



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Health and Homelessness
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HB 1449 – RELATING TO LUNG CANCER

Chair Belatti, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i Cancer Center and the John A. Burns School of Medicine strongly supports HB 1449, which removes the sunset date for the early lung cancer screening task force and extends the date for the task force to submit reports to the legislature and ensures the task force can meet in perpetuity to reduce the impact lung cancer has on our population and especially in those suffering disproportionate morbidity and mortality.

Lung cancer is the number one cancer killer for men and women in the state. The American Lung Association's State of Lung Cancer Report in Hawai'i for 2021 places Hawai'i dead last in early diagnosis of lung cancer. According to the American Lung Association, in Hawai'i, 20% of cases are caught at an early stage, which is significantly lower than the national rate of 26%. University of Hawai'i Cancer Center epidemiologists have shown that Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders develop lung cancer at an earlier age and with lower lifetime exposure to cigarettes, compared to Whites and Asian Americans. According to the American Cancer Society, in 2022, more people will die of lung cancer in Hawai'i than breast, liver, or prostate cancer combined.

Sixty percent of new cases now occur in former smokers, pointing to the importance of screening to diagnose these cancers early and improve survival. Low-dose computerized tomography has been shown in 2011 to lower lung cancer mortality by 20% when used with high-risk patients. Further, in Hawai'i, 3% of those at high risk were

screened, which was significantly lower than the national rate of 6%. Our screening rate ranks 43rd among all states. We must do all we can to make sure that all people at high risk of lung cancer are screened early so that they are offered appropriate treatment options, including less invasive treatments of early lung cancer that allow for a sooner return to function and improved survival rates.

The role of the proposed task force remains crucial in identifying barriers to early lung cancer screening and the contributors to lung cancer disparities observed among ethnic and racial populations in Hawai'i, recommending the steps and resources necessary to increase lung cancer screening in Hawai'i, recommending any additional research that is needed, and providing a report to the legislature with possible policies the state can adopt. The task force is required to "discuss cultural and social barriers associated with lung cancer screening", and to develop a work plan. In order to develop, then implement a coordinated and comprehensive early lung cancer screening program, with appropriate cultural tailoring that addresses other barriers to early detection and/or treatment, the task force will require significant community input throughout the process and especially from those populations at the highest risk. Larger health ecosystem factors, including access to care, seamless coordination between primary care and specialists and between specialists (i.e., lung or medical cancer specialists to thoracic surgeons), reduced barriers to ordering the screening CT in patients recommended for screening (according to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services national coverage determination), reduced barriers to obtaining additional tests for proper staging (to determine the best treatment plan), timely referrals and timely intervention must be part of this work plan development. To do this well and result in meaningful outcomes for the state and high-risk populations, this careful work requires more time than five months (to July 31, 2023).

The UH Cancer Center has made increasing early lung cancer screening in Hawai'i one of its research and community outreach priorities and stands ready to assist the taskforce in any role that the Legislature deems appropriate. Once a comprehensive Hawai'i plan for lung cancer screening is adopted, and during the course of developing the plan, JABSOM will be instrumental in educating practicing physicians (and those in training) about the key strategies, partnerships, and policies.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.