

## Hawaii Ties Expansion of Local Food System to Community Health

Despite an abundance of fertile farmland and a 12-month growing season, Hawaii County imports 85% of its food. At the same time, food security, access to healthy foods, and obesity and obesity-related illnesses, such as diabetes and heart disease, are significant challenges for many of the County's residents. Hawaii County is home to the state's largest concentration of Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, who are known to have the shortest life expectancy (68 years) of any ethnic group in the United States. Currently, nearly one-quarter of the County's residents participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as Food Stamps).

In 2010, the County released a plan to revitalize the agriculture industry in Hawaii County as a path to economic development. And, in 2012, a health impact assessment (HIA) was conducted on the agricultural plan to determine how it might affect the health of local residents. The HIA found that expanding production of and access to locally grown food in Hawaii County could increase community and family food security and residents' access to healthy foods as well as strengthen the local economy. For example, the HIA found that replacing 10% of Hawaii state imports with local farm output could result in the creation of more than 2,300 jobs, \$188 million in sales, \$47 million in earnings, and \$6 million in state tax revenues, while also improving access to and affordability of more nutritious, farm-fresh foods for local families.

### Key Recommendations

Some of the key recommendations from the HIA, which was undertaken by the non-profit, Hawaii Island-based Kohala Center, with support from the Health Impact Project, include:

- Modify Hawaii State procurement practices to allow schools and other government institutions to purchase locally produced foods more easily;
- Promote agricultural careers, including farming and farm management, at the high school and college levels;
- Make the purchase of fresh, local food more convenient and affordable in rural areas; and
- Increase local food-processing capacity through public-private partnerships.

### Results to Date

The following outcomes have resulted from the HIA process:

- The Hawaii Department of Health's 2013 Physical Activity and Nutrition Plan includes recommendations to increase school garden capacity and agricultural training and nutritional education for teachers and the public.
- The Kohala Center obtained federal funds to assist rural farmers markets to participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly know as Food Stamps), significantly increasing low-income families' access to fresh food and augmenting small farmers' incomes.
- The University of Hawaii is developing six new farmer-training programs, and The Kohala Center obtained federal funding for a beginning farmer-training program.
- The Hawaii Department of Education's School Food Authority hired two new staff members to work on local farm-to-school procurement.



For more on this HIA, contact:

**Betsy Cole**

[cole@kohalacenter.org](mailto:cole@kohalacenter.org)

Deputy Director, The Kohala Center

[www.kohalacenter.org](http://www.kohalacenter.org)

Twitter: [Kohala\\_Center](https://twitter.com/Kohala_Center)

Facebook:

[www.facebook.com/TheKohalaCenter](https://www.facebook.com/TheKohalaCenter)

# New Opportunities to Improve Health

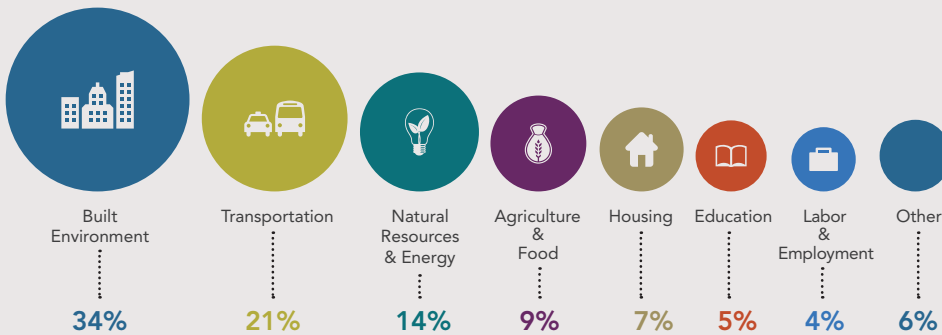
Preventable health problems are crippling the U.S. economy and its workers and their families. Heart disease and diabetes alone now account for more than 700,000 deaths in the U.S. annually and cost the nation more than \$650 billion in medical expenses, disability, missed work, and financial losses associated with premature death. For the first time in U.S. history, data suggest that today's children may live shorter lives than their parents.

Many of the most urgent health problems facing our nation—such as obesity, asthma, diabetes, heart disease, and injuries—are shaped by the conditions in which we live and work. There is a large and untapped opportunity to improve Americans' well-being and address skyrocketing medical costs by bringing health into the decisions that shape the world outside the doctor's office. For example, well-designed and maintained housing can help prevent asthma and serious falls. Transportation projects and land use plans can minimize the risk of traffic injuries and allow people to be more active by including safe routes for pedestrians. And educational policies that lead to academic success can have the unanticipated benefit of reducing the risk of many illnesses and their related medical costs by expanding opportunities for employment and increasing access to better housing and other amenities throughout a person's life.

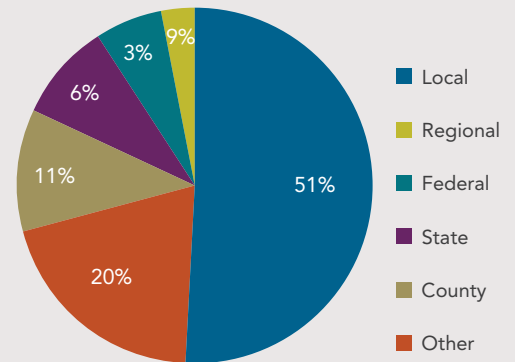
Considering health can help decision-makers leverage opportunities to improve wellness and avoid unintended consequences and associated costs. Health impact assessments, or HIAs, have proved to be an effective way to do that. HIAs bring together scientific data, public health expertise, and community input to inform decisions on proposed laws, regulations, projects, and plans in transportation, energy, education, economic policy, and other sectors.

## HIP-Supported Health Impact Assessments in Action Across the U.S.

In what sectors have HIAs been done?



HIAs are used to inform decisions at what levels?



### Health Impact Project: Advancing Smarter Policies for Healthier Communities

Launched in 2009, the Health Impact Project, a collaboration of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts, is a national initiative designed to bring health into decision-making through the use of HIAs. The project works with government agencies and policymakers to help them implement HIAs; partners with foundations to fund HIAs; provides training and technical assistance; conducts research and policy analysis to support the field; and convenes the National HIA Meeting. The project also partners with foundations to guide and support regional HIA initiatives and collaborates with government agencies and nonprofits around the United States to find practical ways to build health into decisions.

Contact the Health Impact Project:

**Aaron Wernham**  
[awernham@pewtrusts.org](mailto:awernham@pewtrusts.org)  
 Director, Health Impact Project  
[www.healthimpactproject.org](http://www.healthimpactproject.org)