In the face of escalating healthcare costs and a deteriorating state of well-being, our country and our state find themselves grappling with a healthcare crisis, unlike any other developed nation. The US is the only first-world country that spends more on healthcare than safety net services. This disparity has dire consequences as preventable diseases claim more American lives, chronic disease and obesity rates soar, healthcare utilization declines, and maternal and infant mortality rates reach alarming levels. Compounding these issues is the presence of profound health inequities within specific populations.

Within the unique context of Hawai’i, residents face numerous health-related challenges, including limited access to reproductive healthcare, inadequate affordable housing options, mental health concerns, and limited food accessibility. Additionally, the local healthcare system has been severely impacted by the departure of healthcare providers, exacerbating the shortage caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This shortage disproportionately affects neighbor islands and rural communities on O’ahu. While Hawai’i cannot single-handedly reverse national trends, we do have the opportunity to reshape the health trajectory here by implementing thoughtful programs and policies and making substantial investments in public health and social services.

With a budget surplus of nearly $1.7 billion, legislators had an opportunity to make meaningful statewide changes and substantial investments in people and safety net services. This surplus could have provided the impetus to enact transformative policies, including the establishment and support of workforce pipelines, initiatives to retain skilled labor through comprehensive support and fair compensation, the creation of affordable housing options, implementation of paid family leave policies, and the promotion of accessible and affordable early childhood education. It is imperative to prioritize supporting and maintaining good health rather than simply attempting to reverse the declining health conditions of individuals.
Intersection of Health and Politics

Impact of Midterm Elections
Nationally, the 2023 midterm elections were better than expected for Democrats. Following a brutal election season where key social and health issues were of particular interest to both parties, the Democrats control the Senate and the Republicans control the House, with narrow majorities in both chambers.

Federal Health Policy
Following a global pandemic and recent Supreme Court decisions, public health and healthcare were focal areas of the election and remain a concern.

Women’s Health Protection Act
In 2022, the US Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade, taking away the constitutional right to an abortion, resulting in a public health crisis that left millions of people without access to comprehensive reproductive healthcare in their communities. Since the Court’s decision, 17 states have criminalized abortion, and several states have enacted partial bans. To address this health crisis, Congress reintroduced federal legislation to re-establish a nationwide right to abortion. If passed, the Women’s Health Protection Act (WHPA) will create a new right for providers to provide—and their patients to receive—abortion care throughout the US.
**Gun Violence**
Between January 1 and June 21, 2023, over 20,000 people died from gun violence in the US. According to the Gun Violence Archive, 841 were children under the age of 17. The number of victims grows daily, and Congress has failed to pass any meaningful policies.

In June 2022, the Supreme Court ruled that Americans have the right to carry guns publicly for self-defense. This decision heavily impacts states with strict gun laws, including New York, California, Hawai‘i, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Rhode Island. These states are faced with major changes to their firearm laws as mass shootings are occurring at a rapid pace nationally.

**COVID-19 Public Health Emergency Ends**
The Public Health Emergency (PHE), which was put in place for COVID-19, ended on May 11, 2023. During the PHE, several flexibilities were allowed to support public health, such as an increasing reimbursement rate for providers of Medicaid and Medicare, increasing access to telehealth, and providing stable medical coverage for Medicaid enrollees, regardless of finances or employment status. These flexibilities ended with the expiration of the PHE. The collective impact of this loss remains to be seen, but it could result in millions of Americans losing health coverage, access to providers via telehealth, and a large decrease in reimbursements to healthcare providers. These losses certainly will weaken an already fragile system.

**Intersection of Health and Politics**
2023 Legislative Recap

Federal Budget Highlights (FY 2023)
To address the country’s critical needs, the federal budget included the following:
• Money for affordable housing.
• Building a resilient food supply chain.
• Advancing equity and environmental justice.
• Supporting the nutrition safety net.
• Protecting communities and ecosystems from wildfires.
• Connecting Americans to high-speed and affordable Internet.

Other areas that the federal budget addresses are increasing access to behavioral health and crisis services, expanding reproductive and preventative health services to low-income individuals, increasing access to affordable early childhood services, and increasing programs to support survivors of domestic and gender-based violence.

National Debt Ceiling Compromise
Days before the US would default on its debts, President Joe Biden signed into law the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023. He tweeted the agreement “...prevents a first-ever default while reducing the deficit, safeguarding Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid, and fulfilling our sacred obligation to our veterans.”

The legislation also expands SNAP work requirements for those ages 50-54 and removes these requirements for veterans, those experiencing homelessness, and those ages 18-24 who aged out of foster care. Further, it ends the student loan repayment freeze. The full impacts of the compromises made in this bill remain to be seen.

2023 Farm Bill
The 2023 Farm Bill has various opportunities to increase access to healthy food, support rural communities, protect natural resources, and address climate change. This bill is being considered in Congress, and negotiations continue.
Hawai‘i Elections

The 2022 election brought in new leadership to Hawai‘i’s Executive Branch, with Governor Josh Green, MD, and Lieutenant Governor Sylvia Luke. Governor Green has championed public health issues through policy proposals to support the social safety net during his time as a Senator. Lieutenant Governor Luke, who served in the House of Representatives for 24 years, with ten of those years as the powerful House Finance Chair, has supported policies to increase access to early child education.

Following the census, Hawai‘i redistricted in 2022, a process that altered district lines and placed all 76 House and Senate seats up for re-election.

With the number of lawmakers retiring or leaving their current seats to pursue higher office, the 2022 election cycle resulted in 18 new members in the House and six new members in the Senate, one of the largest cohorts of new members to the legislature.
The new administration brought changes in leadership for most of the 17 state departments, several of which affect health. Once nominated by the governor, cabinet members are subject to Senate confirmation hearings before being officially appointed.

Governor Green also selected two legislators, Representatives Ryan Yamane and James Kunane Tokioka, for administrative positions, which resulted in the appointment of two new representatives, Representatives Luke Evslin and Trish La Chica.
Hawaiʻi Legislative Overview

Key New Legislative Chairs

Sen. Jarrett Keohokalole
Senate Commerce & Consumer Protection

Sen. Joy San Buenaventura
Senate Health & Human Services

Rep. Della Au Belatti
House Health & Homelessness

Rep. Mark M. Nakashima
House Consumer Protection & Commerce

Rep. David Tarnas
House Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs

House Finance
While the Capitol re-opened to the public in March 2022, this was the first in-person opening day since 2020. Many people returned to hearings in-person, with the option for virtual participation still available. This allowed continued access for neighbor island constituents and advocates.

Working To Restore Government Trust
The Commission to Improve Standards of Conduct was created from House Resolution 9 (2022) in response to the corruption cases involving former Senator Kalani English and former Representative Ty Cullen. The Commission prepared a report to the Legislature, which included 31 proposed policies to address various conduct issues related to government. Proposals to increase transparency and accountability included requiring legislative testimony to be received and available for public view at least 24 hours before a hearing; requiring legislative leaders to explain why measures were not scheduled for hearings; establishing an Office of the Public Advocate and codifying a “bill of rights” for the public concerning the legislative process; and greater disclosure of the relationships between legislators and lobbyists. The proposed policies were met with varied success, with three bills sent to the governor. Dozens of “sunshine” bills were also introduced to address financial concerns about campaigns and fundraising, intended to restore public trust in government.
Hawai‘i’s Budget for Health

In every odd year, Hawai‘i’s legislature approves a biennial budget for the upcoming two fiscal years to support operations, capital improvements and one-time spending for the executive and judiciary branches, and an operating subsidy for the Office of Hawaiian Affairs. The legislature’s budget is appropriated one year at a time.

Fiscal Year 2024 Budget
Since so much can change in the budget for the second year of the biennium, it is prudent to focus on just fiscal year 2024 (FY24), which starts on July 1, 2023 and ends on June 30, 2024. Overall, spending approved for next year amounts to $23.4 billion, a decrease of nearly $500 million.

What’s up and what’s down?
• The ongoing operating budgets for the executive, judiciary, and legislative branches are up by $2.5 billion in FY24, a hefty 15 percent increase.
• One-time appropriations, which hit a high of $2.7 billion last year, are down by $2 billion.
• Funding for capital improvements projects (CIP) decreased from $3.9 billion to just under $3 billion.

Breakdown of FY24 State Spending

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<tr>
<td>OFFICE OF HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS</td>
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<td>▼ $67 million from FY23</td>
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Hawaiʻi’s Budget for Health

FY24 Budget for Health and Wellness
The total FY24 budget investment in health and wellness – operating budgets, one-time appropriations, and CIP - totals $7.9 billion. The investment in health accounts for one third of all spending authorized for FY24. The state budget’s investment in health is heavily weighted toward health coverage. Public health and prevention accounts for the smallest segment.

FY24 Investments in Health by Category - Total $7.9 Billion ($Millions)

- Health Coverage: $4,609 M
- Care, Education, Research: $443 M
- Related Human Services: $333 M
- Behavioral Health: $406 M
- Environmental Health: $974 M
- Public Health & Prevention: $1,146 M
Hawaiʻi’s Budget for Health

FY24 Investment in Health

Health Coverage
The state’s budget for health insurance coverage is $4.6 billion. This year the budget for Med-QUEST, Hawaiʻi’s Medicaid program, and nursing home and hospital sustainability totals $3.4 billion, two-thirds of which comes from the federal government. The remainder pays for insurance premiums for active public workers and retirees accounts. Med-QUEST’s growth this year includes $30 million added to increase reimbursement rates for providers.

Care, Education and Research
Includes funding for Hawaiʻi Health Systems Corporation (HHSC), the Maui Health System, subsidies to private hospitals, emergency medical services, healthcare in prisons, and the University of Hawaiʻi Cancer Center and John A. Burns School of Medicine. This year’s budget added $180 million for care, education and research, with $130 million of that amount going to HHSC operations and CIP.

Human Services Essential to Health
Good health depends on investments beyond those directly related to public health, care, and coverage. Any program that promotes the equity and the social and economic well-being of Hawaiʻi’s residents contributes to better health. This category includes Department of Human Services programs that support housing, food, family safety and income security. Funding increased by 10 percent in this category this year led by an additional $231 million for housing, rent and assistance for people experiencing homelessness. Child Protective Services’ budget also got an additional $14 million.
Hawai‘i’s Budget for Health

Behavioral Health
Funds programs responsible for providing mental health and alcohol and substance abuse services for adults and children/adolescents, as well as forensic mental healthcare and services for people with developmental disabilities. This year’s budget increased for outpatient mental health services for children and adults by more than $10 million and made a $3.5 million appropriation for mobile care for child and adolescent mental health.

Environmental Health
Programs that control water and air pollution and address solid waste and litter. DOH also protects against foodborne illnesses and unsanitary conditions. This year’s operating budget increased by $4 million. Environmental Health is largely supported by revolving funds (69 percent of the total), which originate from federal capitalization grants that are loaned out and returned with interest for county and private wastewater project construction.

Public Health and Prevention
Funds core programs in the Department of Health, including public health nursing, maternal and child health, disease prevention, the state laboratory, and regulatory functions. Added to this category are one-time appropriations for public campaigns addressing Alzheimer’s Disease, fetal alcohol syndrome, and Medicare fraud, amounting to $2 million.
An Unusual Budget
The executive branch budget passed by the 2023 legislature (HB 300) was highly unusual in several ways.

First, it exceeded the budget ceiling for the upcoming year by more than $1 billion. The budget ceiling is a provision in the state Constitution that applies to state general fund appropriations. The ceiling is intended to curb excessive spending by linking increases in the budget to overall state economic growth. The budget ceiling has been breached a number of times over the years, but not by so much and probably not based on such a vague reason as “... appropriations made in this Act are necessary to serve the public interest...”

It should be noted that the budget also allocates $500 million to the rainy day fund in each year of the biennium. The FY24 rainy day allocation amounts to nearly half of the ceiling busting excess.

A second peculiarity of the budget passed this year is that it allows the governor to move $200 million in general funds to any government program. This amount exceeds the total general fund appropriations for 11 of the state’s 17 departments.

The conference committee that approved the budget noted that it was designed to meet a number of state priorities, several of which directly affect health and wellness. The budget for the biennium:

- Appropriated more than $135 million for behavioral healthcare, the state Loan Repayment Program for healthcare professionals, EMS services, and reimbursement rate for Med-QUEST providers.
- Provided nearly $500 million for rent and housing programs and $85 million for services to help people at-risk for or experiencing homelessness.
- Allocated more than $50 million to bolster efforts to expand quality affordable early education.
One major legislative misstep was failing to approve an inflation adjustment for nonprofit service providers that contract with the state Department of Health and Department of Human Services. Such an addition is needed to adequately fund nonprofits in the health and human service sector, which the state relies on to provide essential services to communities across Hawai‘i. The Senate added $48 million for this need in its version of the budget, but it was eliminated in the final budget.

**Tax Expenditures**

When talking about the state’s investment in health and wellness, it is easy to overlook tax expenditures. These do not show up in the budget, but they reduce tax revenues that support the budget by providing deductions and credits to individual and corporate taxpayers. One example is the passage of HB 954, which:

- Doubled the state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), giving eligible working families 40 percent of the federal EITC;
- Doubled the amount of the state Refundable Food/Excise Tax Credit up to $220 per taxpayer exemption; and
- Increased the maximum household income for eligibility for the food tax credit by $10,000 to address wage inflation.
Hawai‘i’s Budget for Health

Grants-in-Aid
Grants-in-aid (GIAs) are awarded to local nonprofits to serve a variety of purposes. This year’s legislative awards for GIAs amounted to $40 million, split equally between operating and CIP needs.

$40 Million in GIAs Awarded in 2023
Spending vs. Budget
In addition to considering how much the state budgets for health and wellness, we should explore the amount it actually spends. This varies considerably by program. Overall, 87 percent of what was budgeted for health and wellness was spent between fiscal years 2016 and 2022. In terms of dollars, that gap amounted to more than $3 billion.

The biggest difference between budget and spending is for human services, which receives the highest proportion of funding from federal grants. Most of the gap is due to federal and state fiscal year differences and the tendency to inflate estimates for federal grants. These high estimates ensure that whatever amounts are finally awarded to state programs can be used, since only amounts authorized in the budget can be spent.

The budget establishes the maximum that can be spent by public programs, but actual amounts spent are almost always less. Overall, spending is billions of dollars less than budgeted.

Percentage of Budgets Actually Spent
FY16-22
Bills pending adjournment of a regular session in an odd-numbered year will automatically carry over with the same bill number and status for consideration in the next regular session.
How Health Bills* Fared at the Legislature

- **No Hearing**: 54%
- **Heard & Failed 1st Lateral**: 9%
- **Failed 1st Crossover**: 11%
- **Failed 2nd Crossover**: 11%
- **Died in Conference**: 7%
- **Passed Legislature**: 8%

No Hearing
These bills were introduced but were not scheduled for a committee hearing.

Heard & Failed 1st Lateral
Bills were heard, but failed to advance to its final committee in the originating chamber.

Failed 1st Crossover
Bills did not cross over to opposite chamber.

Failed 2nd Crossover
Bill failed to return to originating chamber.

Died in Conference
Chambers could not come to agreement on a final version.

Passed Legislature
Submitted to the Governor for approval.

*Only includes bills referred to the House Health and Homelessness and/or Senate Health and Human Services Committee(s).
Major Bills: Economic Justice & Family Stability

TAX CREDITS
As people continue to struggle because of low wages and the rapidly increasing cost of living in Hawai‘i, the Legislature considered several bills to help people cover their basic needs.

HB 1049 (FAILED) would have provided a variety of ways to address the rising cost of living in Hawai‘i through tax credits. However, HB 954 (PASSED) doubles the maximum earned income tax credit to 40% of the federal credit. It also enhances the food excise tax credit by increasing eligibility and doubling the value of the credit. This policy will technically increase the child and dependent care tax credit to $10,000 for one child and $20,000 for two or more children, however due to credit calculation processes, very few families will qualify for increased tax credit amounts. This robust policy will support many in need of financial support. HB 233 (FAILED) would have established a refundable child tax credit of up to $1,000 per child, depending on their age, for qualifying taxpayers.

PAID SICK DAYS AND FAMILY LEAVE
Through the pandemic, the need for paid sick leave became more evident. HB 1202 (FAILED) would have required employers to provide employees with a minimum amount of paid sick leave as well as supplemental sick leave under certain public health emergency conditions.

Several measures attempted to provide Hawai‘i workers with paid family leave and time to care for family members. SB 360 (FAILED) would have created a family leave insurance program and extended family leave to 16 weeks for those who qualified. HB 490 (FAILED) would have provided employed individuals with up to eight weeks of paid family leave for a new child or to care for a family member with a serious health condition. An additional eight weeks of family leave would have been available to those who qualify after the birth of a child who is required to stay in the neonatal intensive care unit through HB 1409 (FAILED).
Keiki Health
Early childhood education sets children up for continued academic success, however Hawai‘i is facing workforce shortage issues similar to those seen across the country. **HB 547 (FAILED)** would have established a pilot program to raise wages for these professionals to encourage workforce growth and retention.

**SB 239 (PASSED)** ensures keiki have access to accredited child care programs by establishing a program to pay for accreditation costs.

To support the well-being of keiki in the child welfare system, **SB 295 (PASSED)** creates and funds the Mālama ‘Ohana Working Group to identify challenges and provide ways to improve the system. **HB 581 (PASSED)** requires those who evaluate for custody decisions receive at least five hours of training about domestic violence every three years.

Children and adolescents are experiencing a behavioral health crisis. **HB 948 (PASSED)** will support at-risk youth through the development of a crisis mobile outreach team, which will serve youth in their communities.

Every year about 5,000 people, majority children, in Hawai‘i need to go to an emergency room because of an asthma episode. **HB 1448 (FAILED)** would have increased accessibility to bronchodilators (inhalers) for students having an asthma attack to decrease the need for an emergency room visit.
Major Bills: Housing

Kūpuna who rely on Social Security and Supplemental Social Security income face significant challenges, including having to make difficult decisions between paying rent and purchasing food and medicine. Unfortunately, the lifting of pandemic eviction moratoriums may have contributed to a rise in eviction and homelessness among our kūpuna. **SB 898 (PASSED)** extends the state rent supplement program to qualifying individuals ages 62 and older.

**HB 1397 (PASSED)** will increase and maintain supportive housing opportunities for chronically homeless individuals and those with special needs. Support to help provide affordable housing for local individuals and families **HB 1244 (FAILED)** and **SB 678 (FAILED)**. These bills would have increased the conveyance tax to help fund affordable housing and fund homeless services, which are both important policies to address the ever growing need for affordable and accessible housing for residents.

One of the ways the state has been working to support those in need of housing and other social services is through ‘Ohana Zones. These statewide communities provide both transitional housing and wrap around social services. ‘Ohana Zones are unique because the services are all in one location, making them more accessible to those who need them. The pilot program was created and funded through Act 209 (2018) & Act 128 (2019). This program has been successful in helping to transition people into permanent housing and ensuring they are accessing a variety of social safety net services.

**SB 1442 (FAILED)** would have provided an additional $15 million to extend the program through 2026, funded one position to administer ‘Ohana Zones capital improvement funds, and made ‘Ohana Zones projects eligible for general excise tax exemptions. Although the bill did not pass, the legislature still appropriated $15 million through the budget bill, **HB 300 (PASSED)**.
Major Bills: Access to Healthcare

In 2022, the state needed more than 750 full-time physicians and almost 4,000 non-physician, patient-facing healthcare workers such as nurses, technicians, and patient service representatives to serve the demand. As Hawai‘i continues to lose healthcare professionals for a variety of reasons, it becomes more difficult for patients to get access to or receive timely care.

There were efforts to streamline the process for healthcare providers to obtain a Hawai‘i license by creating interstate licensing compacts. The bill that would create this compact for physicians, SB 674 (PASSED), was successful, while a similar effort for nurses, SB 670 (FAILED), did not pass.

Other efforts focused on fairly reimbursing providers for their services. Currently, Medicaid reimburses healthcare providers at 60% of the Medicare rate. This low reimbursement rate results in the loss of Medicaid providers because they are unable to maintain operations at these rates. SB 397 (FAILED) would have increased the Medicaid reimbursement rates to match Medicare, resulting in more healthcare providers being able to accept Medicaid patients, improving provider retention, and increasing access to care for Medicaid beneficiaries. By creating a pathway for reimbursement of services, HB 1300 (FAILED) would have been a step to increase the availability of marriage and family therapists, mental health counselors, and psychologists.

Oral Health
To increase access to oral health practitioners, SB 162 (PASSED) allows qualified graduates of accredited Canadian dental schools to apply for service licenses to practice in specific settings, including community health centers. These changes will add capacity to serve vulnerable populations, helping to reduce health disparities. HB 617 (FAILED) would have established an oral health task force to identify gaps in care and make recommendations to improve the state’s oral health infrastructure.
Reproductive Healthcare
In the midst of a national crisis related to reproductive healthcare access, Hawai‘i took action through SB 1 (PASSED), which reinforces Hawai‘i’s policy to protect an individual’s reproductive autonomy and healthcare providers who performs abortion services. This bill codifies that Hawai‘i will not interfere with a person’s right to choose appropriate reproductive healthcare and protects healthcare professionals who perform abortions and provide aftercare. It further protects patients by prohibiting the release of information about their healthcare and increases access to care by allowing physician assistants to perform abortions, which they are licensed to do.
NO FIREARMS ALLOWED ON THIS PROPERTY
Major Bills: Public Safety

Firearms
Because of the landmark ruling by the Supreme Court to allow people to carry firearms on their person in public, Hawai‘i took steps to protect residents.

SB 1230 (PASSED) defines areas of sensitivity, including schools, places of worship, and government buildings, where individuals would be prohibited from bringing a weapon. The bill also includes safety measures such as barring people from carrying a weapon while intoxicated and requiring annual reports on carry licenses from the Department of the Attorney General.

Law Enforcement
SB 151 (PASSED) will ensure that the public can easily access the use of force policies used by entities that employ law enforcement officers. In addition, this bill requires law enforcement officers to report the use of excessive force by another law enforcement officer.

Correctional System Oversight
Incarcerated women experience gaps in the programming offered to them. HB 1131 (FAILED) would have created an oversight commission, tasked to identify these gaps and recommend policies to the Legislature to help close these gaps.
Major Bills: Environmental Health

Climate Change
Like many places, Hawai’i is susceptible to impacts from climate change. Hawai’i has been at the forefront of renewable energy initiatives and has established renewable energy goals to reduce the harmful effects of burning fossil fuels.

SB 506 (FAILED) would have required warning labels at self-service pumping stations to educate consumers on the negative impacts of fossil fuels, raise awareness about individual behavior’s impact on the climate, environment, and public health, and safeguard consumers. HB 441 (FAILED) would have appropriated funds to develop a database on social vulnerability to climate change.

Red Hill Water Contamination
The aftermath of the Red Hill fuel spill continues to impact our communities and environment.

HB 1511 (FAILED) would have provided money to be used in partnership with the City and County of Honolulu to install monitoring wells and collect data on the condition of the groundwater, as well as begin the construction process of a well to serve metropolitan O‘ahu.

In addition, HB 319 (FAILED) would have established the Red Hill water contamination health impacts program within the Department of Health to track the long-term impacts of the 2021 petroleum leak.
Major Bills: Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs

Alcohol
In 2019 and 2020, Hawai‘i respectively ranked 7th and 18th in the nation for alcohol-impaired fatalities on our roadways. To create safer roads, SB 160 (FAILED) lowered the legal limit for blood alcohol concentration (BAC) from 0.08 to 0.05. This change is meant to deter driving after drinking, not to increase arrests for driving under the influence.

Both the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and American Public Health Association have recommended that communities restrict alcohol availability, including delivery and takeout, to reduce alcohol-related harms and violence in communities. Despite these recommendations from health agencies, HB 16 (PASSED) will create a new statute to allow takeout and delivery of alcoholic beverages. HB 647 (FAILED) would have reduced the state excise tax on seltzer alcoholic beverages by 67%.

Tobacco Prevention and Control
There were a number of tobacco policies introduced this year. To prevent teen use and initiation of tobacco, HB 551 (FAILED) would have ended the sale of all flavored tobacco, including menthol. SB 975 (PASSED) is a comprehensive regulation bill that will tax e-cigarettes at the same rate as other tobacco products, address online e-cigarette sales, and apply the same permitting and licensure structure to e-cigarettes that exist for other tobacco products. This comprehensive approach will encourage adults to quit and stop youth from initiating use.

Historically, counties have passed policies to reduce smoking and the impacts of secondhand smoke. Hawai‘i County was the fourth jurisdiction in the nation to raise the age to purchase tobacco products to 21. However, in 2018, the Legislature passed a measure that removed the county’s ability to regulate tobacco sales. In an attempt to restore this ability back to the counties, SB 1447 (FAILED) was introduced.
Overdose Prevention
Over the past five years, fatal fentanyl overdoses increased 400% in Hawai‘i. Communities continue to discuss ways to address this issue. Some believe opioid antagonists such as naloxone should be more readily available in order to immediately administer to a person who has overdosed. **SB 665 (FAILED)** would have made naloxone available in all Department of Education classrooms.

Another way to address this issue would be to know which drugs fentanyl has been added to. **SB 671 (PASSED)** excludes fentanyl testing strips from the definition of drug paraphernalia in the uniform Controlled Substances Act. This allows people to test a street drug to know if it contains fentanyl, which could quickly and unexpectedly kill an unsuspecting individual.

Cannabis
Several measures were introduced to legalize adult use of recreational cannabis. Regulatory oversight and recreational possession would have been established through **SB 375 (FAILED)** and **HB 1216 (FAILED)**. **HB 237 (FAILED)** and **HB 1425 (FAILED)** would have legalized, regulated, and taxed recreational cannabis for adults. There are strong proponents on both sides of the issue.
Major Bills: Nutrition & Physical Activity

Food Security & Access
In the aftermath of the pandemic, many are still in need of food, but accessing food has become more difficult with dwindling supplies in food banks as they face increasing demands and rising costs.

To encourage donations to food banks, **HB 619 (FAILED)** would have provided tax incentives to Hawai‘i farmers who donate to food banks. Excess crops would have helped to feed the hungry and local farmers would have been supported financially. To further support food banks, **HB 314 (FAILED)** would have established state funding support for Hawai‘i’s food banks, similar to funding structures found nationally.

A Hawai‘i farm to food bank program **SB 430 (FAILED)** would have supported the distribution of locally-grown produce to food banks, increasing access to fresh, healthy food for those in need.

Current SNAP benefits are not meeting the needs of Hawai‘i’s low-income residents. **HB 1248 (FAILED)** would have secured state funding for DA BUX, a SNAP incentive program which doubles the purchasing power of a SNAP dollar when used to purchase local produce. **HB 740 (FAILED)** would have ensured that more families have access to nutritious food by creating a support structure to maintain food access as SNAP benefits end. Many people continue to feel the impact of the pandemic and need continued support with food access.

Food security is dependent on a complex system of relationships. **HB 308 (FAILED)** would have brought together a diverse group of stakeholders to identify food system weaknesses and to identify policies and practices to ensure a resilient Hawai‘i food system.
Major Bills: Nutrition & Physical Activity

Farm to School
Opting for fresh, local food promotes the overall health and well-being of individuals. When students are provided with nutritious meals and schools prioritize procurement of local produce, it improves students’ health. **HB 247 (FAILED) and HB 248 (FAILED)** would have allowed local school complexes to adopt and implement Farm to School principles and help increase the availability of nutritious food in schools. **HB 310 (FAILED)** would have created an Agricultural Education Coordinator position to facilitate comprehensive, coordinated P-20 nutrition education for students.

Sugar-Sweetened Beverages
Lowering consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages has been proven to improve health and reduce chronic disease. **SB 908 (FAILED)** would have imposed a two-cent-per-ounce fee on sugary drinks to encourage people to purchase healthier beverages and dedicated the collected money to support community health.
Major Bills: Nutrition & Physical Activity

Safe Routes for People
Everyone has a right to be safe when they travel. Traffic-related fatalities increased over the past decade, and Hawai’i leads the nation in kūpuna pedestrian deaths.

Advocates proposed a comprehensive Safe Routes for People approach through SB 1506 (FAILED) in an attempt to address the problem in a community-based, holistic manner. SB 1086 (PASSED) brings more community voice to the newly renamed State Highway Safety and Modernization Council.

To address student safety, HB 600 (PASSED) focuses on safety measures where keiki walk, bus, roll, or bike to school. It will engage communities so their unique needs are met, and ensures accessible funding. Safety for keiki uplifts safety for all pedestrians.

School Health
A hungry student is one who is unable to learn. HB 540 (FAILED) and SB 154 (FAILED) would have provided free school meals to Hawai’i students. Regardless of their family’s income, students would be fed, which increases learning readiness. These programs were introduced during the pandemic, and some states are making these programs permanent because of the increase in standardized testing scores.
As in any legislative session, there were some wins and some missed opportunities. The 2023 Hawai‘i Legislative Session was no different, as policies that support the health of our communities were passed and some funding was provided for safety net and social services. However, this session did appear to be more chaotic, and in light of the significant budget surplus, we certainly could have done more to support health.

To ensure that Hawai‘i thrives, it is vital to establish supportive systems that prioritize preventive measures over reactive interventions. By investing in policies and strategies that directly benefit the communities, Hawai‘i can pave the way for a healthier and more prosperous future.

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Budget analysis (pages 12-19) provided by Beth Giesting

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MISSION
To advance the health and wellness of the people and islands of Hawai‘i.

TO ACHIEVE OUR MISSION, WE . . .
• Expand understanding of what creates health of people and place, embracing upstream social, cultural and environmental factors.
• Foster partnerships among public health, healthcare, and other diverse sectors to improve health and wellness.
• Cultivate programs – including education, advocacy, research, capacity building and training – to improve policies, systems, and the environments where people live, learn, work, age, and play.

HIPHI is home to, or provides fiscal administrative & management support to, Coalition for a Tobacco-Free Hawai‘i, Community Health Worker Association, Hawai‘i Alcohol Policy Alliance, Hawai‘i Farm to School Hui, Hawai‘i Oral Health Coalition, Healthy Eating + Active Living (HEAL) county coalitions, and the Obesity Prevention Task Force.

Learn more about HIPHI at hphi.org