

# Inouye Amendments Would Extend the Native Hawaiian Health Care Act

By Houkje Ross

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Seeking to extend health care services to more Native Hawaiians and promote health care practices in tune with their traditional culture, Sen. Daniel Inouye (D-HI) proposed amendments to the law that authorizes funds for health care services directed to the Native Hawaiian population.

Introduced in November, Sen. Inouye's bill, S. 1929, the Native Hawaiian Health Care Improvement Act Reauthorization of 1999, also would extend the authorization of appropriations for Native

In 1998, Papa Ola Lokahi held a Health Summit in which Native Hawaiians discussed and developed health goals and objectives for their communities. Approximately 800 people attended the summit, many more than were expected, said Spoehr. People from all sections of the community attended: the employed, the unemployed, young, old, professionals, non-professionals. One of the most significant contributions the community made to the bill was the addition of culturally competent health care for Native Hawaiians.

Hawaiian health programs from 2002 to 2011, and would support research on the feasibility of making health care an entitlement for Native Hawaiians.

Extended in 1988 and reauthorized in 1992, the Native Hawaiian Health Care Act funds five health service organizations in Hawaii that provide: health promotion and education classes; disease prevention through screening, monitoring, case management, exercise, nutrition, and alternative therapies; and referrals to social services and primary care.

The Act also provides funds for a Native Hawaiian Health Professions Scholarship Program, which aims to improve access to health services by increasing the number of Native Hawaiians in the health professions.

Papa Ola Lokahi is the umbrella agency that administers funds and services. It works with the five health centers and plans, provides training and technical assistance, supports research, and serves as a clearinghouse for data and information.

## Integrating Traditional Cultural Practices

Sen. Inouye's proposed modifications of the law represent "fine tuning" of the existing legislation said Hardy Spoehr, executive director of Papa Ola Lokahi.

"There is a great desire by the local community to see a return to traditional healing practices," Spoehr said. These include the use of

herbal medicines (la'au lapa'au), body manipulation or massage (lomilomi), and mental health or problem solving in the family (ho'oponopono), he said.

"In the last 30 years, the Native Hawaiian community has really begun to feel the stresses and pressures of changes brought about by economic development," said Spoehr. As more land becomes developed, there is more concrete and less farming, and less consumption of healthy foods, according to Spoehr.

"The amended bill incorporates the desires of local communities to return to lives that are based on the natural environment, the land and the sea," said Spoehr. It calls for increasing the number of culturally competent health care workers; increasing the use of traditional Native Hawaiian foods in peoples' diets and dietary preferences; and identifying and instituting Native Hawaiian cultural values and practices within the "corporate cultures" of organizations and agencies providing health service to Native Hawaiians. Amendments would also call for the use of Native Hawaiian healing practices

by healers; and support training and education activities and programs in traditional Native Hawaiian healing practices by Native Hawaiian healers.

Other amendments would provide for the establishment of additional health care systems to serve the islands of Lana'i and Ni'ihau. The revised bill would also authorize Papa Ola Lokahi to carry out Native Hawaiian demonstration projects in areas such as education of health professionals. It would call for the development of a centralized database and information system on the health care status, needs, and wellness of Native Hawaiians. Other projects would include:

- Integration of Western medicine with complementary health practices, including traditional Native Hawaiian healing practices;
- Use of tele-wellness and telecommunications in chronic disease management, health promotion, and disease prevention; and
- Establishment of a Native Hawaiian Center of Excellence for nursing, mental health and nutrition, and research, training, and integrated medicine.

*For more information on the Native Hawaiian Health Care Act and the proposed amendments, contact: Senator Daniel Inouye's office, (202) 224-3934, or visit <http://www.senate.gov/~inouye/>  
To contact Papa Ola Lokahi, call (808) 536-9453. ❖*

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