

REPORT TO THE THIRTY-SECOND LEGISLATURE

STATE OF HAWAI'I

2024 REGULAR SESSION

STATUS OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND HEALTH PROGRAM

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Prepared by

THE STATE OF HAWAI'I DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES

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THE STATE OF HAWAI'I DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

In Reponse to HCR 192 / HR 197

Honolulu, Hawai'i

December 2023

STATUS OF THE CLIMATE CHANGE AND HEALTH PROGRAM

PURPOSE

HCR 192 / HR 197, 2023 Regular Session, urged the Hawai'i Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Commission to develop a proactive and comprehensive strategy to educate Hawai'i's residents about the health impacts of the climate crisis.

The resolution urges the Hawai'i Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Commission to submit a progress report to the Legislature, no later than twenty days prior to the convening of the Regular Session of 2024, detailing actions taken to achieve these goals.

FINDINGS

A comprehensive strategy to communicate the human health risks of the climate crisis to Hawai'i's residents, urged by HCR 192 / HR197, requires the Hawai'i Department of Health (HDOH) to develop an in-depth understanding of all the Hawai'i-specific health impacts presented by the climate crisis. As of May 2023, the HDOH had not developed a dedicated Climate Change & Health Program to analyze these risks. A strong Climate Change & Health program is needed before this communication strategy can be implemented.

In mid-May 2023, the Hawai'i Department of Health hired an acting Climate Change & Health Coordinator to begin developing the foundation of HDOH's Climate Change & Health Program. A well-funded, robust Climate Change & Health program is necessary for HDOH to comprehensively understand the many complex and inter-connected human health impacts of climate change within Hawai'i.

As HDOH further develops its Climate Change and Health Program, it will concurrently advance communications and community engagement to raise awareness of this growing public health problem amongst the public. HDOH is committed to transparency and public health education and outreach, and will continue to share information, data, health risks and prevention guidance with the public as rapidly and thoroughly as possible. HDOH will work with partners at the state, community, county and federal level to help amplify these messages and ensure that the information is shared across different groups and communities. Once a comprehensive assessment of the State's climate and health vulnerabilities is complete, HDOH may request additional resources, if needed, from the Legislature to fund the public communications campaign.

Since mid-May 2023, HDOH's Climate Change & Health Program has established several on-going projects that have begun the process of communicating the human health risks of climate change to the public. These projects include:

- In July 2023, the Climate Change & Health Program launched an updated web portal which provides an adapted, in-depth graphic illustrating the many human health impacts of climate

change in Hawai'i, resources to learn more about each impact, frequently asked questions, resources for health professionals, and an updated timeline of climate change and health progress within Hawai'i. (<https://health.hawaii.gov/heer/climate-and-health/>)

- In June 2023, HDOH kicked-off the first meeting of a newly established Climate Change & Health Working Group. This working group is an extended impact network consisting of members from HDOH, JABSOM faculty, University of Hawai'i public health faculty, Hawai'i State Energy Office, JABSOM medical students, community based organizations and concerned community members. The mission of the working group is to breakdown the existing silos of climate change & public health work across Hawai'i and organize to meaningfully improve statewide climate change and public health resiliency. The working group meets monthly and consists of over 70 members.
- Since May 2023, the HDOH Climate Change & Health Program has been following the [CDC's BRACE framework](#) that guides state health departments on how to build climate change and health programs. The acronym of the framework is Building Resilience Against Climate Effects, and lists stepwise actions that health departments can take to analyze existing climate change and health risks within their state, use climate models to project the future burden of disease as the climate continues to change, and ultimately use these data projections to justify policy and programmatic interventions to reduce climate change related morbidity and mortality, improve health equity, and strengthen public health systems.
- During Summer 2023, the Climate Change & Health Program began utilizing the State's syndromic surveillance program to collect all disaggregated patient health records related to heat illness. Data queries included heat stroke, heat fatigue, dehydration, etc and data will be correlated with temperatures and absence of trade wind days to better understand the impact of these environmental factors on heat-related illness. In October 2023, the Climate Change & Health Program received the first output of this data and is working on data analysis. When results are available, they will be shared widely with the public to help further the understanding of climate change's impact on heat-related illness in Hawai'i.

With adequate resource allocation and dedicated personnel, the HDOH Climate Change & Health Program can continue to grow, analyze, and understand the full spectrum of human health risk to the climate crisis, to ultimately communicate these risks in a manner that bolsters public resiliency and mitigates the negative mental health outcomes associated with climate change. HDOH does not have any requests for the Climate Change & Health Program this year; however, given the magnitude of human health impacts presented by the climate crisis, after the program's foundation has been solidified, HDOH is very likely to request additional dedicated personnel or funding during the 2025 or subsequent Legislative Sessions.