



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I

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**CANCER CENTER**

*Saving Lives in Hawai'i and the Pacific*

Summary - Five-Year Strategic Plan 2024 - 2028





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## 'Saving lives in Hawai'i and the Pacific'

This aspiration drives the work of the University of Hawai'i Cancer Center's team of researchers, clinicians, and staff every day. Cancer is relentless and rising — but so are our team's efforts to stop this terrible disease.

Each year in Hawai'i and the U.S.-Affiliated Pacific Islands (USAPI), more than 8,000 people are newly diagnosed with cancer, and 2,300 people die from it. And at any given time, about 70,000 people here are living with cancer and praying for a cure. This tragedy is why we at the UH Cancer Center have an urgent drive to unlock the mysteries of cancer: To help people beat the odds and live.

## Our 'flagship priority': Addressing cancer health disparities

Our main strategy to drive down and eliminate cancer is to understand and address cancer health disparities. In defining cancer health disparities, the National Cancer Institute notes that while cancer affects all population groups in the United States, due to social, environmental, and economic disadvantages, certain groups bear a disproportionate burden of cancer compared with other groups. Such differences in cancer measures include: incidence (new cases), prevalence (all existing cases), mortality (deaths), survival (how long people survive after diagnosis), morbidity (cancer-related health complications), survivorship (including quality of life after cancer treatment), financial burden of cancer or related health conditions, screening rates, and stage at diagnosis.

As the World Health Organization expects cancer diagnoses worldwide to climb dramatically over the next two decades, the UH Cancer Center's work toward the goal of reducing the rate of cancer patient mortality by 30% by 2033 for Hawai'i and the U.S.-Affiliated Pacific Islands, and erasing disparities between population groups in cancer mortality, is more crucial than ever.

### Our Mission:

To reduce the burden of cancer through research, education, patient care, and community outreach, focusing on and embracing the unique and diverse ethnic, cultural, and environmental characteristics of Hawai'i and the Pacific.

### Our Vision:

To be a global leader in cancer screening, prevention, treatment, and education, which can reduce the cancer burden through innovative team science strategies that meet the specific needs of all our communities, including underrepresented ethnic groups.

## Our Core Values

Our Core Values balance our scientific aspirations with a firm grounding in the communities and cultures we serve.

### Commitment

#### *Kuleana*

#### **(Responsibility, Privilege):**

We see our work as both a responsibility and a privilege. The work to prevent cancer, find cures, and provide top-tier cancer care for the diverse people of Hawai'i and the Pacific is not just our job but an honor and privilege.

### Collaboration

#### *Laulima*

#### **(Many Hands, Cooperation):**

Our faculty, staff, and trainees work hand-in-hand, building strong partnerships both within our organization and in the ethnically diverse communities we serve. By pooling our resources and expertise, we can make a greater impact in the fight against cancer.



### Fairness

#### *Pono*

#### **(Righteousness, Respect):**

We want to ensure that everyone, regardless of ethnicity or background, has equitable access to the best evidence-based cancer prevention, screening, and care. We are dedicated to maintaining a fair and respectful environment and seeking justice within UH Cancer Center and our communities.

### Innovation

#### *Ho'oulu*

#### **(To Inspire, Foster Growth):**

We nurture new, innovative ideas and exciting discoveries, scientific originality, and creativity.

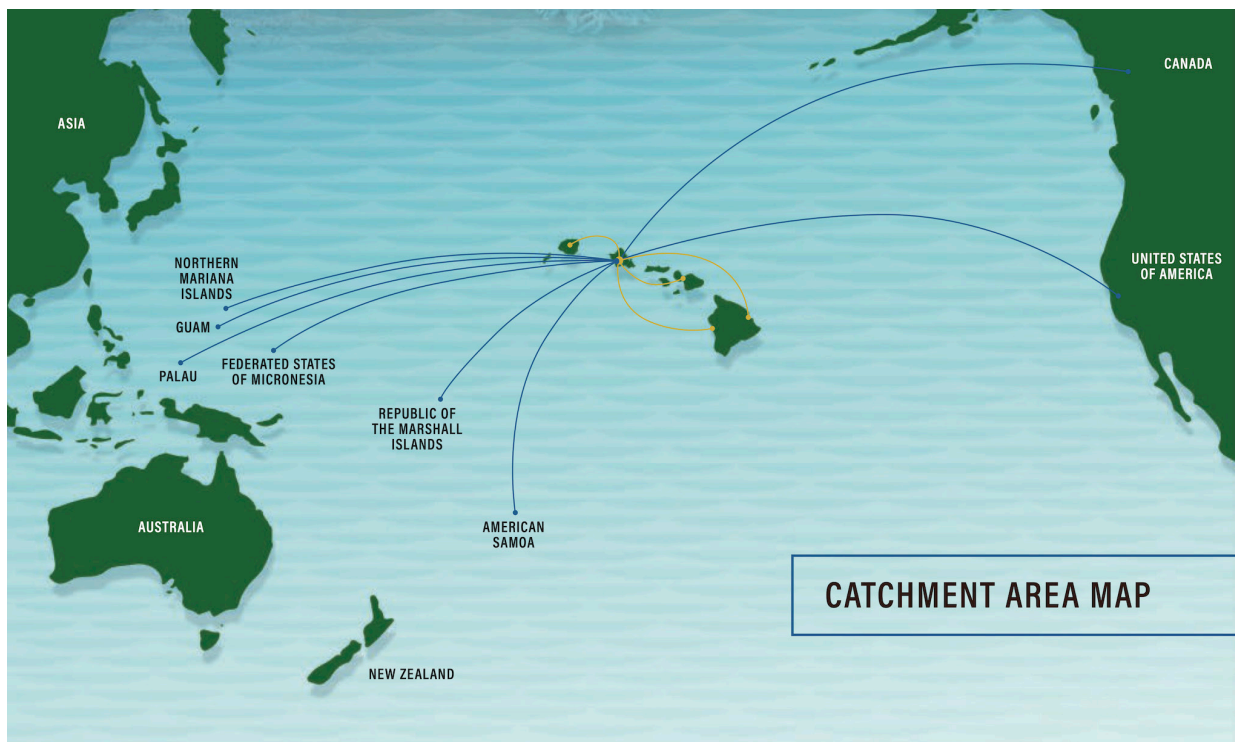
We aim to inspire hope by pioneering breakthroughs in the fight against cancer.

## Who We Serve



The UH Cancer Center serves one of the largest and most logistically challenging catchment areas of any National Cancer Institute (NCI)-designated cancer center in the U.S.—spanning more than 3 million square miles, nearly the size of the entire continental United States. This vast area encompasses over 2 million people across Hawai'i and the USAPI.

- ▶ State of Hawai'i
- ▶ American Samoa
- ▶ Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
- ▶ Federated States of Micronesia
- ▶ Guam
- ▶ Republic of the Marshall Islands
- ▶ Republic of Palau

Each of these communities brings unique challenges and cultural contexts to cancer care and research—ranging from geographic isolation and limited healthcare infrastructure to disproportionate cancer burdens among Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, and Filipino populations. Our location and long-standing partnerships position us to address these disparities with culturally sensitive, community-based cancer solutions.



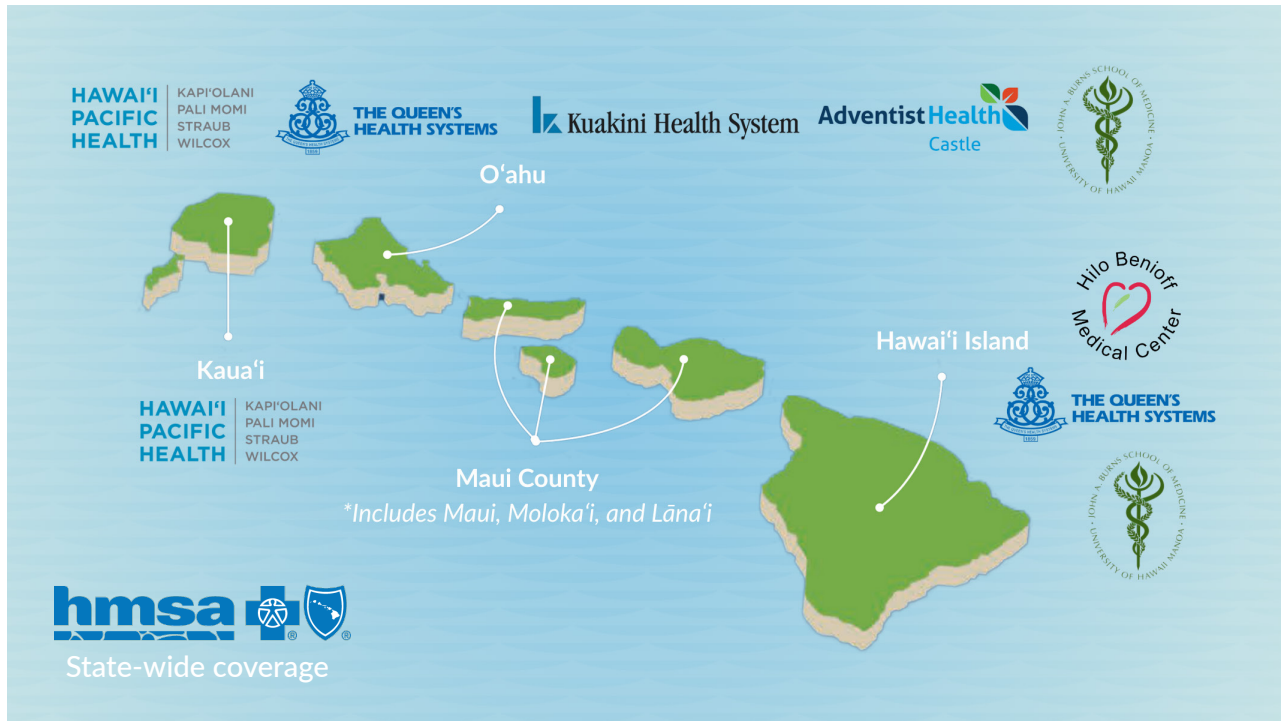
## The UH Cancer Center is uniquely positioned and qualified to conduct impactful research and transform cancer care in Hawai'i and the U.S.-Affiliated Pacific Islands:

-  **Recognized high-quality work:** In September 2024, the UH Cancer Center renewed its federal National Cancer Institute (NCI) designation, a significant mark of rigor and excellence, with its best score in center history. It was categorized as an “outstanding” cancer center in its full five-year renewal and is one of only 73 NCI-designated cancer centers, placing it in the top 4% of cancer centers in the U.S.
-  **Unique focus:** The UH Cancer Center is the only NCI-designated cancer center in Hawai'i and the Pacific, and the only one focusing on the region's unique populations, such as Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and Filipinos, and their specific cancer issues.
-  **Critically positioned:** We also have the largest geographic catchment area among NCI-designated cancer centers, including the State of Hawai'i and the U.S.-Affiliated Pacific Islands. Our coverage spans 3 million square miles, and we are located 2,500 miles from the nearest NCI-designated cancer center on the U.S. West Coast.
-  **Long track record:** Established in 1971 as an Organized Research Unit within the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, we have been an NCI-designated cancer center from 1974-1986 and continuously since 1996. In 2023, the UH Cancer Center oversaw more than 170 active clinical trials. It contributes more than \$57 million to O'ahu's economy through scientific research, clinical trials, and other activities.
-  **Leading the Hawai'i Cancer Consortium:** The UH Cancer Center Director serves as president of the Hawai'i Cancer Consortium, leading a formal affiliation of Hawai'i medical systems aimed at enhancing cancer outcomes for residents of Hawai'i as well as those in the broader Pacific Rim region. The other members are Hawai'i Pacific Health, The Queen's Health Systems, Hilo Benioff Medical Center, Kuakini Medical Center, Adventist Health Castle, John A. Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM), and Hawai'i Medical Service Association (HMSA). The recent addition of Hilo Benioff Medical Center represents the start of planned expansion to Hawai'i's neighbor islands.

The Consortium also has a long-standing affiliation with the Tripler Army Medical Center, and the private practice group of Hawai'i Cancer Care participates in UH Cancer Center-managed clinical trials. Through these alignments, the UH Cancer Center is connected to over 70% of new cancer patients annually within the state and expects to continue to expand.

# The Hawai'i Cancer Consortium

## Our partners serving Hawai'i



The Hawai'i Cancer Consortium is a collaborative network that unites the UH Cancer Center with major medical and research institutions across the state to transform cancer care and outcomes in Hawai'i and the Pacific.

Together, we serve over 70% of new cancer patients in Hawai'i, with plans for expansion to the neighbor islands and USAPI. The Consortium also works closely with Tripler Army Medical Center and Hawai'i Cancer Care to deliver coordinated, cutting-edge research and treatment options.

### Our partners



The Queen's Health Systems, Hawai'i Pacific Health, Kuakini Medical Center, Hilo Benioff Medical Center, Adventist Health Castle, Hawai'i Medical Service Association (HMSA), and UH Mānoa's John A. Burns School of Medicine.



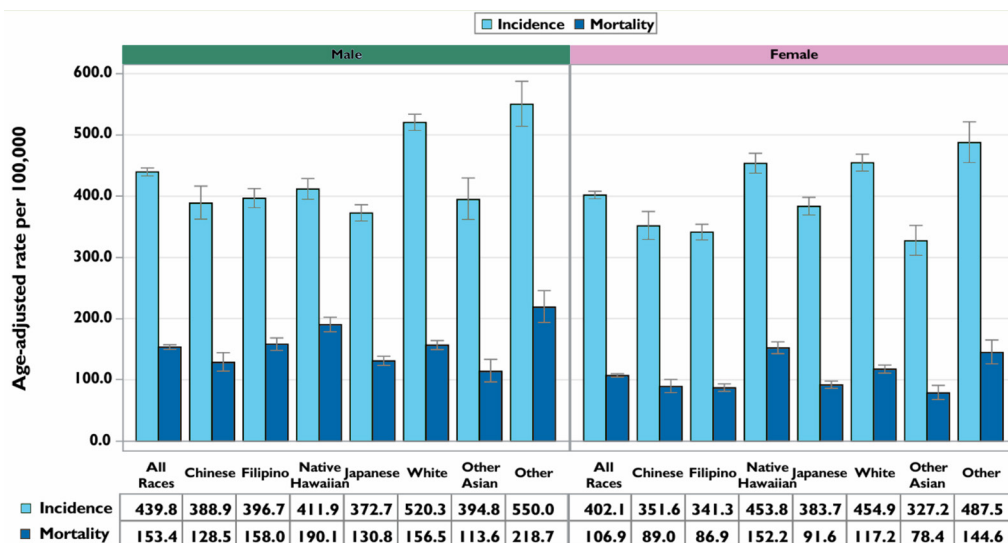
# Urgent challenges our communities face: DISPARITIES IN CANCER HEALTH OUTCOMES

Cancer deeply touches the people of Hawai‘i and the Pacific, affecting entire families, communities, and cultural legacies. Reducing cancer-related deaths within the community we serve is our Job #1. Our flagship strategy to do this is to **understand and address cancer health disparities** — the significant and avoidable differences in cancer health outcomes between population groups. For example, why do Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and Filipinos have much higher cancer mortality rates compared with Whites, and how can such poor health outcomes be improved? Our focus on solving such disparities sets the University of Hawai‘i Cancer Center apart from other NCI-designated cancer centers nationwide.

## Examples of disparities:

- ▶ In Hawai‘i, from 2013-2015, Native Hawaiians had the highest mortality rate for all types of cancer compared with whites in the state.
- ▶ American Samoan men are eight times more likely to develop liver cancer, and Native Hawaiian men are 2.4 times more likely to be diagnosed with that disease compared with non-Hispanic whites.
- ▶ Thyroid cancer incidence is highest in Filipino women, at about 32 cases per 100,000 people, versus 22 cases per 100,000 people for all races.

(Sources: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Minority Health; “Hawai‘i Cancer at a Glance, 2014-2018,” by the University of Hawai‘i Cancer Center’s Hawai‘i Tumor Registry.)



Overall Cancer Incidence and Mortality, By Sex and Race/Ethnicity, Hawai‘i, 2014-2018

**Cancer diagnoses, deaths rising:** In Hawai'i alone, currently, more than 70,000 residents live with cancer, and cancer deaths here average about 2,300 per year. Each year, more than 8,000 new cases are diagnosed in our catchment area of Hawai'i and the USAPI nations.

But cancer worldwide is projected to grow: 2024 was the first year the U.S. was expected to surpass 2 million new cancer cases. The World Health Organization projects 35 million new cancer cases worldwide in 2050 — up 77% from 20 million cases in 2022. There were 9.7 million cancer-related deaths worldwide in 2022, and they are expected to rise to 15.3 million by 2040.

Location	Population	Annual Cancer Cases
Hawai'i	1.44M	7,587
USAPI	0.42M	589
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1.86M</b>	<b>8,176</b>

(Source: Hawai'i Tumor Registry, 2022)

**Unique populations:** Hawai'i is the most racially and ethnically diverse state in the U.S. The people who live in our catchment area of Hawai'i and the Pacific face unique challenges and present an extraordinary opportunity for cancer research, with their variety of races and ethnicities, cultures and lifestyles, geographic isolation, poverty, aging, and environmental impact due to global warming and nuclear testing.

**Aging population growing:** Hawai'i must prepare for a greater need for cancer care due to the aging of its population: By 2030, people age 65 and older are projected to make up 29.7% of Hawai'i's population — compared with 20% for the U.S. population as a whole.

**Shortages of oncology professionals and clinical trials:** These shortfalls are especially severe on the neighbor islands of Hawai'i as well as remote islands and rural areas across the U.S.-Affiliated Pacific. Too often, cancer patients from the outer reaches of our catchment area must travel to O'ahu for high quality cancer care — or do without. Too often, they must fly to the continental U.S. to obtain the latest, most innovative cancer treatments available, leaving their homes and families behind. And many cannot afford this option.



# Our strategies for cancer research and patient outcomes: **FIGHTING CANCER HEALTH DISPARITIES, SAVING LIVES**

At the UH Cancer Center, we are proud of our research and strategies that have helped to reduce cancer mortality rates. We have identified cancer risk factors and cultural backgrounds associated with the disparities, and different interventions to improve patient outcomes. Cancer mortality has been reduced by 25% in Hawai'i and the Pacific over the past three decades — down 28% in males and 21% in females in Hawai'i from 1986 to 2016.

But the work is far from over. We want to erase cancer health disparities. We want every resident of our community to live well. Our collective goal since 2023, in alignment with the federal Cancer Moonshot aspiration, has been to reduce the cancer mortality rate by 30% in 10 years in Hawai'i and the USAPI.

## Our Five-Year Strategy to Reduce Disparities

The UH Cancer Center's strategic plan is to reduce cancer health disparities in our catchment area of Hawai'i and the Pacific. To have a collective impact, we have five areas of focus:



Enhance community-centric cancer research (discovery) and care (intervention)



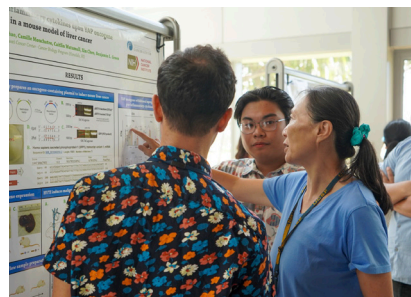
Expand novel IITs based on our discoveries



Enhance our workforce to reflect and connect with community



Improve health disparities through community outreach and engagement



Increase educational opportunities to create researchers and clinical investigators

## Development of Community-Centric Cancer Research

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To deepen our commitment to research that serves our diverse population, we will focus on addressing health disparities and advancing research in high-incidence cancers such as liver, breast, and lung. Our initiatives include:

- ▶ **Building Resources for Disparities Research**  
Utilizing the P20 SPORE planning grant, we will expand the Multiethnic Cohort (MEC) and pursue a future P50 grant. By leveraging advanced technologies like artificial intelligence and molecular profiling, we aim to drive translational research.
- ▶ **Expanding Biorepositories**  
By analyzing tumor, blood, and normal tissue samples, we will create models such as PDX and organoids representing diverse ethnic backgrounds, enhancing our understanding of unique disease profiles in the region.
- ▶ **Enhancing Shared Resources for Cancer Biology (CB) and Population Sciences in the Pacific (PSP)**  
New resources, including the Body Composition Lab and Preclinical Core, will bolster our translational research capabilities.
- ▶ **Fostering Collaboration**  
We will establish a seed funding mechanism to support multi-PI research grants, strengthen Affinity Groups, and focus on disease-specific research, particularly in hepatobiliary, breast, and lung cancers.
- ▶ **Connecting Clinical Investigators with Scientists**  
Collaboration through Disease Site Working Groups will align research objectives, improve clinical trial designs, and accelerate translation from lab to patient care.
- ▶ **Enhancing Clinical Activities**  
We will standardize treatment protocols across the islands to reflect the needs of our diverse populations. This includes expanding clinical trial access in neighbor islands, implementing culturally sensitive care models, and fostering closer integration between community oncologists and academic researchers to ensure alignment with the unique challenges of Hawai'i.



## Enhancing Investigator-Initiated Trials (IITs) for a Diverse Population

Our strategy focuses on translating discoveries into novel therapies and prevention methods that cater to Hawai'i's unique biodiversity and diverse populations. Key initiatives include:

- ▶ **Strengthening Clinical Research Operations**

We aim to increase enrollment in clinical trials across the islands, enhance education on the benefits of clinical trials, and expand infrastructure to ensure access for neighbor islands and Pacific communities.

- ▶ **Enhancing the Preclinical Core**

Investments in advanced tools and strategic partnerships will empower our researchers to conduct cutting-edge preclinical research.

- ▶ **Diversifying Clinical Trial Portfolios**

By increasing trial diversity and improving clinical trial literacy, we aim to make trials more accessible and inclusive.

- ▶ **Developing a Robust Phase 1 Program**

With the opening of Ho'ōla, our Early Phase Clinical Research Center (EPCRC), set for late 2025, we will align with healthcare systems to establish a robust Phase 1 program, targeting 30-40 active trials by 2030.



## Expanding Training and Educational Opportunities

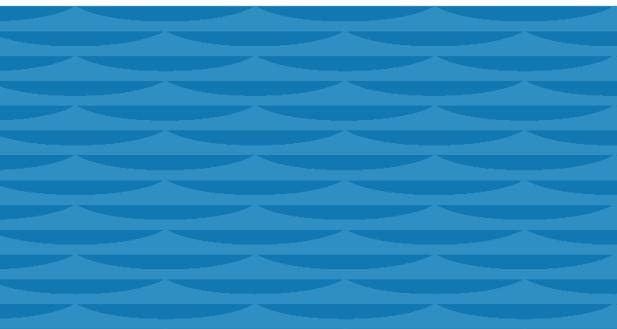
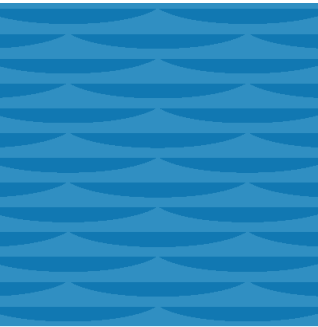
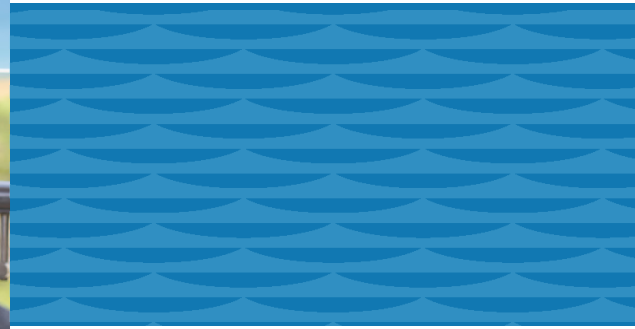
We aim to train future cancer researchers and clinicians who reflect our community, and will address Hawai'i's unique needs. Initiatives include:

- ▶ **Enhancing Scientific Diversity**

Recruitment in immunology, AI-based medicinal chemistry, and community-based research will drive innovation. Faculty and training evaluation programs will ensure equity and transparency.

- ▶ **Establishing an Academic Clinical Oncology Program**

In partnership with JABSOM, we will standardize treatments, improve trial access, and promote translational research. A hematology/medical oncology fellowship program will be established to fortify the local oncology workforce, addressing an ongoing shortage.



## Addressing Cancer Health Disparities Through Community Outreach

Our strategy prioritizes partnerships with community leaders, healthcare providers, and stakeholders to ensure research aligns with the needs of Hawai'i's population. Key initiatives include:

- ▶ **Addressing Unique Health Disparities**  
Tailored interventions will focus on Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, and Filipino communities, integrating culturally sensitive approaches.
- ▶ **Improving Access Through Technology**  
AI-based clinical trial screening and referral systems will help overcome geographical barriers.
- ▶ **Engaging Community Scientists**  
Workshops will train citizen scientists to support research and fundraising efforts.

## Enhancing Workforce Diversity and Community Engagement

We aim to foster an inclusive environment that reflects the cultural and ethnic diversity of Hawai'i. Initiatives include:

- ▶ **Increasing Team Alignment and Leadership Development**  
Leadership workshops and cultural sensitivity programs will enhance teamwork and align with UH Mānoa's 2025 strategic initiatives.
- ▶ **Expanding Community-Advocate 'Ohana**  
Increasing community-advocate participation will create a culturally sensitive and sustainable approach to cancer research, ensuring patient and community voices are central to our mission.

Through these initiatives, the University of Hawai'i Cancer Center will continue to advance community-centric research, reduce health disparities, and improve cancer care for Hawai'i and the Pacific.



## New Initiatives

Our innovative plans at the UH Cancer Center include:

### ➤ Ho‘ōla – Early Phase Clinical Research Center

*Expected to open in late 2025*

Ho‘ōla is expected to be a game changer for Hawai‘i and the Pacific: For the first time in history, cancer patients can come to the UH Cancer Center for Phase 1 and Phase 2 clinical trial treatments. The goal: No longer will Hawai‘i patients have to make expensive, exhausting trips to the continental U.S. to get the most innovative, cutting-edge cancer treatments. They can stay home in Hawai‘i, surrounded by ‘ohana and aloha.

### ➤ Ka ‘Umeke Lama (Academic Clinical Oncology Unit)

*Launched in December 2024*

A historic partnership between the UH Cancer Center and the John A. Burns School of Medicine, responding to the unique and urgent challenges that Hawai‘i and the U.S.-Affiliated Pacific Islands face in erasing cancer health disparities and providing comprehensive cancer care. The initiative will raise the quality and consistency of cancer care through cutting-edge research, workforce development, and culturally informed practices. This effort will align with fellow Hawai‘i Cancer Consortium member organizations.





## ➤ Strengthening of Cancer Biology, Population Sciences in the Pacific Research Program, and Shared Resources

### *Ongoing*

We will invest in talent, infrastructure, and innovative collaborations for our Cancer Biology and Population Sciences in the Pacific research programs. This includes recruiting researchers in emerging areas such as immunotherapy, precision medicine, nutrition, and data science while fostering diversity to address cancer health disparities. We will strategically invest in shared resources that will accelerate our research.

## ➤ Next-Generation Multiethnic Cohort

### *Expected to launch by the end of 2025*

The original Multiethnic Cohort (MEC), established in 1993 by the UH Cancer Center and the University of Southern California, is the largest study of its kind in the world: over 215,000 participants from Hawai'i and California, in five major ethnic groups (Japanese Americans, Native Hawaiians, African Americans, Latinos, and Whites). The original study is internationally known for its identification of dietary, lifestyle, and genetic factors that contribute to cancer risk and prevention, insight into ethnic disparities in cancer incidence and outcomes, and contributions to understanding the role of obesity, physical activity, and smoking in cancer development. A Next-Generation MEC would track how cancer risk and prevention is evolving with shifting lifestyle and environmental factors, and leverage advances in genomics, biomarkers, and artificial intelligence.

## ➤ Cancer C.A.R.E. Community – patient support initiative

### *Launched in April 2025*

The UH Cancer Center is pledging to walk even closer alongside patients in their cancer journey by rolling out a new patient support program called the Cancer C.A.R.E. Community (Community, Awareness, Research, Emotional Well-Being). Designed with the advice of cancer “thrivers,” programs will provide information and support for cancer patients, their families, and caregivers.



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I  

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