

**PROTECT  
PUBLIC HEALTH**

**REVIVE  
THE ECONOMY**

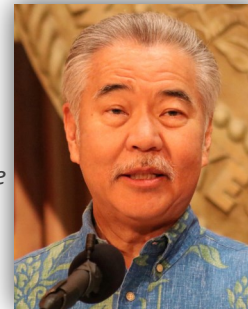
**STRENGTHEN  
OUR COMMUNITY**

## **CAPITOL CONNECTION**

**JANUARY 2021**

### **From the governor: Hope, challenges as vaccines arrive**

**A** year ago, no one could have imagined we'd be battling a global pandemic. Yet when we needed it most, Hawai'i has stepped up. Healthcare heroes and first responders have put their lives on the line. The Department of Health and multiple state, county and federal agencies have helped keep us safe. Government agencies and community groups reached out to help families, and businesses reinvented themselves to survive. And the Hawai'i National Guard has been everywhere to provide critical support. Now we're looking to 2021 with the promise of vaccines and some hope ahead. This edition describes how Governor Ige, his team, and public and private partners continue to fight the virus as we prepare for the future together.



Hawai'i has launched its vaccination plan but must find ways to meet the state's budget shortfall.

**Q. What do you most want people to know as we look back on 2020?**

**A.** I want to thank the people of Hawai'i for their willingness to put community first. I'm proud to be governor of this state, despite the challenges we face. The national media have asked why we've done so well in handling the virus compared to other places, and I tell them it's because of our strong sense of community. We understand that we can only be successful together. We know that what we do impacts our friends and neighbors, and that we're willing to live with restrictions to protect us all.

**Q. What gives you hope for the months ahead?**

**A.** In 2021, we expect to have a COVID-19 vaccine for anyone who wants it. That will help us get to a "new normal" so we can return to in-person learning, our jobs and community activities. Even though we've never faced a crisis of this magnitude, our state created whole new systems in a matter of months to deal with the pandemic and help people survive. The virus changed every aspect of our lives, but we're working hard to be as responsive as we can to help people who are still struggling. For our economy, we've been able to welcome more visitors to the islands without a major spike in COVID-19 cases, which tells us the Safe Travels program is working.

**Q. What will be the economic impact from COVID-19 for the state — now and for the future?**

**A.** The economic reality is that it will be a long, tough road to recovery until tourism rebounds. The state is projecting a \$1.4 billion general fund shortfall for each of the next four years, so to make up the difference we've already instituted budget reductions, hiring freezes and other measures. The cabinet and I will also be taking pay cuts. We're hoping to cut less from education, the Department of Human Services and other core areas that cover basic needs. As our last resort, the state employee furloughs will give us needed cost savings and allow us to restore hours when the economy improves. The Legislature and I will be working closely in the coming months to address all these issues.

### **Update on state's vaccination plans**

**W**hat may be the largest immunization campaign in the history of the state is being rolled out by the state Department of Health, in partnership with the Healthcare Association of Hawai'i, healthcare facilities and other providers. The first doses in Phase 1a are designated for healthcare workers involved in direct patient care and residents and staff in long-term care facilities. Phases 1b and 1c include first responders and essential workers, adults with high-risk medical conditions and adults 65 and older.



**Upon approval by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration,** the state expects to receive thousands of doses of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines. Both vaccines require a two-dose regimen. "This marks the beginning of our path to recovery," said Governor Ige. "I'm confident in the Department of Health's ability to distribute the vaccines across Hawai'i, and I trust the science. But even as more people get vaccinated, we need to maintain our vigilance and continue the safe practices that have made Hawai'i a world leader in containing the spread of COVID-19." For current information on vaccination progress, go to <https://hawaiiicovid19.com/vaccine/>.

# Making the Hawai'i Pandemic Action Plan work

The governor's **Pandemic Action Plan** focuses on **protecting public health, reviving the economy and strengthening our community**. Finding the right balance has been part of the ongoing challenge for the governor and the four county mayors. From the start of the pandemic, the question has been, **"How do we strike the right balance between public safety and economic recovery?"** Since the state's March 2020 launch of the nation's first mandatory 14-day self-quarantine for travelers, the governor and mayors, working with the Department of Health, have developed tiered systems, guidelines and protocols for businesses, gatherings and school and college instruction. **The state's Oct. 15 launch of its Safe Travels pre-travel testing program with "trusted testing partners" was a milestone** as part of Hawai'i's multi-tiered screening process to keep the community safe while helping businesses recover and restore local jobs. The website development was coordinated by the state's **Office of Enterprise Technology Services**. "So far, the Safe Travels program has worked to bring in visitors safely," said Governor Ige.



Governor Ige with the mayors on June 18: Kirk Caldwell, Mike Victorino, Harry Kim, ASL interpreter Laura Safranski, and Derek Kawakami.

## State, counties continue to protect public health



DOH's Dr. Libby Char

As the state mobilized to respond to COVID-19, people have turned to Hawai'i's **Department of Health (DOH)** for leadership and guidance for this mysterious new virus. DOH continues to update its [HawaiiCovid19.com](https://www.hawaii.gov/doh/hawaii-covid-19) website and **COVID-19 data dashboard** to provide the latest information and advice to the public and support decision-making for schools, businesses and travel. DOH has worked with more than 150 representatives from over 90 organizations to develop the **state's vaccination plan**. **What will 2021 look like for living with COVID-19?** "Hawai'i is in a good place, but, even with a vaccine, we're going to be wearing masks for a while because we know they work. Meanwhile, prevention is the key. So let's help each other, pull together and be kind to each other," said DOH director Dr. Libby Char.

**Improved systems to respond to the virus** – As the number of cases climbed in the state, DOH has created a more efficient **system of disease investigators and contact tracers**, in collaboration with the **Hawai'i National Guard and the University of Hawai'i**. DOH also worked to develop a **multi-organizational campaign** to reach Pacific Islanders and the state's large immigrant population as well as the **Hawai'i CARES program** for those who needed to self-isolate and/or quarantine. As of Nov. 22, the program helped more than 1,600 individuals, including 400 families, while providing 24/7 crisis support.



**Multi-media campaigns to prevent the spread of COVID-19** – Since the start of the pandemic, **DOH, HI-EMA, and other community partners** have launched campaigns to encourage everyone to mask up and follow safe practices to prevent spread of the virus. DOH has also partnered with Mānoa Now and the UH School of Social Work to reach young adults through social media, a mobile app and other student-produced media. **Behavioral Health and Homeless Statewide Unified Response Group** – Led by DOH and the governor's coordinator on homelessness, this group managed isolation and quarantine services among behavioral health and homeless people and provided 482,479 units of personal protective equipment (PPE) to frontline mental health workers.

## Schools and colleges pivot to deliver learning safely

Transforming entire statewide education systems in a pandemic is no small feat, but Hawai'i's public schools and the University of Hawai'i 10-campus system managed to do it. The **Hawai'i State Department of Education (HIDOE)** transitioned to distance instruction, guided by its **Return to Learn: School Reopening Plan**. Each school complex is deciding what fits its community best and when students can move to more in-person learning. HIDOE created the **'Ohana Help Desk**, the nation's first statewide tech and multilingual support for students. They also allocated \$31 million in federal CARES funds for student laptops and tablets and improved connectivity. Schools also provided more than 2.6 million free grab-and-go meals to children statewide.



Students statewide are learning remotely.

**More than 45,000 college students across the state successfully completed** the semester with record high graduation rates, even though the **UH 10-campus system** shifted to online learning in March. UH enrollment has held steady with more local students staying home for college. Members of the UH community also have been doing work on developing an effective vaccine, advising government agencies and studying the economic, social and psychological effects of the pandemic. Campuses have provided community support through food drives and other service projects.

# Strengthening our community in the COVID crisis

**Programs to help families, businesses survive:** Even as DOH and community partners managed public health challenges, other state agencies mobilized to help those who lost their jobs, businesses that needed support and families struggling to survive. Much of the immediate aid came from federal **Coronavirus Relief (CARES Act) funds** received by the state. “Hawai‘i will not leave any of the federal funding unused. We are going to use every penny,” said Governor Ige. Any unspent monies will help repay a \$1 billion loan secured for unemployment benefits to local residents.



The Hawai'i Restaurant Card helped the unemployed, restaurants and suppliers.

**Help for the unemployed** – In the wake of the pandemic, Hawai‘i went from having the lowest unemployment rate in the nation to one of the highest. The state **Department of Labor and Industrial Relations** has processed thousands of unemployment claims and paid out billions of dollars in benefits, despite the limitations of its antiquated system to handle the huge surge of more than 200,000 applications. **On the job creation front**, DLIR worked to connect people to local businesses looking for workers in the pandemic. The **RUDDER program** assisted 43 employers who hired more than 1,000 new employees. The department’s **Workforce Development Council** also partnered with the Chamber of Commerce to develop the “Hawai‘i is Hiring” [website](#).

**Lifelines for individuals and families** – The state **Department of Human Services (DHS)** continues to help protect individuals and families in the face of a major surge in applications for aid. **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)** demand increased by 50 percent compared to 2019, and DHS worked with federal partners to ensure timely benefits to those in need. Med-QUEST suspended disenrollments from Medicaid to alleviate concerns about losing health coverage. And DHS frontline workers who protect vulnerable children and adults have continued to respond to reports of abuse, neglect, harm and exploitation.



Governor Ige explains the program for housing assistance.

**The Rent Relief and Housing Assistance Program (RRHAP)** provided tens of millions of dollars in aid to renters and homeowners to avoid eviction. Using federal Coronavirus Relief funds, the program, launched by the state’s **Hawaii Housing Finance and Development Corporation (HHFDC)**, aided those impacted by the pandemic. **The Hawai‘i Department of Agriculture** helped struggling farmers by distributing \$448,495 to 196 farmers and organizations in a record nine weeks through emergency relief grants. The department also approved 29 loans totaling over \$5 million and acted on leases for 8,000 acres of land for diversified agriculture. The department’s **DABUX Double Up Food Bucks** program provided SNAP recipients with more buying power for local produce.

## Reviving the economy and planning for the future

**H**awai‘i’s **multi-layered Safe Travels program** with pre-travel testing involving “trusted testing partners” will continue into 2021 as a way for residents and visitors coming into the state to avoid having to quarantine. The list of testing partners for both interisland and trans-Pacific keeps growing while the state continues to review how the program is working. But the overall message remains the same: the **governor and the Hawai‘i Tourism Authority** have asked for “the same diligence and care from our visitors that we expect from our residents.”

**Grants and programs to help local businesses** – State and community partners have worked together to develop creative ways to help local residents and businesses survive. The programs have included the **Hawai‘i Restaurant Card and Holiday Business Card, the Hawai‘i Business Pivot Grant and the Buy Hawai‘i, Give Aloha Platform** — all developed by the **Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism**, in partnership with the business community.

**The Hawai‘i Technology Development Corporation**, collaborating with the private sector and other state departments, launched **TRUE**, an initiative to tech-enable organizations and local businesses to share solutions to common business challenges. HTDC also offered \$10 million in innovation grants to companies producing PPE supply chain products and services.



**The Hawai‘i Community Development Authority and HHFDC** have also **continued construction of affordable housing** in Kaka‘ako and other areas. This includes A‘ali‘i and Koula towers, which will add 850 affordable housing units to the urban core of Honolulu. Other complexes that broke ground or are already completed are Hale Kalele, a 200-unit rental project for families earning 30 to 60 percent AMI — the state’s first interagency collaboration between HHFDC and the Judiciary; Ola ka ‘Ilima Artspace Lofts and Nohona Hale micro-housing in Kaka‘ako; and Hale Moena Kupuna in Kapolei for seniors.

**The Hawai‘i Department of Transportation** forged ahead on harbor modernization, including the \$350 million Kapālama Container Terminal Project construction project to maintain the state’s vital connection to supplies and continued airport modernization to create construction jobs and expand air service. The October bond sale resulted in \$300 million in new revenue while refinancing saved the state \$100 million over the next two years.

# An all-hands-on-deck response from state agencies

**M**ultiple state departments came together to respond to fast-changing COVID-19 conditions, case numbers, community concerns and federal guidelines. What the people didn't see is the countless hours of coordination that went into developing and implementing programs such as **Safe Travels and pre-travel testing, airport screening, quarantine and emergency proclamation enforcement, and system and staffing upgrades by many agencies to handle the unprecedented demands.**

**The Hawai'i National Guard, under incident commander Maj. Gen. Kenneth Hara, launched the largest and longest support mission in its history, providing 1,300 service members in support of the state's Pandemic Action Plan.** Hawai'i Army and Air National Guard members executed tasks, including 24,000 COVID-19 swab tests, passenger thermal screenings at airports, transporting thousands of pounds of cargo, contact tracing, vaccination planning and community food and free PPE distribution. The Guard recently received federal approval for a funding extension so it can continue to provide assistance to the state through March 31, 2021. The **Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency** continues to support numerous operations and emergency preparedness.



Temperature checks and masks became part of the new normal.

**The Hawai'i Department of Transportation (HDOT)** has been an integral part of the state's COVID-19 response — from minimizing the spread of COVID-19 at airports statewide, implementing the Safe Travels program and thermal screening and coordinating with partner agencies on pre-travel testing and surge testing on the H-3 freeway. HDOT also works closely with the DOH and multiple federal, state, county and private agencies to provide current COVID-19-related travel information and messaging.

## Keeping people safe, making systems work for the public



DLNR helped enforce emergency restrictions on gatherings.

**The Department of Land and Natural Resources, its 11 divisions and four offices** continued their work statewide but in health and safety-focused ways. State conservation officers worked seven days a week during the first surge to keep people safe and away from closed state parks and forest trails. The Division of Aquatic Resources developed spending plans for the distribution of \$4.3 million in CARES Act funds for fishery interests. Public hearings and meetings moved to virtual formats. The department also used the "pause" in normal operations to catch up on a backlog of maintenance and repair and projects.

**DHHL deployed rental and mortgage relief** — In May 2020, the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands initiated a rental relief program for its Applicant Waiting List beneficiaries and Undivided Interest Lessees. The program utilized \$7 million in Native Hawaiian Housing Block Grant funds available through the Native Hawaiian Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Act. Eligible native Hawaiians who experienced income or job loss as a result of COVID-19 were qualified to receive assistance for payment of their security deposit and/or rent for up to six months. The Hawaiian Homes Commission also provided mortgage relief to beneficiaries.

**The Department of the Attorney General** has drafted and refined multiple COVID-19-related emergency proclamations, helped develop the Safe Travels Program, investigated and prosecuted travel quarantine violations, responded to over 100,000 requests for exemptions from travel restrictions and advised agencies and businesses on safe practices. **The Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs, working with the Attorney General's office, has successfully protected the state's consumers in several legal actions, resulting in millions of dollars in settlements that can be used to help Hawai'i residents.** **The Department of Public Safety's** advance planning enabled staff to effectively contain outbreaks at its correctional facilities through mass testing and other measures. PSD's sheriffs assisted in over 80 operations to help the homeless and protected the traveling public and employees at airports by helping with screening and enforcement.

**The Department of Accounting and General Services's behind-the-scenes work goes largely unseen by the public, yet affects every person in the state.** This was especially true in 2020. Besides receiving a national Award for Excellence in Financial Reporting for the eighth consecutive year, DAGS was instrumental in purchasing critical PPE, COVID-19 test kits, construction completion of the Hawai'i State Hospital's new facility, facilitating the state's first mail-in ballot election and upgrading the digital platforms for unemployment benefits and Safe Travels through the Office of Enterprise Technology Services. Also, with more employees teleworking, the **Department of Human Resources and Development** has launched a new Learning Management System for workers to develop skills and train remotely.

**FINALLY, mahalo to the Hawai'i COVID-19 JOINT INFORMATION CENTER and all of the department public information officers and staff statewide for their tireless work to keep the community informed in this unprecedented COVID-19 time.** 

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