

'Imi Pono



Hawai'i Wellbeing Survey 2021

COVID-19 Impacts

Referring to the search for wholeness and balance, 'Imi Pono seeks a more complete picture of wellbeing among Native Hawaiians and Hawai'i residents. As the source and outcome of multiple factors, wellbeing feeds, and is fed by, many streams. Native Hawaiian perspectives on wellbeing emphasize relationships, interconnections, and balance. As discussed in this brief, while these relationships were disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, for some, sources of strength and positive impacts also emerged.

Increasing and sustaining wellbeing require relevant and actionable data. Despite composing more than one-fifth of Hawai'i's population and enjoying a unique and what should be a privileged status as the Indigenous people of the state, Native Hawaiians are typically reported within the broader category of Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander. In addition, data collected by state agencies are often narrowly focused and deficit based.

To collect relevant and actionable data, Kamehameha Schools, Lili'uokalani Trust, and the Office of Hawaiian Affairs contracted Marzano Research to administer a statewide survey examining Native Hawaiian wellbeing from a holistic and strengths-based perspective. The results will inform organizational planning and improve community services for Native Hawaiians.

Survey Topics

The survey provides unique insight into a range of topics: cultural, community and spiritual connections; civic engagement and leadership; quality of life; hope for the future; participation in cultural activities; interaction with the 'āina (the land or, more broadly, that which feeds) and kai (the sea); community strengths; and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Survey items were informed by previous research conducted in partnership with Native Hawaiian communities.

Purpose: COVID-19 Impacts

The purpose of this brief is to identify COVID-19 impacts on Hawai'i residents at the end of 2020 and beginning of 2021. This brief also explores commonalities and differences between Native Hawaiian and non-Hawaiian experiences and across age groups and counties.



Kamehameha Schools



Lili'uokalani
Trust



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COVID-19 Impacts: Key Findings

This brief focuses on COVID-19 impacts related to physical health, mental and emotional wellbeing, employment and finances, education and care, digital connectivity, and coping strategies at the end of 2020 and beginning of 2021. Special attention was paid to the experiences of Native Hawaiian and non-Hawaiian respondents as well as to differences by age group and location. Non-Hawaiian refers to Hawai'i residents who selected "no" in response to the question "Are you Native Hawaiian?"

Overall, Native Hawaiians were more likely to report being impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The five key findings in this brief include:

1. Physical health, and mental and emotional wellbeing, were primary concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic for Native Hawaiians.
2. Native Hawaiians were more likely to express concerns about employment and finances in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Native Hawaiians were more likely to voice concerns about their children's education and care during the COVID-19 pandemic.
4. Both Native Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians faced similar challenges related to digital connectivity.
5. Native Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians reported differences in their coping strategies.

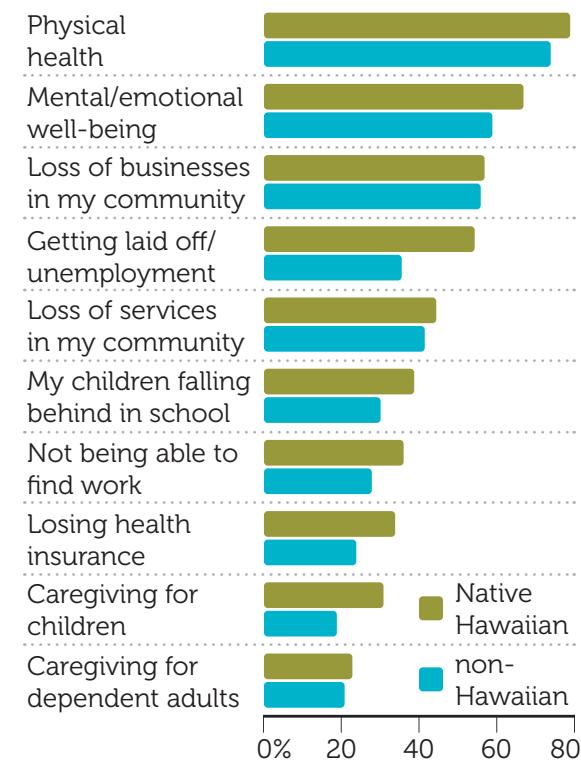
The pandemic impacted Hawai'i residents in many ways. Respondents were most concerned with maintaining their physical health, followed by their mental and emotional wellbeing. Across a range of areas, the percentages of Native Hawaiians who expressed concern were higher than the percentages of non-Hawaiians (*Figure 1*).

Sample and Methods

Data were collected from November 2020 through February 2021. Respondents included 755 Native Hawaiians and 703 non-Hawaiians. Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 55 and over. The most populated counties, Honolulu County and Hawai'i County, contributed the highest percentages of survey responses (57% and 22%, respectively). The least populated counties, Maui-Moloka'i-Lana'i County and Kaua'i County, had the lowest percentages of survey responses (13% and 8%, respectively). Respondent data were collected via email, phone, postcard, and social media outlets.

Given the data collection methodology, it is likely that the sample of survey respondents are more financially affluent than the general Native Hawaiian and Hawai'i population. It is important to note that the survey results are a snapshot in time and that the effects of the pandemic on all aspects of wellbeing are likely to be felt for years to come. Some negative impacts may continue to deepen despite the rollout of vaccines and gradual return to fuller employment and in-person learning.

Figure 1. Among all respondents, maintaining physical health was the top concern during the COVID-19 pandemic



Health and Wellbeing

Physical health and mental and emotional wellbeing were primary concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic, for both Native Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians.

Native Hawaiians reported their physical health (79%) and their mental and emotional wellbeing (67%) as the top two areas of concern impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. These percentages were similar among Native Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians and across all counties. However, there were differences by age group. Older Hawai'i residents were more likely than younger residents to be concerned about their physical health during the COVID-19 pandemic. Approximately 80% of Hawai'i residents age 45 and older reported being concerned about their health, compared to 70% of residents ages 18 to 34. These results may reflect the increased vulnerability of older residents to COVID-19 complications.

Residents were also concerned about their mental and emotional wellbeing. About 63% of all respondents reported this to be a concern, with similar percentages across Native Hawaiians, non-Hawaiians, age groups, and counties.

 *COVID has really given me so much anxiety and stress regarding who will take care of my child who is in the first grade.*
- Parent respondent

When asked to share their stories about how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted their wellbeing, respondents primarily described the toll it took on their physical health and mental and emotional wellbeing.¹ Many shared that the physical separation and lack of activities left them feeling isolated and alone. Others reported increased stress due to fears of becoming sick, getting others sick, losing their jobs, experiencing a reduction in financial resources, and taking on increased caregiving responsibilities. Respondents' stories illustrated how these factors were interrelated and could exacerbate one another. One respondent stated how caring for keiki (a child), job requirements, and sick leave were connected:

"COVID has really given me so much anxiety and stress regarding who will take care of my child who is in the first grade. He attends public school and only goes every other day. I work for the city and no longer able to work from home. Therefore, I need to exhaust all my vacation and sick [time] before going on leave without pay."

Another shared how financial stressors impacted their physical health, and mental and emotional wellbeing:

"No unemployment checks since September of 2020, used up all of my savings to pay bills, maxed out credit cards resulting in stress, having panic attacks to severe anxiety. Started to drink more beers than normal, insomnia, a foggy mind."

¹ Of the 1,458 total respondents, approximately 1,200 provided comments about ways they were impacted by the pandemic. Fifty-seven percent (57%) discussed how their physical health and mental and emotional wellbeing were impacted.

Health and Wellbeing (cont.)

Such stories were repeated across the survey responses, with many sharing that the pandemic has made them feel anxious, uncomfortable, scared, depressed, irritable, lonely, and down.

Additionally, respondents shared how they had fewer social interactions and activities during the COVID-19 pandemic.² They pointed out that their lives shifted greatly due to a drastic reduction in going out, visiting friends, traveling, and seeing family. Not being able to connect with others in person was repeatedly mentioned as a hardship. One respondent shared, *"I am missing social interactions with my friends and family, and other things I took for granted such as eating out at restaurants and going to the movies. Also, the fear of myself or my loved ones contracting COVID-19 is constant, that causes an always present underlying stress."*

“ I am missing social interactions with my friends and family, and other things I took for granted...

- Respondent



Another respondent summarized a similar experience: *"Stressed in trying to stay COVID free and having to quarantine/stay at home. Lonely and bored not being able to gather with family and friends. Inactive when locked down."* Many also said that restrictions shut down many of their avenues for exercise and physical movement. Gyms closed, exercise classes were canceled, and outdoor activities were regulated. For some, these restrictions led to deteriorating physical health and weight gain. The suspension of in-person gatherings in churches and among other religious groups also greatly affected respondents' wellbeing.

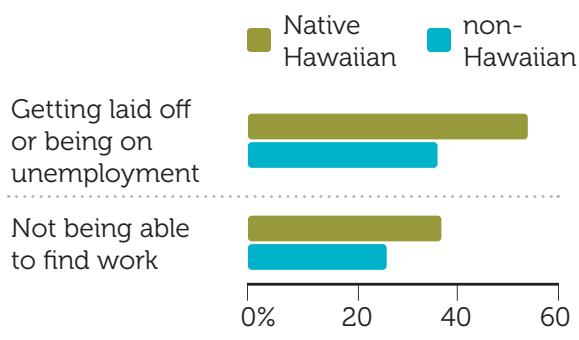
² Of the 1,200 respondents who provided comments, 36% discussed reduced social interactions and activities. This was the second-most mentioned topic among respondents' comments.

Employment and Finances

Native Hawaiians were more likely to express concerns about employment and finances in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic greatly affected employment and finances. Approximately 44 percent (44%) of respondents reported concerns in this area. Many respondents described reduced work hours, job loss, or increased difficulty in finding employment. In turn, some respondents experienced reduced household income, saw more stress placed on their partners, made lifestyle changes to lower expenses, or used savings to make ends meet. For many, these financial hardships resulted in increased levels of stress and worry, and those who lost their jobs experienced sadness and depression. One respondent shared, *"I need to find more work to keep my baby fed and cared for, but there's no resources for me to apply to because either no one is hiring or hours are not flexible."* Another shared multiple struggles: *"I've lost my job. I need retraining. My daughter is failing school. She and I both needed mental health assistance, and there was none available. I don't know what's going to happen, and I am afraid we will be homeless again."*

Figure 2. Native Hawaiians reported greater concern about the occupational effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Employment

Survey responses showed that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Native Hawaiians were concerned about being laid off or being on unemployment and not being able to find work. Fifty-three percent (53%) of Native Hawaiians were concerned about being laid off or being on unemployment, compared to 36% of non-Hawaiians—a 17 percentage point difference. Also, 37% of Native Hawaiians were concerned about not being able to find work, compared to 28% of non-Hawaiians (*Figure 2*).

Additionally, during the COVID-19 pandemic, 53% of Hawai'i residents ages 25 to 34 and 57% of residents ages 35 to 44 were concerned about being laid off or being on unemployment. Hawai'i residents age 55 and older were the least concerned about being laid off or being on unemployment. These findings likely reflect the general trend that residents are less likely to be concerned about their employment status as they move closer to and into retirement.

Employment status is often associated with health insurance coverage. Although approximately 29% of respondents overall were concerned about losing their health insurance, there were significant differences between Native Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians. Thirty-four percent (34%) of Native Hawaiians were concerned about losing health insurance, compared to 24% of non-Hawaiians. Native Hawaiians' concerns about loss of health insurance may reflect their reported concerns about loss of employment.

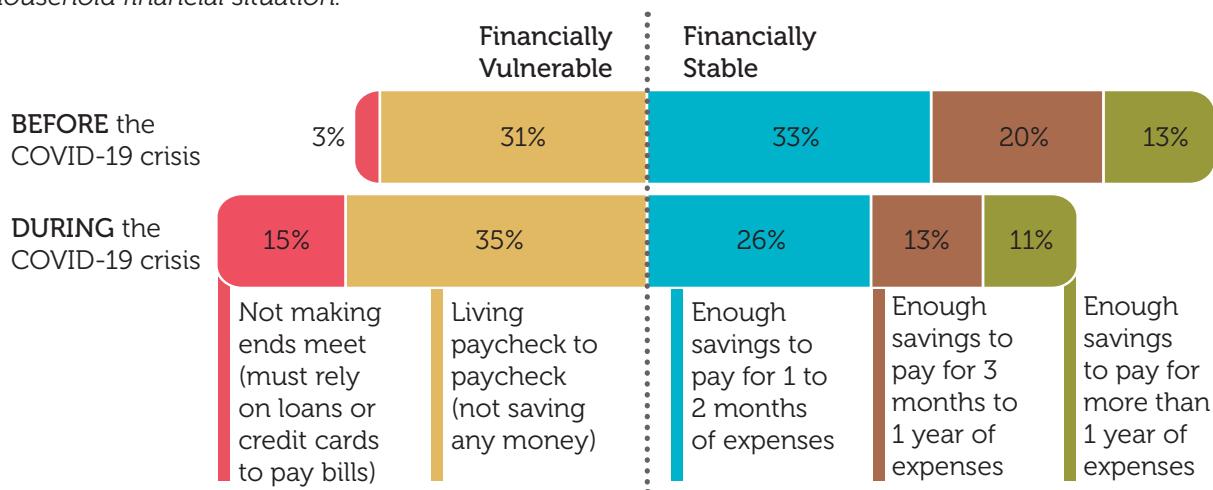
Employment and Finances (cont.)

Finances

The majority of Native Hawaiians reported their household financial situation before the COVID-19 pandemic as having enough savings for 1 to 2 months of living expenses. On average, Native Hawaiians were more likely than non-Hawaiians to report having a less stable household financial situation or living paycheck to paycheck. Thirty-three percent (33%) of Native Hawaiians reported having enough savings for at least 3 months of living expenses, whereas 48% of non-Hawaiians reported a similar household financial situation.

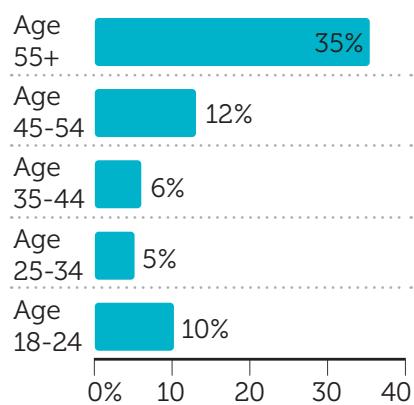
Both Native Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians indicated their household financial situations were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Because Native Hawaiians were more likely than non-Hawaiians to report a less stable household financial situation before the pandemic, it is not surprising that 50% of Native Hawaiians reported living paycheck to paycheck or not making ends meet during the pandemic (*Figure 3*), compared to 35% of non-Hawaiians.

Figure 3. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Native Hawaiians reported a shift toward a more vulnerable household financial situation.



Among the different age groups, Hawai'i residents age 55 and older were more likely than residents ages 25 to 44 to report a more financially stable household situation before the COVID-19 pandemic (enough savings for more than 1 year of expenses). During the pandemic, residents 55 and older experienced a decline in their savings (having enough savings for only 1 to 2 months, or for 3 months to 1 year, of expenses) but were still more financially stable than residents ages 18 to 54. Hawai'i residents ages 25 to 54 were more likely than residents age 55 and older to report that their household financial situation was somewhere between living paycheck to paycheck and not making ends meet (*Figure 4*).

Figure 4. Hawai'i residents 55 and older were more likely to report having enough savings to pay for more than one year of expenses.



Education

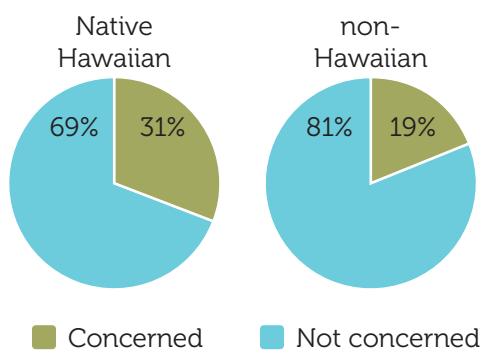
Native Hawaiians were more likely to voice concerns about their children's education and care during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Native Hawaiians reported concerns about their children falling behind in school during the COVID-19 pandemic. Forty percent (40%) of Native Hawaiians were concerned about their children falling behind in school, compared to 29% of non-Hawaiians. Among the different age groups for both Native Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians, 52% of respondents ages 35 to 44 were concerned about their children falling behind in school, compared to 40% of respondents ages 25 to 34 and ages 45 to 54.



Native Hawaiians were more likely to be concerned about providing care for children. Specifically, 31% of Native Hawaiians reported being concerned about providing care for children during the COVID-19 pandemic, compared to 19% of non-Hawaiians (*Figure 5*). It is important to note that not all survey participants had children. Because participants were not asked if they had dependents under age 18, these analyses reflect the concerns of the sample as a whole, regardless of household composition.

Figure 5. Native Hawaiians were more concerned about caring for children during the pandemic.

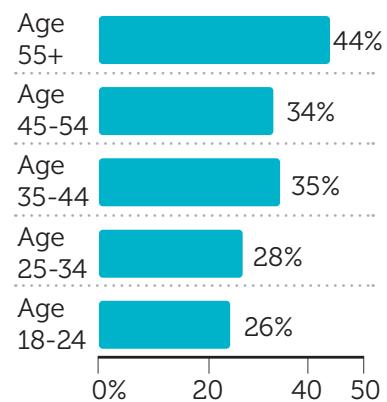


Digital Connectivity

Both Native Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians faced similar challenges related to digital connectivity.

Hawai‘i residents reported concerns about digital connectivity in their households. Both Native Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians were concerned about having enough internet-ready devices for household members to be online simultaneously, having devices that were easy to use for essential purposes such as school or work, and having internet speeds and quality that met their needs. About 64% of Native Hawaiians and 65% of non-Hawaiians reported challenges with household devices and adequate internet service. There were significant differences for Hawai‘i residents age 55 and older in terms of digital connectivity. Fourteen percent (14%) of residents ages 18 to 44, 7% of residents ages 44 to 54, and 4% of residents age 55 and older reported relying on public hot spots for internet access. The percentage of respondents who reported they would maintain (not downgrade or turn off) their internet service also varied across age groups: 27% of residents ages 18-34, 34% of those ages 35-54, and 44% of those age 55 and older (*Figure 6*). The survey results also showed that households with a reported annual income of \$65,000 or higher were 16 percentage points more likely to report having enough internet-ready devices for everyone to be online at the same time.

Figure 6. Older Hawai‘i residents were more likely to maintain their current internet subscription.



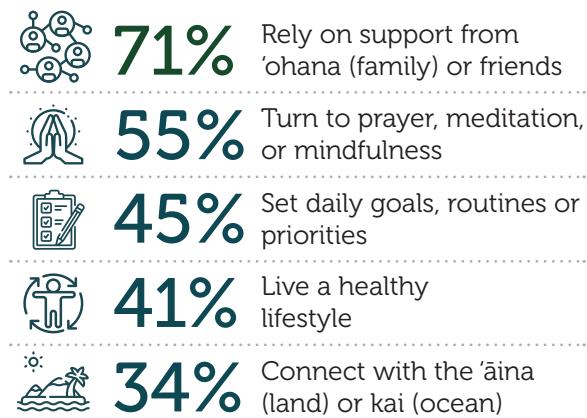
Coping Strategies

Native Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians reported differences in their strategies to coping with loss or other difficult circumstances.

Relying on 'ohana (family) or friends; turning to prayer, meditation, or mindfulness; and setting daily goals, routines, or priorities were the top three strategies most Native Hawaiians reported choosing to cope with loss or other difficult circumstances. In comparison to non-Hawaiians, Native Hawaiians more often chose prayer, meditation, and mindfulness as their preferred coping strategy (*Figure 7*). Non-Hawaiians, however, were more likely to choose a healthy lifestyle such as nutrition, exercise, or support from health professionals (51%) than Native Hawaiians.

Survey respondents experienced the COVID-19 pandemic in very unique and personal ways. For some, the pandemic provided an avenue for positive change in their lives.³ Some respondents found that the restriction on activities and increased time at home strengthened their relationships with their partners and children. They had more time together as an 'ohana and for activities around the house such as planting a garden together or engaging in art, writing, music, or poetry. One respondent shared, "*COVID has given our 'ohana the opportunity to spend quality time together—plant, play, laugh, cook, clean and learn together. Our wellbeing has been enhanced because of the reduction in busyness.*" Other respondents said that the pandemic helped them to slow down and look at what was important in their lives. For some, the pandemic affected their outlook on life and led them to feel more grateful for what they had. Some also had a heightened awareness of keeping themselves and others healthy.

Figure 7. Native Hawaiians primarily relied on 'ohana (family) or friends, as well as prayer, meditation, and mindfulness as coping strategies.



One respondent shared,
COVID has required those I'm closest to and myself to deal with the loss of access to what created wellbeing and joy in our lives on many fronts. It's forced us to find new sources or ways of connecting to places, people, and practices that nurture mauli ola [healing]. Along that path has been extremely tough times where doubt, frustration, and depression have prevailed—for a time. But that experience has required me to dig deeper to create my own happiness and to help others do so, too. And that need has taken me on a journey of spiritual, mental, and cultural growth. So I am hopeful that, overall, COVID will have prompted important and enduring changes for the better.

³ Thirteen percent (13%) of the 1,200 respondents who provided comments discussed positive changes brought about by the pandemic.

Conclusion

Results from the 'Imi Pono Hawai'i Wellbeing survey illustrate that Native Hawaiian respondents experienced some unique and some shared challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. While Native Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians listed physical health and mental and emotional wellbeing as their top concerns during the pandemic, Native Hawaiians were significantly more worried about losing their health insurance. Native Hawaiians were also more likely to fear being laid off from their jobs. Similarly, household finances were less secure among Native Hawaiians before and during the pandemic than among non-Hawaiians. These findings underscore the fact that Native Hawaiians continue to have the highest rates of poverty and underemployment in Hawai'i⁴ and the lack of a financial buffer to help weather crises. The pandemic exacerbated these existing inequities and challenges.

During the pandemic, access to childcare was an issue for Native Hawaiians more than for non-Hawaiians. As a population, Native Hawaiians tend to be younger than other racial/ethnic groups in Hawai'i, resulting in more families with small children. Regarding education, Native Hawaiians were significantly more likely than non-Hawaiians to express concerns about their children falling behind in school. An achievement gap between Native Hawaiian learners and their peers already existed before the pandemic, and it may grow larger as a result of the pandemic.⁵

Hawai'i schools pivoted from in-person learning to remote and hybrid delivery models. The survey found no significant differences between Native Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians regarding digital connectivity. Both groups struggled with adequate internet speeds and quality and with a sufficient number of devices. Results from a Hawai'i State Department of Education (2020) survey indicate that Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders are more likely than other racial/ethnic groups to report not having enough devices in the home and having challenges with school-issued devices.⁶

Native Hawaiians continue to demonstrate resilience in the face of tremendous adversity. At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted preexisting inequities among Native Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians. As noted, these survey results are a snapshot in time, and the effects of the pandemic on all aspects of wellbeing are likely to be felt for years to come. This is especially likely for vulnerable members of our communities, a category in which Native Hawaiians are overrepresented.



⁴ Kana'iaupuni, S. M., Kekahio, W. M., Duarte, K., & Ledward, B. C. (with Fox, S. M., & Caparoso, J. T.). (2021). Ka Huaka'i: Native Hawaiian educational assessment 2021. Kamehameha Schools. https://www.ksbe.edu/ka_huakai/

⁵ Kana'iaupuni et al. (2021).

⁶ Hawaii State Department of Education. (2020). Summary of insights and findings: HIDOE distance-learning surveys. <https://bit.ly/3f7Xncc>

Next Steps

Data from the 'Imi Pono Hawai'i Wellbeing Survey identifies unique challenges for Native Hawaiians. Findings also underscore the need for a systems approach to better understand challenges and opportunities presented by the COVID-19 pandemic and how they contribute to, and are affected by, other experiences. For example, in the wake of near-universal online learning, anxiety and depression spiked among youth. This led to renewed calls among educators to address the needs of the "whole child." At the same time, remote work was normalized and telehealth services were expanded. These conditions have contributed to a potential increase in access to health care and improvement in physical health, and mental and emotional wellbeing within families. These investments, in turn, may strengthen community resilience and create healthier learning environments for keiki (children).

With this in mind, the current and persistent impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Native Hawaiian families may be mitigated by the following actions:

- Prioritizing educational, financial, and employment resources for Native Hawaiian families.
- Supporting the needs of younger Native Hawaiian families to help keiki who may have fallen behind in their learning.
- Focusing on health-related resources and outreach for Native Hawaiians age 55 and older.
- Improving infrastructure for digital connectivity throughout Hawai'i and increasing availability of educational devices for Native Hawaiians.



Note.

The confidence intervals for the State and Honolulu County—including breakouts for Native Hawaiians within these areas—are five percent (5%) or less. Confidence intervals for other counties are higher; therefore findings for these counties should not be generalized beyond the survey sample.