

NATIVE HAWAIIANS

Women's Health

HISTORY

The state of Hawaii is comprised of a chain of 132 islands spanning 1500 miles within the Pacific Ocean. As the southernmost state, the islands of Hawaii are approximately 2,700 miles southwest of the contiguous United Statesⁱ. Unlike many other Asian American subgroups, Hawaiians are indigenous peoples not immigrants. Native Hawaiians are primarily of Polynesian, Micronesian, and Melanesian ancestryⁱⁱ. The majority of Native Hawaiians speak both English and Hawaiian.

The islands of Hawaii were inhabited by indigenous peoples as early as 300 AD. Native Hawaiian people and cultures thrived for centuries, until the arrival of British explorers in 1778. U.S. involvement Hawaii, beginning in 1820, has been characterized by ethnocentrism, exploitation of natural resources for profit, and continuous oppression and subjugation of Native Hawaiiansⁱⁱⁱ. In 1959, Hawaii became the 52nd U.S. state. Overtime the Western influence in Hawaii has led to the destruction of indigenous people, culture, and way of life^{iv}. In recent years there has been a movement to recognize Hawaii as a sovereign government^v.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Native Hawaiians are a minority in Hawaii^{xix}.

The total population of Native Hawaiian in the United States was about 211,000 in 1990, with over 12% living in the state of Hawaii.^{vi} By the year 2000, the population of Native Hawaiians had increased to

over 254, 910 just in the state of Hawaii^{vii}. Almost 50% of the Native Hawaiians in Hawaii are women^{viii}.

HEALTH STATUS

The overall health status of Native Hawaiian women in the United States is not clear. The

Life Expectancy for Asian Pacific Islander Women ^{xx}	
All Asian American	85.5 years
Japanese	84.5 years
Native Hawaiian	77.2 years
Samoan	74.9 years

majority of data on health status usually groups Native Hawaiian women with all of the Pacific Islander groups. However, some studies have identified breast cancer, diabetes, and

obesity as health problems disproportionately affecting Native Hawaiian women^{ix}.

BREAST CANCER

Pacific Islander women as a subgroup have the lowest breast cancer death, but there are disparities within specific ethnic groups. In a study of multi-ethnic women in Los Angeles and Hawaii, Native Hawaiian women were 65% more likely to develop breast cancer than white women^x. In addition, as a result of later detection, survival rates are 9% lower than Whites^{xi}.

Native Hawaiian women have the highest breast cancer death rate of any racial or ethnic minority in the United States^{xxi}.

Late stage detection may be a function of poor utilization of mammogram services. Studies suggest that Native Hawaiian women were the least likely of all PI women to get mammograms^{xii}.

DIABETES

Native Hawaiian women are 2.5 times more likely to be diagnosed with diabetes than White women^{xiii}. Within this population diabetes is correlated with glucose intolerance, a genetic disorder. In addition, another study of diabetes found that within this population diabetes was associated depression, obesity, and heart disease^{xiv}. Diabetes interventions focusing on social support and *ohana*, the Hawaiian value of family, have been promising in promoting behavior change^{xv}.

OBESITY

Another related health problem among Native Hawaiian women is obesity. The prevalence of obesity among women is as high as 65% among some populations of NH women^{xvi}. It is believed

Native Hawaiian women are one of the most obese sub-populations in the world^{xxii}.

that some genetic factors such as central adiposity play a role in the high prevalence of obesity among Native Hawaiians^{xvii}. Obesity is also attributed to poor diet and sedentary lifestyle among Native Hawaiian women. Culturally sensitive intervention programs that have incorporated the Native Hawaiian traditional diet as well as important cultural norms and values, have been effective in reducing obesity among participants^{xviii}.

RESOURCES

Additional information is available on Native Hawaiian Women's health and social services from the following organizations and websites.

- **National Women's Health Information Center**
http://www.4woman.gov/faq/Asian_Pacific.htm
- **Asian American and Pacific Islander Health Forum**
<http://www.apiahf.org/>
- **Hawaiian Health Portal**
<http://www.hawaiihealthportal.org/nativehawn.html>
- **Alu Like Inc.**
(808) 535-6700
<http://www.alulike.org/index.htm>
- **'IMI HALE: Native Hawaiian Cancer Research and Awareness Training Project**
(808) 597-6558
<http://imihale.org/>
- **Office of Minority Health: Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Populations (NHOPI)**
<http://www.cdc.gov/omh/Populations/NHOPI/NHOPI.htm>
- **Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations**
(510) 272-9536
<http://www.aapcho.org/>
- **Papa Ola Lokahi**
(808) 597-6550
<http://www.papaolalokahi.org>

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http://www.oha.org/pdf/databook_6_02.pdf
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- ^{xii} Health Problems in Asian American, Pacific Islander, and Native Hawaiian Women
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