



Hawai'i



This report draws not only on rich learning from the experiences of American Indians and Alaska Natives but also on wisdom from the Native Hawaiian community. While Native Hawaiians face distinct challenges, the key themes in the Commission's research and the content of its recommendations resonate with and reflect Native Hawaiian concerns, solutions, and aspirations.

Pursuant to its charge to include Native Hawaiians in its study, the Commission on Native Children held a regional hearing and conducted site visits in Hawai'i from February 13-17, 2023, hearing from nearly two dozen representatives of Hawaiian communities and organizations, engaging with young people, and learning about both the challenges and successes in creating resilience and wellbeing for Native Hawaiian children and youth.

These interactions reinforced the Commission's understanding that while the situation of Native Hawaiian children and youth is in many ways similar to that of American Indian and Alaska Native children, there are important distinctions that variously differentiate and amplify Native Hawaiians' needs. Three important differences concern the political history of Hawai'i, the ongoing presence of the military in Hawai'i, and the significant revival of Native Hawaiian language, culture, and knowledges.

For most of the 19th century (1810-1893), European powers, the United States, and other world nations recognized the Kingdom of Hawai'i as an independent nation-state located in the Hawaiian Islands. In 1893, a coup instigated by American business interests—and supported by U.S. military and diplomatic personnel—deposed Queen Lili'uokalani, ending the monarchy. While the nation briefly organized as a republic, the United States annexed the islands in 1898 and admitted Hawai'i to the union as a state in 1959. In 1993, U.S. Public Law 103-150 (the "Apology Resolution") acknowledged that "the Native Hawaiian people never directly relinquished to the United States their claims to their inherent sovereignty as a people over their national lands, either through the Kingdom of Hawai'i or through a plebiscite or referendum."²² The forced abdication of their Queen, the loss of territorial sovereignty, and the United States' seizure of the islands were oft-cited events during the Commission's hearings in Honolulu, and witnesses referred to these events as causes of historical and intergenerational trauma that contribute to the challenges facing Native Hawaiian children and youth today.

Certainly, business interests were key drivers of the United States' decision to annex Hawai'i; the islands' geopolitical

importance is another. From the mid-1800s onward, corporate sugar and fruit plantations transformed Hawai'i's agriculture, ecology, and economy. Tourism followed in the 1900s, creating further distortionary effects on local markets. In parallel, based on the claim that Hawai'i offered a strategic location from which the United States could protect the Asia-Pacific region, the U.S. military developed a significant presence in Hawai'i. By 2000, the military controlled nearly a quarter of the island of O'ahu,²³ and by 2021, 10% of the Hawaiian population owed its presence in the state to the U.S. military.²⁴

Combined, plantations, tourism, and the military have alienated Native Hawaiians from significant cultural and subsistence resources, both through direct takings of lands and waters and through contamination from toxic waste, unexploded ordinance, and radiation. Further displacement occurs through the lack of affordable housing and the thin economy outside the tourism and military sectors. These factors contribute to high rates of dropout and homeless youth and to brain drain, as individuals and families move to the continental United States in search of economic security. Witnesses at the Hawai'i hearing also spoke to the military's contribution to criminal activity, including human trafficking and sexual abuse of Native Hawaiian children and young adults.

On the other side of the coin, Hawai'i also is an epicenter of cultural resurgence, renewal, and revitalization. From the growing number of language nests and immersion schools to the reclamation of lands for traditional crops and the renaissance of Polynesian voyaging traditions, Hawaiian knowledges and practices have become ascendant among many contemporary island residents. In particular, implementation of Hawaiian language programs at every academic level up to the Ph.D. has demonstrated the possibilities for bilingual education in Native languages. This resurgence affects the daily life of Hawaiians and

22 | United States Congress, (1993), Joint Resolution to Acknowledge the 100th Anniversary of the Overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawai'i, Public Law No. 103-150, 107 Stat. 1510, http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=103_cong_bills&docid=f:sj19enr.txt.pdf.

23 | K. Kajihira, (2010), Nation under the gun: Militarism and resistance in Hawai'i, *Cultural Survival*, 24, Spring, 28-33. <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/nation-under-gun-militarism-and-resistance-hawaii>.

24 | C. Story, (2021, July 7), Pearl Harbor naval shipyard: An economic pillar for Hawai'i, Defense Visual Information Distribution Service website, <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/400470/pearl-harbor-naval-shipyard-economic-pillar-hawai'i>.

non-Indigenous residents alike and has led to many hopeful improvements in outcomes for Native Hawaiian children.²⁵

The Commission was both impressed and moved by what it learned and committed to making recommendations that have the potential to create transformative change for Native Hawaiians; in fact, the Hawaiian regional hearing provided evidence of many excellent and successful models that deserve to be scaled across Native communities, especially related to education, language revitalization, and juvenile justice alternatives. Therefore, the Commission's recommendations are intended to apply not only to American Indians and Alaska Natives and to their Tribes and Tribal Organizations but also to Native Hawaiians and their organizing entities—unless the wording of a recommendation specifically limits it to Tribes.

By way of context, the Commission includes here the proposals made by witnesses at the regional hearing. They offer additional information, inspiration, and guidance to policymakers, funders, and advocates dedicated to the welfare of Native Hawaiian children. Notably, there is significant alignment between the proposals made by witnesses in Hawai'i and the Commission's recommendations.

Child Welfare

- Implement high fidelity wraparound programs that provide comprehensive support to families and emphasize the importance of supportive relationships and cultural connections
- Encourage support from fathers or father figures as allies, focusing on safety, trust, peer support, collaboration, and giving voice and choice to parents
- Fund culturally based programs and support authentic voices of children and young people in case planning and decisionmaking
- Promote permanency for children, prioritizing relational and cultural permanency and listening to individuals with lived experience

25 | See, for example, S. M. Kana'iaupuni, B. Ledward, 'U. Jensen, (2010), *Culture-based education and its relationship to student outcomes*, Kamehameha Schools Research and Evaluation Division, https://www.ksbe.edu/assets/research/collection/10_0117_kanaiaupuni.pdf; S. M. Kana'iaupuni, W. M. Kekahio, K. Duarte, & B. C. Ledward (with S. M. Fox & J. T. Caparoso), (2021), *Ka Huaka'i: 2021 Native Hawaiian Educational Assessment*, Kamehameha Publishing, <https://www.ksbe.edu/ka-huakai>.

Juvenile Justice

- Address the vulnerabilities of youth through prevention, safe homes, and support systems that preserve identity and provide long-term affordable housing
- Transform juvenile detention to offer workforce training, high school classes, and land connections (through farming, for example)
- Provide nurturing trauma-informed connections to ensure ongoing guidance and emotional support for individuals affected by trafficking

Education and Early Childhood

- Align Native language initiatives with Federal language revitalization programs, such as the White House's 10-year language revitalization initiative
- Incentivize language learning by allowing scores in non-English languages to substitute for English in Federal competitive grants and require private universities receiving Federal grants to provide access to Native American students to study ancestral languages
- Implement mandatory training programs for educators that focus on cultural competence, cultural responsiveness, emotional and social learning, and the recognition of Native Hawaiian speakers and knowledge holders
- Ensure that funding and opportunities are available for experts and elders without formal degrees to share their expertise and knowledge with students
- Invest in facilities that serve as hubs for education, allowing youth to engage with practitioners and programs dedicated to land, language, and cultural traditions
- Allocate funding and resources to community organizations that facilitate programs focused on connecting youth with land, language, and cultural traditions
- Develop initiatives to recruit, train, and retain teachers who are knowledgeable about the cultural history and living practices of the community

Physical and Mental Health

- Allocate resources to expand school-based health services, including dental, mental, and physical health care, to address the needs of children and families who may have limited access to health care due to time constraints and economic factors
- Invest in training programs that equip mental health practitioners such as in-school counselors with cultural competency, enabling them to better understand and connect with the community they serve
- Develop comprehensive population-based interventions that leverage education and culturally based practices to promote overall health and wellbeing
- Establish funding streams and partnerships to support community-specific grassroots programs and workforce development initiatives that prioritize training Hawaiian health professionals and integrating traditional healing practices
- Ensure that Native Hawaiian health care receives funding equivalent to state and Tribal programs to address unique health challenges and promote equitable access to quality health care services

Data and Evaluation

- Ground the return to thriving and abundance for Native Hawaiians in traditional strengths and develop new knowledge about wellbeing collaboratively with Hawaiian-serving organizations
- Expand the definition of “evidence-based practice” to include cultural, community-based early intervention strategies (practice-based evidence) and ensure disaggregated data for accurate assessment and funding allocation.
- Utilize cultural measures of success, such as a sense of place, belonging, meaning, and purpose

Cross Systems

- Focus on prevention strategies, early childhood education, family strengthening, and youth intervention services
- Fund program innovations rooted in culture and ancestral knowledge and mandate cross-system data sharing to increase equity for BIPOC communities
- Promote Indigenous and community-based leadership, partnerships, and solutions
- Emphasize systems innovation as a restoration of Hawaiian culture and ancestral sciences, reframing work from decolonization to Indigenization, and re-establishing agency through metrics-based models