



NEWS RELEASE

Date: March 16, 2023

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Waimānalo Health Center Receives \$500,000 HDS Foundation Grant to Expand Its Current Facility and Open a New Dental Clinic in Kaneohe

Waimānalo, Hawaii — Windward Oahu residents will soon have greater access to dental services from Waimānalo Health Center, thanks to a \$500,000 grant from the HDS Foundation.

Since 1992, Waimānalo Health Center has played a vital role in the Waimānalo community, which is considered by the federal government as a medically underserved population. The health center serves the broader Koʻolaupoko community, the southeastern district of the windward coast of Oahu, extending from Waimānalo through Kailua and Kaneohe up to Kualoa.

More than half — about 52% — of Waimānalo Health Center’s patients are Native Hawaiian, who face more barriers to care and experience higher rates of chronic diseases such as diabetes compared to other ethnic groups in Hawaii. Diabetes has a direct impact on oral health. High sugar levels in saliva can lead to increased bacteria and cause tooth decay and gum disease, which can lead to tooth loss.

“Mahalo to the HDS Foundation for providing this generous grant to support our community’s oral health needs,” said Dr. Mary Oneha, chief executive officer. “Over the past 30 years, our community’s needs have grown, but the health center remains committed to helping to meet those needs. This gift will help move us further forward in our capital campaign to continue expanding and enhancing the services we provide to the community.”

According to data collected by Waimānalo Health Center in 2021, about a quarter of all of the health center’s patients — or 23% — were uninsured and nearly half — or 49% — were at or below 100% of the federal poverty level. In addition, 66% of its dental patients are Medicaid beneficiaries, 16% have no medical insurance and only 18% have commercial dental coverage.

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“Oral health is just as important as primary care and is essential to preventive health. Providing easier access to dental care especially in federally designated Medically Underserved Populations, like Waimānalo, is one of our top priorities,” said Dr. Diane Paloma, HDS president and CEO. “Everyone deserves good oral health care, regardless of their ability to pay. We’re glad to be partnering with Waimānalo Health Center to break through socioeconomic challenges and address the health disparities in our state.”

The HDS grant will allow Waimānalo Health Center to serve more dental patients to meet the community’s growing needs with more dental operatories — dentist workstations and other state-of-the-art equipment.

“When dental services began at the health center in 2009, we started with only four operatories. We quickly realized the need for dental services was far greater than we could manage with our small space,” said Dr. Anthony Kim, dental director of Waimānalo Health Center. “Our plan is to enhance the patient experience and advance the quality of dental care for the entire ‘ohana while thoughtfully and purposefully expanding our dental services. HDS Foundation is helping us make this vision a reality. By the end of this project, our operatories in Waimānalo will more than double.”

In addition, Waimānalo Health Center recently acquired and renovated a private dental practice in Kaneohe, which will provide an additional four operatories for preventive, restorative and emergency dental care.

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About the Hawaii Dental Service Foundation

The Hawaii Dental Service Foundation was established in 1986 by Hawaii Dental Service to improve oral health in Hawaii. The Foundation’s oral health initiatives include programs such as Seal Away Decay, Dentist by One and Kupuna Smiles. In 2018, the Foundation established the Hawaii Dental Service Community Scholarship Program to support Hawaii students pursuing careers in dentistry or dental hygiene. The Foundation also awards grants 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. Visit the Hawaii Dental Service Foundation website at www.HDSFoundation.gives.

About Waimānalo Health Center

Rooted in Native Hawaiian values, Waimānalo Health Center’s mission is to improve the health and wellness of all people, regardless of ability to pay, by providing comprehensive primary and preventive health care services of the highest quality. The health center welcomed its first patient as an independent, non-profit community health center in January 1992 and became a federally qualified health center in 1994. <https://Waimanalohealth.org>.