

OFFICE of Wellness & Resilience

Ke Ke'ena Kūpa'a Maui Ola
Our resilience is rooted in our wellness

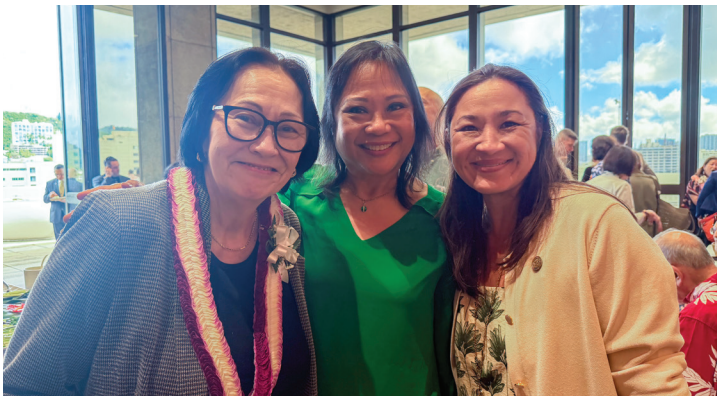
Newsletter

Quarter I: January–March 2026

Opening Day with Lei at the Capitol

The Office of Wellness and Resilience marked Opening Day of the Hawai'i State Legislature on January 21 with what we hope can be a new tradition in our Office: hand-making lei for the legislators we work closely with on mental health and trauma-informed care policy.

Members of our team gathered the pua kalaunu (crown flower) and other materials, sat together at our communal office table and



Hawai'i Supreme Court Justice Sabrina S. McKenna, House District 36 Representative Daisy Hartsfield and OWR Director Tia L. Roberts Hartsock.



OWR's Telesia Pasese, Director Tia L. Roberts Hartsock, Trina Orimoto and Jodie Burgess on Opening Day of the Hawai'i State Legislature.

crafted each lei one strand at a time. It was a grounding, intentional way to prepare ourselves for the day, as well as session in general – before it gets busy with hearings!

We presented more than 20 lei to state lawmakers leading on policies that impact our workforce, state service systems and communities – the three places where trauma-informed practice must take root if it's going to be sustainable over the long term.

We are entering this session with optimism and hope for what's possible: innovative, progressive policy that strengthens mental health and weaves trauma-informed care more deeply into state government and the communities we serve.



Behind the Scenes with Noreen Kohl

Noreen joined our team in late 2025 through our partnership with the Social Science Research Institute at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

Noreen (she/her) holds a Master of Arts and a Ph.D. in sociology, both from UH Mānoa. She brings more than a decade of experience in policy research and evaluation in Hawai'i, where she has led mixed-methods

projects focused on social determinants of health and mental health. Noreen also teaches undergraduate courses in power, criminalization, aging and health, and she is passionate about policies that support caregivers across the lifespan.

Outside of work, Noreen loves being in nature with her family.

Policy Update

Bills on medical debt relief and family wellness advance

As of March 30, there are four measures that OWR has been named in that are still moving through this legislative session.

SB3025 Relating to Medical Debt: Requires the Office of Wellness and Resilience to develop, implement and administer a Medical Debt Acquisition and Forgiveness Program to acquire and forgive outstanding medical debt for residents of the State, subject to the availability of program funds.

SB2861 Relating to the Office of Wellness and Resilience: Requires the Office of Wellness and Resilience, in consultation with the Department of Human Services, to develop a comprehensive plan by 6/30/2027 for the establishment of a Kakou Pilot Program to support families and children in need. Requires the Office to submit preliminary and final reports to the Legislature on the plan and identify an administering agency or agencies for the pilot program. Beginning 7/1/2028, authorizes the Department of Human Services to expend Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program funds for the purposes of the Kakou Pilot Program.

SB3204 Relating to Family Resilience Pilot Program: Establishes a two-year Family Resilience Pilot Program within the Office of Wellness and Resilience. Requires a report to the Legislature.

HR94: Urging the Department of Education, in collaboration with the Department of Health and Office of Wellness and Resilience, to establish a statewide peer counselor program to address youth loneliness and social disconnection in Hawai'i's schools.

In addition to these bills, there are a few other measures related to workplace wellness, mental health and disaster preparedness that we are supporting.



Director's Message

Tia L. Roberts Hartsock, Director

Aloha, all,

When our team sat together to string crown flower lei — pua kalaunu — for Opening Day at the Hawai'i State Legislature, I was struck, as I always am, by how much patience the work takes. Each tiny bloom is pierced and threaded by hand. There are no shortcuts. A lei only becomes a lei because someone slowed down, and was still and focused long enough to make it, one flower at a time.

Crown flower was the lei beloved by Queen Lili'uokalani. Choosing it for this day felt like its own quiet act of remembrance — a thread of legacy running through our offering and into the hands of the lawmakers who carry this work with us. That's a useful reminder for the work we do.

At the Office of Wellness and Resilience, we have big dreams for mental health and trauma-informed care across Hawai'i — in our workforce, our state departments and our communities

across the islands. The agenda is long. Our calendars are full. And it's easy, in that current, to miss the small moments of recognition: to skip the mahalo or save the celebration for some later, bigger milestone.

But a lei is not given for what comes next. It is given for what is already true — partnership, presence and the willingness to do hard work together. Opening Day was an opportunity to honor the policymakers who carry this work alongside us, and to acknowledge that none of our progress belongs to us alone.

As we step into this session, I'm asking all of us (including myself) to keep making time for this strand-by-strand work of gratitude. It's the practice that holds the bigger work together.

Mālama pono,

Tia

About the Office of Wellness and Resilience (OWR)

Our kuleana is to strengthen our state service systems, using hope-centered principles as strategies to make Hawai'i a trauma-informed state. We break down the barriers that impact the well-being of Hawai'i's people — from keiki to kūpuna.

Practice This

Open with a Check-In Q

A simple way to bring trauma-informed care into the workday: start meetings with a brief check-in question. It signals that people are seen as whole people first, not just task-doers, and gives the team a small, low-stakes way to be seen and heard in the room before diving into the agenda.

A favorite around our office comes from one of our kūpūna mentors, Auntie Pua Puanani Burgess: the weather ball. Each person describes their “internal weather” at the moment – sunny, partly cloudy, stormy, foggy, calm seas. Metaphor gives people poetic license to talk about what they’re carrying without forcing them to be more specific than they want to be. It honors their own agency but keeps communication open.

Other options:

“What’s one word for how you’re arriving today?”

“On a scale of 1 to 10, what’s your capacity right now?”

“What’s something taking up space for you – work or otherwise?”

A few ground rules make the practice work. Always offer a “pass” option – choice is a core trauma-informed principle. Keep responses short, and set the tone by going first. And honor what’s shared; resist the urge to fix or follow up unless invited.

A few minutes in, and the team is a little more honest about their capacity and needs in the day ahead.



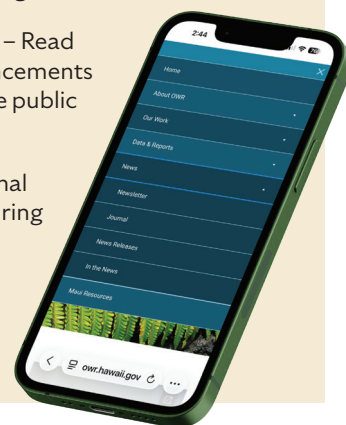
In Case You Missed It

Explore Our Expanded News Sections

Our website now features multiple news sections, making it easier to find exactly what you’re looking for.

Explore the four categories below:

- » Newsletter – Access current and past editions
- » Journal – See what the OWR team has been working on
- » News Releases – Read official announcements shared with the public
- » In the News – Discover external coverage featuring OWR



Event Summary

Aloha ‘Ia ‘O Wai‘anae Event x OWR

The Office of Wellness and Resilience (OWR) was honored to support the 3rd Annual Aloha ‘Ia ‘O Wai‘anae, a community-centered event focused on celebrating the strength, culture and resilience of the Wai‘anae Coast. In partnership with Kids Hurt Too, the Dept. of Education’s Nānākuli-Wai‘anae Complex Area Family & Community Engagement Team and Wai‘anae Elementary School, the event created a space for connection, healing and community wellness through student performances, local resources and opportunities for families to come together.

The OWR team assisted with distributing the Hawai‘i Quality of Life and Well-Being surveys and supporting the community store throughout the event. Hundreds of community members participated in the survey, helping to uplift the voices and lived experiences of Wai‘anae residents. Events like Aloha ‘Ia ‘O Wai‘anae remind us that connection, culture and community care are essential components of collective well-being and resilience.



Hawai‘i Dept. of Education’s Angela Hoppe Cruz, OWR’s Ana Kia and Kids Hurt Too Hawaii Executive Director Walker Rowsey.

Event Summary: Ho'okua'āina Cultural-Wellness Immersion Day



The Office of Wellness & Resilience attended a cultural wellness immersion day at Ho'okua'āina in collaboration with University of Hawai'i College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources, and Ho'ohanu. Founded on Maui, Ho'ohanu is a nonprofit organization committed to caring for first responder mental health and wellness. The organization helps them learn to manage the stress in their lives to maintain a healthy, balanced lifestyle.

The gathering brought together first responders and farmers for a meaningful day of connection, cultural learning and wellness in the lo'i kalo.

Participants spent time working alongside kalo farmers and learning about the deep relationship between health, wellness and 'āina. The experience created space to reconnect with culture, community and the healing power of the land while strengthening relationships across groups committed to community resilience. The day also included reflection on ola kino and culturally grounded approaches to well-being.

OWR's Nannie Apalla, Ana Kia and Leilani Willing.

New look!

In this issue, we are excited to introduce our refreshed newsletter design. This marks the beginning of a new visual identity for the Office of Wellness & Resilience.

Stay tuned for updated website content, fact sheets and informational materials.

We will also be unveiling our custom Hawaiian quilt graphics, which thoughtfully represent our initiatives.



Coming Up

April 2

OWR Rapid Response for Kona Low Response: *Psychological First Aid Training Webinar with the National Child Traumatic Stress Network*

May 13

Inaugural Trauma-Informed Care Certification Graduation with Gov. Josh Green

August 11

Trauma-Informed Care Certification Completion Training (Modules 5-8) at Windward Community College

Data Dose: Supervisor Support

Employees who said they always or usually receive supervisor support reported 3.9 mentally unhealthy days in the past month, compared with 10.2 days for those who never receive it – a difference of 6.3 days.

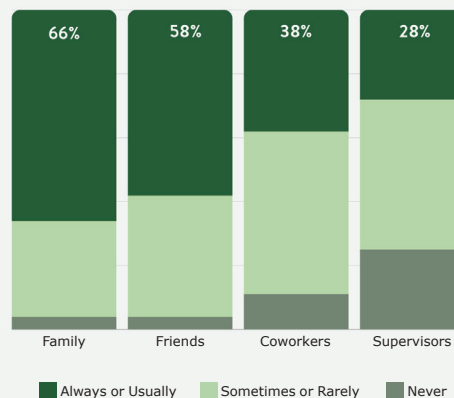
Consistent supervisor support also tracked with 33% higher job satisfaction and a 24% lower likelihood of leaving within 12 months.

Yet only 28% of state employees turn to supervisors for support – the lowest of any source, behind family (66%) and friends (58%).

Scan the QR code or go to itl.link/sup-sup to read the entire brief.



Who do state employees reach out for support?



This newsletter is published quarterly by the Office of Wellness & Resilience (OWR), within the Office of Governor Josh Green, M.D.

Quarter 1 Issue:
January-March 2026

Let's talk story!

📞 (808) 586-0805

✉️ gov.owr@hawaii.gov

🌐 owr.hawaii.gov

Hawai'i quality of life and well-being dashboard (2024). Partnership for Wellness & Resilience, Health Policy Initiative, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. URL: health-study.com.