



2024 ANNUAL REPORT



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I
CANCER CENTER

Saving Lives in Hawai'i and the Pacific

2024

ANNUAL REPORT

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UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII CANCER CENTER

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Cover Image: Two-time breast cancer survivor and Community Health Advocate Patricia Kalo Cornett hugs her oncologist, Dr. Jami Fukui, MD, Faculty Co-Director of Community Outreach and Engagement at the UH Cancer Center.



DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Aloha!

For more than 50 years, the University of Hawai'i Cancer Center has focused on world-class oncology research that has been translated into cutting-edge care for cancer patients. In 2024, we continued our relentless battle against cancer to save lives in Hawai'i and the Pacific.

At the UH Cancer Center, we are conducting research that is leading to game-changing clinical care for better health outcomes. Our goal is to empower people to take charge of their health and lives.

Our researchers, clinicians, and staff are not isolated in a laboratory away from the real world. On the contrary, our work is rooted in the lives of real patients in our islands. We understand the frustrations that patients and their families experience, and we work alongside them in their cancer journeys. We recognize that it is our kuleana, or responsibility, to do everything possible to improve their health outcomes and quality of life.

As you will see in this annual report, 2024 was a busy year for our UH Cancer Center team. Our renewal of our National Cancer Institute designation for another five years, with the best score in our center's history, was a significant milestone, and a sign that we are moving in the right direction. We also continued to develop our operational and physical infrastructure in preparation for our expected opening in early 2026 of our Ho'ōla Early Phase Clinical Research Center.

Reflecting on 2024, we must also remember all of our supporters. Our achievements in improving early cancer detection, diagnosis, and treatment would not have been possible without the support of those who shared our vision, understood our mission, and believed in the UH Cancer Center.

We are grateful for the support of donors, lawmakers, and others who have brought the UH Cancer Center so far. With everyone's cooperation, we can continue to find innovative solutions together and significantly impact the fight against cancer.

Mahalo nui loa,

Naoto T. Ueno, MD, PhD, FACP
Director
University of Hawai'i Cancer Center

Our aspiration

The University of Hawai'i Cancer Center is dedicated to saving lives in Hawai'i and the Pacific.

It is inspiring hope by working to conquer cancer. Our flagship priority is to understand and address cancer health disparities – the avoidable differences in cancer health outcomes between different groups of people.

OUR MISSION

To reduce the burden of cancer through research, education, patient care, and community outreach, focusing on and embracing the unique and varied 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, significantly reducing the cancer burden in Hawai'i and the Pacific. We commit to collective team strategies for innovation and discovery to meet the specific needs of all our communities, including underrepresented ethnic groups.

Our core values

INNOVATION (HO'OU LU)

➔ **To inspire, foster growth**

We aim to inspire hope by nurturing innovative ideas and exciting discoveries. With a passion for scientific originality and creativity, we strive for breakthroughs in the fight against cancer.

COMMITMENT (KULEANA)

➔ **Responsibility, privilege**

We view this work as a noble mission. It is our responsibility and privilege to serve those affected by cancer, and we commit to making a lasting difference in their lives.

COLLABORATION (LAULIMA)

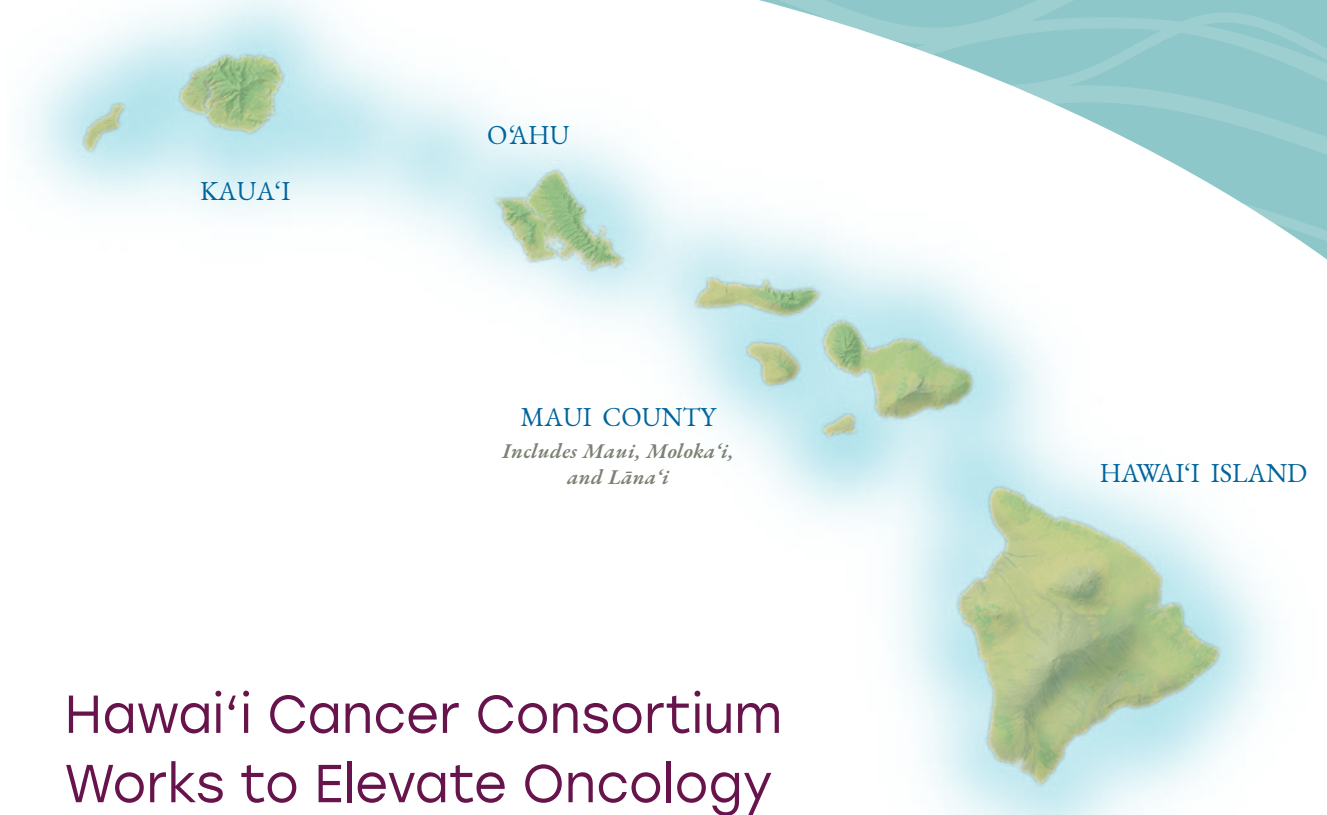
➔ **Many hands, cooperation**

Our faculty, staff, and trainees work hand-in-hand, building strong partnerships both within our organization and in the communities we serve.

FAIRNESS (PONO)

➔ **Righteousness**

We are dedicated to maintaining a fair and respectful environment, and ensuring that everyone, regardless of background, has equitable access to the best cancer prevention, screening, and care.



Hawai'i Cancer Consortium Works to Elevate Oncology Across Our Islands

The Hawai'i Cancer Consortium is a collaborative network of health organizations working together with the UH Cancer Center to develop and deliver high quality cancer care and research across Hawai'i and the Pacific.

Along with the UH Cancer Center, the consortium includes The Queen's Health Systems, Hawai'i Pacific Health, Adventist Health Castle, Kuakini Medical Center, Hawai'i Medical Service Association (HMSA), and the UH Mānoa John A. Burns School of Medicine, with expansion planned to include health systems on the 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 all of these alignments, the UH Cancer Center is connected to over 70% of new cancer patients annually within the state and continues to expand.



A Patient Tribute: Susan Hirano Leaves a Lasting Legacy

Receiving the news that you have cancer is not easy. Susan Hirano is a powerful example of how to accept life's unexpected challenges with grace and tenacity.

In October 2021, when she was diagnosed with a rare form of breast cancer that was resistant to standard treatment, Susan wanted to learn all the options that were available to her.

Her oncologist at The Queen's Medical Center suggested clinical trial treatments at either Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York City, or MD Anderson in Houston, Texas.

Although both appeared promising, Susan thought traveling to either site was not practical since it would have required traveling every three weeks, keeping her apart from her teenage son. She couldn't see herself being away from her 'ohana and not having the support of family and friends that she would need between treatment sessions.

"I did not know clinical trials even existed, especially for breast cancer," she said.

When she learned that the UH Cancer Center would be starting an early phase clinical research center right here in the islands, she made it her personal mission to become a patient advocate and raise awareness about the early phase

center. She also founded the Susan C. Hirano Cancer C.A.R.E. Community, an initiative at the UH Cancer Center to support and empower cancer patients.

"When the Ho'ōla Early Phase Clinical Research Center is opened at the UH Cancer Center, it will help keep families together and provide hope for the future," she said. "Patients can stay home in Hawai'i, receive advanced treatment, and enjoy a better quality of life."

Although Susan passed away in April 2025 and did not have the opportunity to see the launch of Ho'ōla, her passion, enthusiasm for life, and love for others continue to have a profound impact on the UH Cancer Center.

"Susan never gave up, and she consistently gave her all for the UH Cancer Center," said UH Cancer Center Director Dr. Naoto T. Ueno. "Her radiant, resilient spirit encouraged other cancer patients, and inspired our researchers and her doctors as well. She leaves an incredible legacy, and we will deeply miss her."

Susan C. Hirano, Patient Advocate, Hope Ambassador, and founder of the Susan C. Hirano Cancer C.A.R.E. Community. *Photo by George F. Lee, The Honolulu Star-Advertiser, used by permission*



Ho'ōla Center Preparing to Offer Innovative Cancer Treatments

The opening of the Ho'ōla Early Phase Clinical Research Center within the Iwēwa wing of the UH Cancer Center in Kaka'ako, scheduled for early 2026, is expected

to be a game changer: For the first time, cancer patients in Hawai'i will have access to Phase 1 clinical trial treatments tailored for different racial and ethnic groups, right here at home, without having to leave the Islands. The innovative Phase 1 clinical trials and treatments offered through this pioneering facility, a first in the state, will include drugs pending FDA approval.

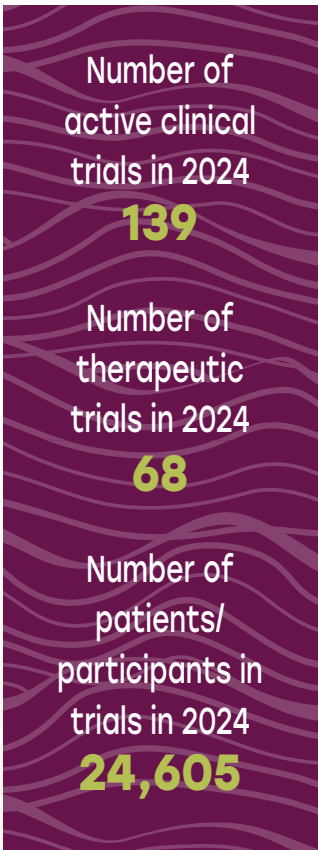
Ho'ōla – “to heal” in Hawaiian – will help to eliminate costly trips to the continent, thousands of miles away from home.

Patients will be able to receive cutting-edge cancer care while remaining close to their families and support systems, which is critical in their healing journey.

Spanning more than 7,800 square feet, Ho'ōla is a collaborative effort involving RIM Architects, Coffman Engineers, and The Whiting-Turner Contracting Company, with a total project value of \$19.5 million. This includes a \$6,478,224 grant from the National Institutes of Health, an equal contribution from the Hawai'i State Legislature, and Congressional Directed Spendings.

Dr. Toshiaki Iwase, Medical Director of the UH Cancer Center's Clinical Trials Office, is leading this effort. Before joining the UH Cancer Center, he was a researcher with the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center.

“Working with our health partners in the Hawai'i Cancer Consortium, we hope to see Ho'ōla become a hub for cancer care right here in our islands,” said Dr. Naoto T. Ueno, UH Cancer Center Director. “By tailoring treatments for different racial and ethnic groups, the center seeks to address the unique needs of Hawai'i's varied population. Ho'ōla is poised to be pivotal in advancing cancer care in Hawai'i.”



Rendering of Ho'ōla's lobby area.
Image courtesy of RIM Architects



Cancer at a Glance

2024

75,768

Approximate number of Hawai'i residents currently living with cancer

Male « **33,289** Female « **42,479**

7,852

Approximate annual number of residents diagnosed with cancer (including unknown county)

Male « **4,044** Female « **3,808**

2,469

Approximate annual number of residents who die of cancer (including unknown county)

Male « **1,331** Female « **1,137**

Average age at diagnosis

67.8 Male « 65 Female «

AVERAGE ANNUAL NUMBER OF CANCER CASES AND DEATHS BY COUNTY 2018-2022

Honolulu
Incidence per year » 5,253
Deaths per year » 1,632

Hawai'i
Incidence per year » 1,257
Deaths per year » 409

Maui
[including Kalawao]
Incidence per year » 931
Deaths per year » 287

Kaua'i
Incidence per year » 405
Deaths per year » 129

Total number of research projects:	172
Total number of funded Principal Investigators:	57
Total awarded research funds:	\$65.2m
Number of journals that published research findings:	288
Total number of affiliated clinicians:	94
Total number of employees:	310
Number of years of NCI designation:	39



Ka 'Umeke Lama: A Transformative Cancer Care Initiative for Hawai'i and the Pacific

A Historic Partnership

In a groundbreaking alliance, the University of Hawai'i Cancer Center and the John A. Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM) have launched Ka 'Umeke Lama, a pioneering initiative to elevate cancer care across Hawai'i and the U.S. Affiliated Pacific Islands (USAPI). This transformative effort brings together partners from the Hawai'i Cancer Consortium – including Hawai'i Pacific Health, The Queen's Health Systems, HMSA, Kuakini Medical Center, and Adventist Health Castle – to collectively address cancer disparities through research, education, workforce development, and culturally informed practices.



Our vision is a future where cancer care is accessible, equitable, and rooted in both scientific innovation and cultural understanding.

~ Naoto T. Ueno, MD, PhD, FACP,
Director, UH Cancer Center



Meeting Urgent Needs Across the Islands

Ka 'Umeke Lama ["Bowl of Enlightenment"]

is a comprehensive response to critical challenges in our region:

- Disparities in cancer outcomes for Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and Filipinos
- Severe shortages of oncology professionals – especially on the neighbor islands and in rural/remote areas
- A rapidly aging population and increasing cancer burden
- A lack of culturally competent care and tailored research initiatives

Cancer Disparities Snapshot

- Native Hawaiians have the highest mortality rate for all cancers
- American Samoan men are 8 times more likely to develop liver cancer than non-Hispanic whites
- Native Hawaiian men are 2.4 times more likely to be diagnosed with liver cancer

Key Pillars of Impact

1 Oncologic Education & Workforce Development

- Launch of a medical oncology fellowship focused on disparities, geriatric oncology and drug development
- Integration of statewide oncology curricula, with special support for neighbor islands
- Cultural competence training for all healthcare professionals

2 Addressing Health Disparities

- Deployment of mobile early detection units to rural and underserved areas
- Expansion of telehealth systems to reduce provider isolation
- Introduction of targeted clinical trials for high-impact cancers in Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities

3 Enhancing Clinical Research

- Community-driven outreach to boost clinical trial participation
- Creation of a centralized research database with precision medicine integration
- Use of AI-powered tools for trial screening and patient monitoring

A Vision for the Future

With **Ka 'Umeke Lama**, Hawai'i is building a distributed model of education, research, and clinical care – one that empowers communities, uplifts underserved populations, and ensures every patient, no matter where they live or who they are, has access to world-class cancer care.

Study Shows Potential for Maintenance Therapy in Aggressive Breast Cancer

University of Hawai'i Cancer Center researchers, led by Director Dr. Naoto T. Ueno and Assistant Professor Dr. Toshiaki Iwase, conducted a phase II clinical trial exploring pembrolizumab as a maintenance therapy for aggressive breast cancers, including Inflammatory Breast Cancer (IBC) and Triple-Negative Breast Cancer (TNBC). The study, conducted at their former institution, MD Anderson Cancer Center, was published in *Clinical Cancer Research*.

Aggressive breast cancer subtypes are difficult to treat and often return despite chemotherapy, which, while effective, can

cause severe side effects. Pembrolizumab, an immune checkpoint inhibitor, uses the body's immune system to target cancer cells and may offer a less toxic, more targeted alternative.

"This study explored whether immunotherapy could maintain disease control after chemotherapy, and identified potential biomarkers for treatment response," said Dr. Ueno.

The trial showed a 60% disease control rate over four months with manageable toxicity. Researchers also identified high baseline T-cell clonality as a potential biomarker for longer disease control, offering insight into which patients may benefit most from pembrolizumab.

Patient Deborah Sumulong, who had struggled with chemotherapy's harsh side effects, reported significantly improved quality of life while on pembrolizumab. "I experienced less fatigue, only mild colitis, and recent scans showed the cancer was completely gone," she said.

Dr. Iwase emphasized the need for larger trials to confirm the biomarker findings and refine patient selection. The study highlights pembrolizumab's potential as a promising maintenance therapy for aggressive breast cancers.

Toshiaki Iwase, MD, PhD, and Medical Director of the Clinical Trials Office





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We hope this study improves understanding of why different groups face different risks for smoking-related diseases.

~ Dr. Lani Park, UH Cancer Center researcher and senior author

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The Impact of Smoking Across Racial and Ethnic Groups

Researchers from the University of Hawai'i Cancer Center have co-authored a study highlighting how smoking affects gene activity differently across racial and ethnic groups. Published in the *American Journal of Human Genetics*, the study explores the link between tobacco exposure, epigenetics (chemical modifications that influence gene expression), and smoking-related disease risk—particularly lung cancer, which remains the leading cause of cancer-related death in Hawai'i.

The study analyzed DNA methylation, a key epigenetic mechanism, in relation to smoking dose among six racial/ethnic groups: African Americans, Chinese, Japanese Americans, Latinos, Native Hawaiians, and Whites.

“We hope this study improves understanding of why different groups face different risks for

smoking-related diseases,” said Dr. Lani Park, UH Cancer Center researcher and senior author.

The findings showed many consistent epigenetic changes across groups, but also identified two methylation sites where differences appeared: one specific to African Americans and another with a stronger effect in Latinos. These differences may help explain disparities in disease risk. This research offers valuable insights into the biological impact of smoking and emphasizes the need for culturally tailored prevention and intervention strategies to reduce health disparities.

Lani Park, PhD, MPH, and Program Co-Leader in the Population Sciences in the Pacific Program

Advancing Alzheimer’s Detection Across Varied Populations

University of Hawai‘i Cancer Center researcher Dr. Song-Yi Park is studying the effectiveness of a blood test for Alzheimer’s disease using data from the Multiethnic Cohort (MEC) Study, supported by a \$140,000 grant from the Alzheimer’s Association.

Her research focuses on pTau-217, a blood biomarker for Alzheimer’s, evaluating its accuracy across Native Hawaiian, African American, and White populations. The goal is to uncover potential racial and ethnic differences in pTau-217 levels and identify contributing factors, helping to improve early detection in underrepresented groups.

“Minority populations have been underrepresented in Alzheimer’s research,” said Park. “This grant

will help reduce that gap and assess how well this safe, affordable test works across different communities.”

Park and fellow researcher Dr. Unhee Lim previously found that Native Hawaiians face Alzheimer’s risk levels comparable to African Americans – almost double the risk seen in Japanese Americans – highlighting major disparities in Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias.

Song Yi-Park, PhD (center), receives her grant award. Photo courtesy of Alzheimer’s Association





This study shows how understanding resistance can lead to better, smarter treatments.

~ Dr. Jangsoon Lee, UH Cancer Center Associate Researcher



Breakthrough Research Offers New Hope for Aggressive HER2-positive Breast Cancer

A new study from the University of Hawai'i Cancer Center reveals a way to outsmart treatment-resistant HER2-positive breast cancer—a fast-growing and aggressive form of the disease affecting 15-20% of patients.

The research, led by Associate Researcher Jangsoon Lee and UH Cancer Center Director Dr. Naoto Ueno, was recently published in the *Journal of Experimental & Clinical Cancer Research*. The team studied a medication called trastuzumab deruxtecan (T-DXd), a powerful drug currently used to treat HER2-positive breast cancer. While T-DXd has shown strong effectiveness in clinical trials and early use, researchers anticipate that some patients will eventually develop resistance, a persistent challenge in cancer treatment.

The scientists uncovered how cancer cells survive treatment by activating internal repair mechanisms to fix the damage caused by T-DXd. By introducing a second drug, elimusertib, they were able to block this repair system. When used in combination, the two drugs significantly improved cancer cell destruction.

“This gives us a new strategy to keep the treatment working longer and more effectively,” said Dr. Ueno. “It opens the door to better outcomes for patients facing limited options.”

Clinical trials testing the same concept of combination are already underway to evaluate its effectiveness in real-world settings. If successful, the therapy could mark a major advancement for patients with HER2-positive breast cancer. “This study shows how understanding resistance can lead to better, smarter treatments,” added Dr. Lee.

UH Cancer Center researchers continue to lead innovative research aimed at improving cancer care for Hawai'i and the Pacific region.

Jangsoon Lee, PhD, Associate Member in the Cancer Biology Program

Skin✓ Van Provides Skin Cancer Education and Prevention

While being able to enjoy Hawai'i's warm, tropical climate has numerous upsides, the sun exposure also puts many at risk for skin cancer.

The UH Cancer Center's new Skin✓ Van ("Skin Check Van") is touring O'ahu to promote skin cancer prevention. The initiative, generously supported by the Friends of the UH Cancer Center, began with a launch event in April 2024 at Kalihi Valley District Park. The goal is to educate the community



about skin cancer prevention methods and highlight the importance of sun protection.

The mobile unit – with a crew of staff, students and doctors drawing variously from the UH Cancer Center, the UH John A. Burns School of Medicine, and the Hawai'i Dermatological Society – tours outdoor venues and is fully equipped with educational materials, including photoaging software, and tools to measure a person's total sun exposure throughout their lifetime.



Kū Ola Van Aims to Reach Native Hawaiian Men

A new mobile clinic van with a fully functioning laboratory, exam table, automated wheelchair lift, and other customized features was officially dedicated in August 2024.

The van is used to reach Native Hawaiian men in communities throughout O'ahu. Emblazoned with the positive message "Promoting Native Hawaiian Health and Well-being," the van will make cancer screenings and exams more easily accessible for Native Hawaiian

men. The van is the result of a collaboration between Ke Ola Mamo, the only Native Hawaiian healthcare system on O'ahu, and the UH Cancer Center.

The van helps to advance the mission of Kū Ola, a UH Cancer Center health program for Native Hawaiian kāne, or men, which has been in operation for more than two decades. Kū Ola was formed out of the need for Native Hawaiian men to meet together to share their health concerns.

Center Hosts Inaugural Genome Research Consortium Meeting

The Pacific Center for Genome Research at the University of Hawai‘i hosted the inaugural in-person meeting of the Diversity Centers for Genome Research Consortium in April 2024. The National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI) established this initiative to promote diversity in genomics research. The event brought together researchers and leaders from five external genome centers and the program director of NHGRI. It marked a crucial step in the collective journey toward more inclusive genomics research.



The Diversity Centers for Genome Research Consortium gathered for its first meeting at the UH Cancer Center.

‘Ohana Pink Event Engages Breast Cancer Community

The UH Cancer Center marked a successful inaugural “‘Ohana Pink” event in October 2024, with more than 200 local breast cancer community members coming together to share the latest medical and health information, find inspiration, and share heartfelt support.

“We wanted to make sure patients, clinicians, researchers, nonprofits, everyone, could share in our fight against breast

cancer. It’s truly heartening to see the community unite this way,” said Dr. Jami Fukui, a UH Cancer Center researcher and clinician who was the organizer of the ‘Ohana Pink event. Fukui relayed the promise of the latest scientific developments in breast cancer as she spoke about “Past, Current, Future and Pivotal Breast Cancer Clinical Trials in Hawai‘i.”



L to R: UH Cancer Center Director Dr. Naoto T. Ueno, patient advocate Susan C. Hirano, and ‘Ohana Pink founder Dr. Jami Fukui



Bobby Senaha's Legacy of Hope

When Bobby Senaha was diagnosed with stage-3 pancreatic cancer in late 2022, life as the Senaha family knew it changed in an instant. Just months before, they were in a season of joy – his wife, Dana, had overcome her own health challenges, their two sons were thriving, and Bobby's business was flourishing. Then came the diagnosis, and the future they had imagined was suddenly uncertain.

But Bobby chose to face cancer not with fear, but with fierce determination. Even as he underwent 33 weeks of chemotherapy, he refused to let the disease define him. He ran or walked 5K races, lifted weights, and stayed active – fighting to remain strong in every sense of the word. When surgery was no longer an option, Bobby and Dana turned to clinical trials. Their path led them first to Los Angeles, then to San Antonio, Texas, where Bobby became one of the first patients enrolled in a groundbreaking phase 1 trial for RMC-6236 – a drug designed to target the aggressive KRAS mutation.



The journey was grueling. Constant travel, side effects, and long stretches away from home tested their endurance. But for 29 remarkable weeks, they witnessed a miracle: Tumors shrank, pain subsided, and Bobby was able to come off all pain medication. Hope returned.

The cancer eventually outpaced the treatment, however, and Bobby passed away peacefully in August 2024. Yet his fight was not in vain. His courageous participation helped propel RMC-6236 into a phase 3 trial – now considered one of the most promising advances in pancreatic cancer care.

And now, that same trial will be available right here in Hawai'i, at the UH Cancer Center. No more flights to the continent for this treatment. No more time apart. Patients will have access to this cutting-edge drug while remaining close to their families.

Dana believes Bobby would be deeply proud to know that his journey helped open doors for others. He wasn't just fighting for himself – he was fighting for a future where no one has to leave home in search of hope.

Left: Bobby Senaha, Founder of BlackLetter Group, and clinical trial advocate. Above: Bobby, Dana, James, and Jacob Senaha

Breakthrough Discovery: Immunotherapy Puts Cancer in Remission

A growing number of solutions to pressing medical challenges are now available here in the islands. Chimeric Antigen Receptor T-cell therapy, or CAR T therapy, is an innovative therapy that is effective in curing some of the most difficult to treat cancers. With Dr. Stephanie Si Lim of the UH Cancer Center leading use of CAR T therapy in Hawai'i, certain types of cancer can now be put into remission by using a patient's own immune cells.

"In the treatment of cancer, many are familiar with chemotherapy and radiation. CAR T-cell therapy elevates cancer care to an entirely new level. It's very different from traditional chemotherapy because it targets cancer cells with more precision," explained Dr. Si Lim, who also serves as a pediatric hematologist/oncologist at Kapi'olani Medical Center for Women and Children and medical director of the cellular immunotherapy program of Hawai'i Pacific Health. Hawai'i Pacific Health is a partner in the UH Cancer Center's Hawai'i Cancer Consortium.

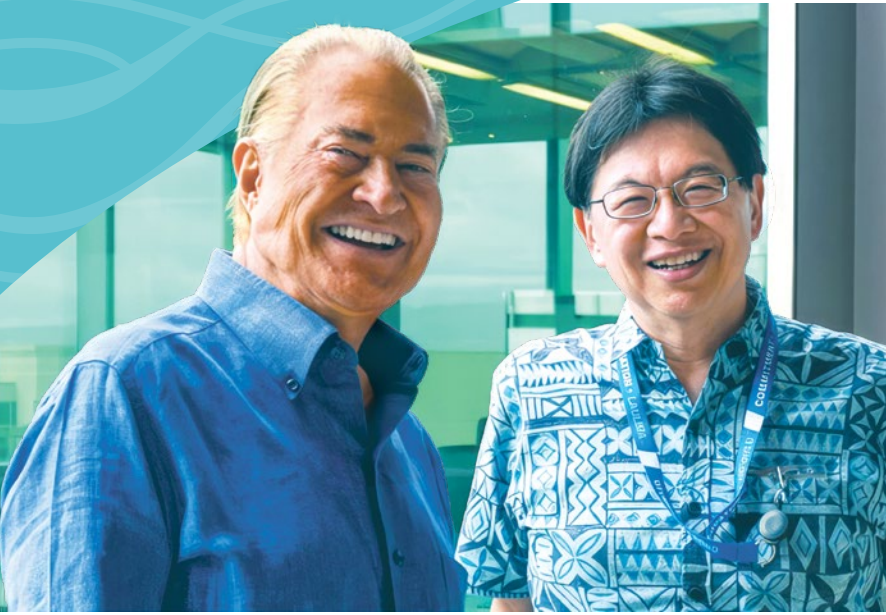
In May 2023, the UH Cancer Center received approval to infuse CAR T-cell therapy to treat children and adults with recurrent/refractory cancer. In a joint effort, the UH Cancer Center and Hawai'i Pacific Health treated the first patient with aggressive lymphoma on August 2023, and the patient went into remission after just one month.

Building the cellular immunotherapy program took a lot of hard work, but ultimately it will allow for increased access to novel therapies for patients with aggressive diseases. CAR T therapy is now offered to children and adults with B-cell acute lymphoblastic leukemia, lymphoma, and multiple myeloma.

"This treatment allows children and adults from Hawai'i and the Pacific to stay near their family and friends while they receive care," Dr. Si Lim said. "With our new Ho'ōla Early Phase Clinical Research Center opening next year, we hope to introduce more life-saving treatment modalities for patients who may have cancers that are difficult to treat using traditional means. We believe the UH Cancer Center has the potential to offer more FDA-approved treatment options and cutting-edge clinical trials for our community. We're excited about what the future holds for Hawai'i."



Stephanie Si Lim, MD, MBA, and a patient with B-cell acute lymphoblastic leukemia, at Kapi'olani Medical Center for Women & Children



“

The UH Cancer Center is such a hidden gem in Hawai‘i that I think more people should know about it.

~ Jay H. Shidler

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Transformational Gifts Bestowed by Philanthropist and Businessman Jay H. Shidler

In May 2024, philanthropist and UH Mānoa alumnus Jay H. Shidler ('68) donated \$100,000 to help increase public awareness of the UH Cancer Center’s work as it prepares for the opening of its Ho’ōla Early Phase Clinical Research Center – an early-phase advanced clinical research and patient care facility in Kaka’ako.

“The UH Cancer Center is such a hidden gem in Hawai‘i that I think more people should know about it,” said Shidler. “Cancer touches so many individuals and families, and the fact that we will soon be able to offer patients cutting-edge treatments through early-phase clinical trials – without having to leave their homes and families – is just tremendous.”

In July 2024, Shidler further demonstrated his commitment to advancing cancer research by donating \$1 million to establish the Director’s Innovation Fund. This fund enables UH Cancer Center Director Dr. Naoto Ueno to drive transformative research initiatives.

A portion of the funds supported the purchase of advanced imaging and analysis equipment to enhance the accuracy of cancer drug screening, accelerate the development of new treatments, and recruit skilled researchers and technicians to translate discoveries into patient care more efficiently.

Additionally, the funds were instrumental in launching Ka ‘Umeke Lama, a program designed to strengthen community outreach, address cancer health disparities, and develop the next generation of oncologists in collaboration with the John A. Burns School of Medicine.

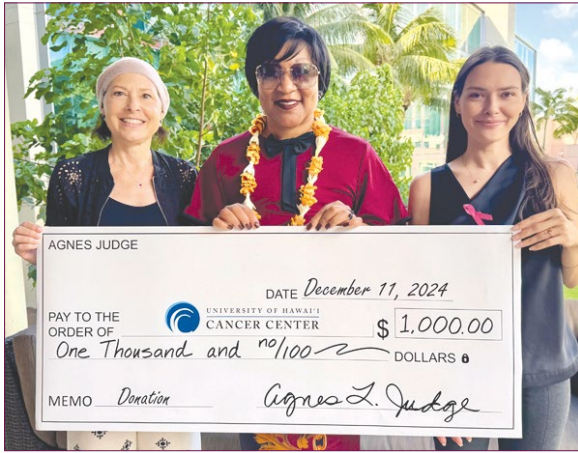
Dr. Ueno also plans to expand culturally appropriate practices and improve access to cancer care for patients on the neighbor islands, helping alleviate Hawai‘i’s chronic shortage of oncologists.

We are deeply grateful for Jay’s visionary support, which is helping to shape a healthier future for Hawai‘i through innovation and community-centered cancer care.

Philanthropist and businessman Jay H. Shidler, left, and UH Cancer Center Director Dr. Naoto T. Ueno

*Mahalo to
Our Donors!*

Cancer C.A.R.E Community Fund Established by Breast Cancer Survivor



In December 2024, breast cancer survivor Agnes Judge made Hawai'i stop number 49 on her tour of all 50 states, bringing a \$1,000 donation to the UH Cancer Center, along with a message of hope and empowerment for fellow cancer patients.

The Charleston, South Carolina, native is a breast cancer survivor who had a double mastectomy in 2019. She is a breast cancer model and patient advocate. Her donation kicked off the Susan C. Hirano Cancer C.A.R.E Community Fund (Community, Awareness, Research, Emotional Well-being) which backs patient empowerment and support initiatives for cancer patients, caregivers, and families.

UH Cancer Center Hope Ambassador Susan Hirano, visiting patient advocate Agnes Judge, and UH Cancer Center Associate Director of Development Tawney Sablan

Diane Ono's Visionary Gifts Raise Awareness for Clinical Trials

Diane Ono's steadfast commitment to advancing cancer research has made a profound impact on the work we do at the University of Hawai'i Cancer Center. A passionate philanthropist and tireless advocate, Diane has dedicated herself to raising awareness about clinical trials and bringing hope to families facing cancer.

Her journey as a supporter began with a deeply personal experience—her daughter Mari's diagnosis with childhood leukemia at the age of 4. Through Mari's participation in clinical trials, Diane witnessed firsthand the life-saving potential of cutting-edge treatments. This experience ignited her lifelong mission to ensure others in Hawai'i have access to the same opportunities for hope and healing.

In 2024, Diane significantly expanded her advocacy by funding a statewide public awareness campaign focused on the importance of clinical trials. Her efforts will help educate the community, reduce stigma, and empower patients to seek innovative treatment options. Diane also hosted a powerful Toast to Hope event focused on pancreatic cancer, bringing together survivors,



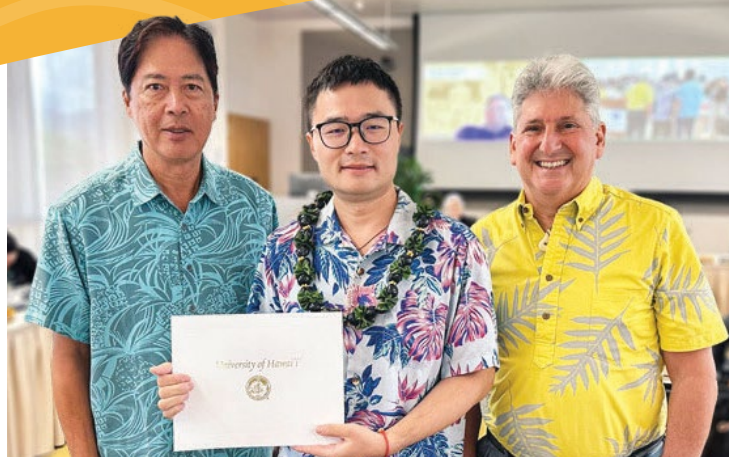
researchers, and supporters to spotlight one of the most challenging diseases we face.

Diane's support has been instrumental in the growth of our Ho'ōla Early Phase Clinical Research Center. Her vision and generosity are helping to shape a future in which cutting-edge care is available here at home, and patients can remain surrounded by loved ones.

L to R: Owen Martin, Mari Galiher Martin, Diane Ono and UH Cancer Center Director Dr. Naoto T. Ueno

Researcher Wu Draws Multiple Accolades

UH Cancer Center Associate Professor Lang Wu was named the UH nominee for the 2024 Governor’s Award for Distinguished State Service Employee of the Year. Wu is the founding director of the UH Pacific Center for Genome Research, which was established in 2023 through a \$10.9 million grant from the National Institutes of Health.



In 2024, Wu also received a \$3.4 million grant from the National Cancer Institute to continue research on improving pancreatic cancer risk prediction and prevention. He is collaborating with experts nationwide to tackle critical gaps in understanding this disease.

Lang Wu, PhD, center, with Board of Regents Chair Gabriel Lee, left, and then-UH President David Lassner

Chief Scientific Officer Shepherd Secures Endowed Professorship

John Shepherd, Chief Scientific Officer at the UH Cancer Center, was named the B.H. and Alice C. Beams Endowed Professor in Cancer Research at UH Mānoa’s John A. Burns School of Medicine. Shepherd is using the award to advance breast cancer awareness, prevention, and treatment in Hawai’i and the U.S.-Affiliated Pacific Islands.

John Shepherd, PhD and Chief Scientific Officer

Research Program Manager Kazemi Wins Densitometry Award

UH Cancer Center Clinical Research Program Manager Leila Kazemi, MS(C), CMRI, CBDT, CCRP, was awarded the 2024 Dr. Sydney Bonnick ISCD Award for Excellence in Densitometry by the International Society for Clinical Densitometry. This honor announced in April 2024 is a testament to Kazemi’s remarkable contributions to the field of densitometry, which is a procedure that measures the amount of bone minerals and density by passing X-rays with two different energy levels through the body.



Leila Kazemi, MS(C), CMRI, CBDT, CCRP and Clinical Research Manager

Braun-Inglis Receives Community Clinical Scientist Award

University of Hawai'i Cancer Center Associate Researcher Christa Braun-Inglis, DNP, APRN, FNP-BC, AOCNP, was awarded the 2024 David King Community Clinical Scientist Award from the Association of Community Cancer Centers. Braun-Inglis



was recognized for her exceptional dedication to cancer research and education and her commitment to advancing the goals of cancer prevention, early detection, and quality treatment through her leadership in developing, participating in, and evaluating clinical studies.

Braun-Inglis, an oncology nurse practitioner who focuses on helping advanced practice providers overcome barriers so that they can participate in National Cancer Institute-sponsored clinical trials, received the Mary Pazdur Award for breaking down barriers, which is essential in advancing cancer care. By bridging the gap between clinical care and research, she is helping to improve patient outcomes and advance cancer care standards.

Christa Braun-Inglis, DNP, APRN, FNP-BC, AOCNP (right) with the 2003 award recipient, Robert Winn, MD, Director of VCU Massey Comprehensive Cancer Center

Carbone, Yang Win NCI Grant for Mesothelioma Research

University of Hawai'i Cancer Center researchers Haining Yang, PhD, and Michele Carbone, MD, PhD, in collaboration with Taylor Ripley, PhD, a thoracic surgeon at Baylor College of Medicine in Texas, received a National Cancer Institute grant for their work on mesothelioma. This highly competitive grant, which amounts to \$2.5 million and has more than \$1 million in indirect cost-benefit to the University of Hawai'i, is awarded to only 9% of applicants.

Michele Carbone, MD, PhD (left) and Haining Yang, MD, PhD





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The University of Hawai'i Cancer Center is saving lives in Hawai'i and the Pacific, and inspiring hope by working to conquer cancer. It is one of only 73 National Cancer Institute-designated cancer centers in the U.S., and the only one in Hawai'i and the Pacific. The UH Cancer Center aims to reduce the burden of cancer through research, education, patient care, and community outreach, focusing on and embracing the unique and varied ethnic, cultural and environmental characteristics of Hawai'i and the Pacific. Located in Kaka'ako, the UH Cancer Center is a unit of the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, and directly employs more than 300 faculty, staff and students. The Hawai'i Cancer Consortium, a collaborative network of health organizations, provides access to UH Cancer Center-driven clinical trials and high quality clinical care, and serves over 70% of cancer patients in the State of Hawai'i.