

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Kōkua Kalihi Valley Receives \$140,000 Hawaii Dental Service Foundation Grant to Respond to Impact of COVID-19 in Kalihi

Honolulu, Hawaii — As the state begins to cautiously reopen to manage the spread of the coronavirus, the ongoing effects of the statewide lockdown are beginning to surface. Kalihi Valley residents are among those who have been hit the hardest.

Before the pandemic, many of Hawaii's most vulnerable populations already faced significant economic, health and other challenges. With COVID-19, the pressures have grown: Increased food insecurity, massive unemployment and the possibility of eviction. Kōkua Kalihi Valley Comprehensive Family Services (KKV), a community health center that serves one of the largest low-income immigrant populations in Honolulu, is meeting the community's needs.

Tough times require new, innovative thinking. COVID-19 has created new constraints on the way healthcare organizations deliver care, but KKV is rising to meet these new challenges of Hawaii's most vulnerable.

With non-emergency dental visits curtailed, KKV quickly adapted to the new environment and is meeting the needs of its patients and others in Kalihi in relevant ways to fill the new needs. Thanks to a \$140,000 grant from the HDS Foundation, instead of being furloughed, KKV's team of 25 dentists, dental hygienists and dental assistants is channeling their compassion and care to provide a range of non-dental services for 300 of its high-risk, senior dental patients and others in the community over a six-month period that began in April.

"We've had to rapidly reinvent ourselves to provide health education and support services that address the factors that influence the health of Kalihi residents to protect them from COVID-19 and the fallout from this pandemic," said Dr. Matthew Oishi, a Kōkua Kalihi Valley dentist who is spearheading the community outreach effort. "Over the years, we've earned the trust of our patients and we're using the relationships we've established to help them stay safe at home during the pandemic, maintain their oral, physical and mental health, and stay out of hospitals and emergency rooms."

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“We are so grateful. This redeployment has not only given us a broader perspective but has also prevented the need for staff furloughs and layoffs,” Dr. Oishi added. “Redeploying the dental team with these new duties has changed the way staff think about their relationships with their patients and community, as well as the role of dentistry in public health.”

With funding from the grant, the community health center is providing comprehensive support to individuals to ensure whole health. This support often begins with providing fresh local produce and prepared meals from KKV’s Roots Café to ensure food security. They also provide hygiene and household supplies such as toothbrushes, floss, toothpaste, and other basic necessities such as masks, disinfectants, and soap—so that the recipients can practice the recommended public health guidelines. These physical necessities also lead to identifying the need to address physical or mental health conditions.

KKV has also temporarily repurposed its mobile dental bus. Previously used for its school-based preventive program, the dental bus is now used to provide COVID-related public health education to the Kalihi community. The team has also selectively reached out to neighborhood establishments to share customized health education flyers and brochures.

“We appreciate the great work of Kōkua Kalihi Valley to address the immediate needs of the Kalihi community,” said Mark Yamakawa, CEO of Hawaii Dental Service. “Factors such as isolation and anxiety can create stress and affect our overall health and wellbeing. We hope Kōkua Kalihi Valley’s pilot project can serve as a good example of community outreach and ingenuity during difficult times. Their work is especially critical now. Keeping Kalihi Valley residents healthy helps prevent a resurgence of cases of COVID-19 in Hawaii as our state begins to reopen.”

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About Kōkua Kalihi Valley

Kōkua Kalihi Valley Comprehensive Family Services (KKV) is a community health center and federally qualified health center that serves the ahupua’a of Kalihi on O’ahu, Hawai’i. In 2019, KKV served 15,000 people through its broad range of clinical services and community programs.

About the HDS Foundation

The HDS Foundation was established in 1986 by Hawaii Dental Service to improve the oral health of Hawaii’s communities. Grants are distributed to local non-profit organizations for programs and projects that provide oral health education, prevent oral disease, and increase access to dental care for underserved populations. The Foundation’s oral health initiatives include the development of programs such as Seal Away Decay and Dentist by One.

For more information, visit HDSFoundation.gives.