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# A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO THE OFFICE OF HEALTH EQUITY.

**BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:**

1           SECTION 1. The legislature finds that health outcomes and  
2 well-being are not equal across Hawaii. Life expectancy is used  
3 internationally as a standard summary measure of population  
4 health and Hawaii is nationally ranked as having the highest  
5 life expectancy amongst the states. Life expectancy rates  
6 however, in Hawaii vary as much as 14.4 years when calculated by  
7 ZIP Code Tabulation Areas. The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-  
8 19) pandemic has had a devastating effect on communities already  
9 experiencing disparities in health and life expectancy. In the  
10 United States, COVID-19 became the third leading cause of death,  
11 and life expectancy from 2018 to 2020 is estimated to have  
12 decreased by 1.87 years. The decrease in life expectancy was  
13 experienced by the most marginalized populations, with Hispanic  
14 and non-Hispanic Black people experiencing decreases three times  
15 greater than the non-Hispanic White population.

16           While state life expectancy rates have not been calculated,  
17 in Hawaii, COVID-19 risks exacerbated conditions for people with



1 existing health disparities and economic disadvantages. Native  
2 Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and Filipinos were at higher risk  
3 of COVID-19 exposure based on over-representation in the  
4 essential workforce, large households, and preexisting higher  
5 rates of chronic disease and smoking. From March 8, 2020, to  
6 January 31, 2021, it is estimated that Pacific Islanders  
7 represented twenty-four per cent of all COVID-19 cases, despite  
8 representing only four per cent of the State's overall  
9 population.

10 The legislature further finds that the State's department  
11 of health has a duty to advance health equity. Chapter 321,  
12 Hawaii Revised Statutes, describing the general powers and  
13 duties of the agency, was amended by Act 157, Session Laws of  
14 Hawaii 2014. Section 321-1(a), Hawaii Revised Statutes states,  
15 "[t]he department of health shall have general charge,  
16 oversight, and care of the health and lives of the people of the  
17 State, and shall pursue as a goal, the achievement of health  
18 equity. The department shall consider social determinants of  
19 health in the assessment of state needs for health." Health  
20 equity is defined as, "assuring equal opportunity for all people  
21 in the State to attain their full health potential," and the



1 social determinants of health defined as, "the complex,  
2 integrated, and overlapping social structures and economic  
3 systems that contribute to health inequities. These social  
4 structures and economic systems include the social environment,  
5 physical environment, health services, and structural and  
6 societal factors".

7 Accordingly, the purpose of this Act is to:

- 8 (1) Establish an office of health equity within the  
9 department of health;
- 10 (2) Provide positions for the office of health equity; and
- 11 (3) Authorize the creation of office of health equity  
12 external advisory groups.

13 SECTION 2. Chapter 321, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is  
14 amended by adding a new section to be appropriately designated  
15 and to read as follows:

16 "§321- Office of health equity. (a) There is  
17 established within the department of health an office of health  
18 equity. The purpose of the office of health equity shall be to  
19 advance health equity by serving as catalysts for change to  
20 improve the social determinants of health that affect a wide  
21 range of health, functioning, quality of life opportunities and



1 outcomes. The advancement of health equity shall include the  
2 following higher level activities by collaborating with multi-  
3 sector partners:

4 (1) Assess and monitor population health and identify  
5 significant health disparities;

6 (2) Identify and engage stakeholders on policies, systems,  
7 and environmental improvements to eliminate  
8 inequities;

9 (3) Evaluate and monitor efforts using short- and long-  
10 term measures; and

11 (4) Reassess strategies with stakeholders.

12 (b) The goals of the office of health equity shall  
13 include:

14 (1) Establishing a public health framework based on  
15 addressing the social determinants of health;

16 (2) Establishing data standards and practices to support  
17 the advancement of health equity;

18 (3) Building capacity internally within the department and  
19 externally with stakeholders for assessing, and  
20 advancing policies, systems, and environmental change  
21 to improve population health; and



1        (4) Supporting and developing an inclusive and diverse  
2        workforce in the department.

3        (c) The office of health equity shall also appoint and  
4        convene advisory groups at the discretion of the director of  
5        health that may include a:

6        (1) Policy advisory group to deliberate, develop, and  
7        support the adoption and implementation of policies,  
8        systems, and environmental change improvements, and to  
9        comprise not more than eighteen leaders from  
10       organizations that:

11       (A) Advance racial and ethnic health equity for  
12       native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and other  
13       disadvantaged racial or ethnic groups;

14       (B) Advance gender and sexual minority health equity;

15       (C) Advance disability health equity for those with  
16       physical, developmental, and other disabilities;

17       (D) Advance health equity for geographically  
18       disadvantaged communities, such as rural and  
19       remote communities; and

20       (E) Possess with other specific health equity  
21       expertise; and



1       (2) Community network advisory group to identify community  
2       needs and barriers to health and well-being, and  
3       recommend solutions across the domains in the social  
4       determinants of health: economic stability; education  
5       access and quality; health care access and quality;  
6       neighborhood and built environment; and social and  
7       community context. The participants shall include  
8       representatives of organizations and representing  
9       populations disproportionately impacted by health  
10       disparities and inequities."

11       SECTION 3. There is appropriated out of the general  
12 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$                    or so  
13 much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2022-2023 to  
14 carry out the purposes of this Act, including the establishment,  
15 hiring, and filling of positions and contractors to carry out  
16 the purposes set forth in section 2 of this Act.

17       The sum appropriated shall be expended by the department of  
18 health for the purposes of this Act.

19       SECTION 4. New statutory material is underscored.

20       SECTION 5. This Act shall take effect on January 1, 2050.



**Report Title:**

Health Equity; Department of Health; Appropriation

**Description:**

Establishes the Office of Health Equity within the Department of Health. Appropriates funds. Effective 1/1/2050. (SD1)

*The summary description of legislation appearing on this page is for informational purposes only and is not legislation or evidence of legislative intent.*

