



OFFICE of Wellness & Resilience

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

Newsletter

Quarter 2: April–June 2026

Inaugural Cohorts Certified, Inducted into Learning and Leadership Collaborative

We are excited to announce that we have certified the first cohort of our signature training — the state's first Trauma-Informed Care Certification — and it will soon be inducted into our newly formed Office of Wellness and Resilience (OWR) Learning and Leadership Collaborative.

The collaborative is the community OWR has been building toward: a standing network of certified state employees positioned across departments to translate training into daily practice. Members carry trauma-informed and resilience-centered approaches into the way agencies lead their teams and serve Hawai'i's people — in their offices, in the classroom and over the phone.

The collaborative went live in mid-May across most executive state departments, giving agencies a built-in resource of trained staff who can support culture change and advise on administrative policy. Members will serve as in-house points of contact for trauma-



The state's first Trauma-Informed Care Certification cohort met for their April 16 training, led by OWR Director Tia L. Roberts Hartsock.

informed practice, and departments gain a peer network for sharing wins, challenges and questions. As cohorts grow, OWR plans to draw on collaborative members as future trainers and ambassadors for trauma-informed care.

The inaugural cohort represents state employees from a range of departments, and this is only the start. Additional cohorts are already in the pipeline, with a goal of seeding the Collaborative across most major public-facing executive state departments over the coming year.



Members of the inaugural Trauma-Informed Care Certification cohort celebrate their graduation, along with Governor Josh Green and OWR staff.

Policy Update

OWR Initiatives Strengthen Family Resilience Across Hawai‘i

Four legislative measures that the Office of Wellness and Resilience (OWR) was named in made it to the finish line of the 2026 legislative session and are awaiting Governor Josh Green’s signature. OWR is honored to have the opportunity to work closely on programs to support the well-being of keiki and families in our state – and is excited to partner with other state agencies and community partners on implementation.

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 June 30, 2027, for the establishment of a Kākou Pilot Program to support families and children in need. Requires OWR to submit preliminary and final reports to the Legislature on the plan and identify an administering agency or agencies for the pilot program. Beginning July 1, 2028, authorizes the Department of Human Services to expend Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program funds for the purposes of the Kākou 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, OWR supported measures related to workplace wellness, mental health and disaster preparedness.



Director’s Message

Tia L. Roberts Hartsock, Director

Aloha mai kākou,

It’s a season of celebration at the Office of Wellness and Resilience. Our first cohort has completed its in-person Trauma-Informed Care certification training – a milestone years in the making – and one I’ve been excited to share with you.

This cohort showed up fully. They leaned into difficult conversations, sat with one another through the hard parts and built the skills to bring trauma-informed practice back to their teams, agencies and communities. Watching them learn side by side reminded me why this work matters: lasting change in how we serve Hawai‘i’s people starts with how we care for the people doing the work.

In June, we gathered to mark their graduation. It was more than a ceremony. It was a public commitment – to one another, to those they serve and to the kuleana of weaving trauma-informed care into every corner of state government.

Mahalo to the cohort for your courage and commitment. Mahalo to our trainers, partners and the agencies that made space for staff to participate. And mahalo to all of you for keeping this work moving forward.

This is only the beginning. As one cohort graduates, another is ready to begin – and our shared kuleana of building a more resilient Hawai‘i continues.

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:

Close with a Breath

In our last issue, we featured check-in questions as a good way to open a meeting in a trauma-informed way. A moment of hanu — breathing — is a good way to close one. In ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i, hanu is to breathe and hā means breath or to exhale.

Hā is believed to carry life and mana — power — and to hanu is a way to center oneself back to the present moment with intention. Before ending a meeting, invite your group to pause together. Say “hanu mai” as everyone breathes in — and “hanu aku” as everyone breathes out.

One mindful, slow breath in unison may be enough, but we like to set aside time for a set of three together. If using the Hawaiian language doesn’t feel right for your group, simply say it in English or another language that is fitting.



Breathing together is a small but meaningful way to mark the transition from a meeting back into the rest of the day — a return to baseline before everyone moves on to what’s next.

We will introduce other breathing practices in future issues as well.

Participants at the 2025 Kūpa‘a Maui Ola Summit breathe together.

Coming Up

August 11

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

October 22

Trauma-Informed Care Certification Completion Training (Modules 5-8) at Wahiawā Value-Added Product Development Center

In Case You Missed It

In our last issue, we introduced our refreshed newsletter design. This marks the beginning of a new visual identity for OWR.

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.



Event Summary

WGA 2026 Policy Forum

We were honored to participate in the recent panel on Trauma-Informed Approaches to Disaster Recovery, at the Western Governors’ Association (WGA) 2026 Policy Forum on Maui. Director Hartsock facilitated a discussion reflecting on lessons from the 2023 Maui wildfires, including what has worked well in recovery efforts and how those insights are actively shaping more responsive, community-centered approaches moving forward. We shared OWR’s ongoing work assisting a coordinated, trauma-informed disaster response in partnership with community organizations and state and federal agencies.

During the session, OWR highlighted Hawai‘i’s first-in-the-nation disaster behavioral health framework, which integrates mental health and well-being across all phases of disaster — planning, preparedness, response and recovery. We also spoke to how this framework has guided recent response efforts, including support following the latest flooding events. The panel provided an opportunity to share practical strategies and reinforce the



OWR Director Tia L. Roberts Hartsock represented the office at Western Governors’ Association 2026 Policy Forum on Maui.

importance of culturally grounded, trauma-informed approaches that strengthen coordination, improve service delivery and support long-term healing for impacted communities.

Event Summary: Mauiola Ke'ehi

A few of our staff supported a day of well-being activities in partnership with Child Welfare Services (Dept. of Human Services) staff, grounded in aloha for the 'āina and kai at Ke'ehi Lagoon, on O'ahu. This experience offered new ways to support mental health and well-being through connection to place, culture and community. Established in 2019, Mauiola Ke'ehi is a nonprofit dedicated to guided huaka'i (cultural journeys) to the waters of Ke'ehi, promoting healing for both people and place.

Throughout the day, our staff engaged in culturally grounded and place-based practices, including hoe wa'a (canoe paddling and ocean education), learning mo'olelo connected to the area and practicing kilo (keen observation) to deepen awareness of the surrounding environment. Activities such as kilo kino/hanu supported reflection through breath and internal awareness.

"Thank you for the opportunity. This is probably the most relaxed I've been in 30 years."

– Event Participant

The experience also included hands-on stewardship practices, such as marine debris removal, planting native species and removing invasive plants, reinforcing a sense of responsibility and care for the 'āina. Creative expression through hana no'ēau (art and mo'olelo-based activities) supported both individual and collective healing. Participants in this experience have observed meaningful impacts, often returning more grounded, centered and settled.



First Lady Jaime Kanani Green, Mauiola Ke'ehi Executive Director Kēhaulani Kupihea and OWR's Leilani Willing.



Data Dose: Medical Debt and Well-Being

Nearly 1 in 5 survey respondents (19%) currently hold \$500 or more in medical debt, according to our statewide quality of life and well-being survey in partnership with the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa's Health Policy Initiative. One in five respondents (20%) delayed medical care because of the cost, and 12% said they needed to see a doctor but couldn't afford it.

The burden compounds: Residents carrying \$2,500 or more in medical debt reported an average of 10.4 mentally unhealthy days in the past month, compared with 6.1 days for those owing less than \$500.

Our 2026 preliminary data analysis shows a noticeable shift in Hawai'i's medical debt patterns from



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

2024 and 2026, which is why we are excited about the passage of SB2035 (see Policy Update, pg. 2). Residents carrying very small debts (under \$500) declined. But balances between \$2,500 and \$10,000 doubled.

Total Amount of Medical Debt Currently Owed by Number of Mentally and Physically Unhealthy Days in the Past Month

Amount of Medical Debt	Avg # of Mentally Unhealthy Days (N=6,432)		Avg # of Physically Unhealthy Days (N=6,381)
Less than \$500	6.1	↓	4.7
\$500 to less than \$1,000	8.6	↑	6.0
\$1,000 to less than \$2,500	9.3	↑	8.5
\$2,500 to less than \$5,000	10.5	↑	5.7
\$5,000 to less than \$10,000	10.5	↑	9.0
\$10,000 to less than \$25,000	8.2	↑	6.0
\$25,000 or more	10.3	↑	8.1
Average	6.8		5.2

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Let's talk story!

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