

University of Hawaii at Manoa

Department of Sociology

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MEMO TO: Board of Trustees, State of Hawaii Employees Health Fund

FROM: Eldon L. Wegner, Chair
Department of Sociology

SUBJECT: Medical benefits for reciprocal beneficiaries of UH employees

I urge your approval to extend medical benefits for reciprocal beneficiaries of UH employees. Due to our pre-paid health care law, most individuals are covered through their own place of employment, and so extending coverage to this category of employee is likely to involve small numbers having an insignificant financial impact.

However, the situation is very serious for those individuals who are in relationships with persons not having their own health insurance. My own situation is such a case. My partner is unfortunately severely mentally ill and unable to work or to obtain health insurance on his own. Medical care of any kind creates a crisis. I cannot describe in words the anxiety this creates and how disruptive this could be to our lives. Furthermore, without health insurance, he is simply not receiving the desirable preventive medical care that is desirable.

As a department chair, I wish to note that the University of Hawaii is behind other institutions in the lack of this benefit. In today's world, domestic partnership benefits are commonly found in major universities. We cannot compete well for the best nor can we expect to retain our current employees if we ignore their genuine needs for health care coverage for themselves and their families.

During this past year, our union, UHPA, offered health benefits to reciprocal beneficiaries in its health plan. Now that these plans are being phased out, a failure to include such coverage in the new state employees health plan would actually be reducing our employee benefits.

This issue is a serious one of equity. I urge you to approve this coverage.