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NATIVE HAWAIIANS AND PACIFIC ISLANDERS ARE ONE OF THE FASTEST GROWING POPULATIONS IN CALIFORNIA

Groundbreaking report includes new social and economic data on this emerging community

SACRAMENTO – Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (NHPI) are one of California’s fastest growing and most diverse racial groups statewide. More NHPI reside in California than any other state on the continental U.S. according to a new report released today by Empowering Pacific Islander Communities (EPIC) and Asian Americans Advancing Justice (Advancing Justice).

Statistics from the report show that although the community is relatively small in number, NHPI grew 29%, a rate slightly higher than Latinos over the last decade and are expected to be the second fastest growing population behind Latinos. The report, A Community of Contrasts: Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in California, is one of the first of its kind, and uses data to shed light on a community that is often invisible, particularly when it comes to public policy. This report paints a more accurate picture of the NHPI community that is often lost when NHPI data is folded into the broader “Asian Pacific Islander” category.

“We need disaggregated data on Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders to show that we share many similarities with other communities of color,” said Tana Lepule, Executive Director of Empowering Pacific Islander Communities. “Without data, legislators often ignore our communities when crafting policy. Having this data allows us to be more effective advocates on a host of issues facing our families.”

In addition to general demographic data about the size and concentration of the population, the report includes social and economic data pulled from the Census Bureau and other sources.

Data on education achievement reveals significant challenges for NHPI youth. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, only 19% of NHPI adult population has a bachelor’s degree compared to 30% of the total population. Data on high school students in 2013 show that NHPI faced one of the lowest graduation rates while the dropout rate among NHPI students was one of the highest statewide. Despite surveys showing that most NHPI students want to attend college, University of California college admissions data show that NHPI have one of the lowest admissions rates, second only to Blacks or African Americans.

“Similar to other communities of color, many youth are the first in their generation to go to college and many of the students come from low-income households where college is financially out of reach. For those that make it to college, there is often little institutional support for them to stay in school and finish on time,” said
Sefa Aina, Board Chair of Empowering Pacific Islander Communities and associate dean and director of Asian American Resource Center at Pomona College. “We need more programs that support Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander high school and college youth as they navigate higher education.”

The report also sheds light on health disparities facing NHPI families. Cancer is the fastest growing cause of death among NHPI. The growth in cancer deaths among NHPI outpaced statewide averages (21% compared to 3%) between 2005 and 2010. The number of suicide deaths among NHPI doubled between 2000 and 2010. In comparison, the number of deaths by suicide for Whites increased 17%. Despite these disparities, many NHPI lack health insurance. For example, about 30% of Tongan Americans do not have health insurance, a rate higher than Latinos (28%).

“Although our community suffers from chronic diseases, we continue to face barriers to quality health care,” said Lepule. “Some Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander organizations have created model programs that address language and cultural barriers, but often these programs run on shoe-string budgets or are severely underfunded and as a result, our community continues to suffer from lack of access to quality care.”

While the common misperception is that all NHPI are born in the U.S. in places like Hawaii, data show that one in five NHPI are foreign-born. Large proportions of Fijian (71%), Tongan (40%), and Samoan Americans (10%) were foreign-born and are limited English proficient. Many of those who migrate from the Pacific come from islands with political relationships with the U.S. that translate into complex immigration statuses.

“Many people assume that we’re all U.S.-born citizens, however, like Asian Americans and Latinos, many of us immigrated here for educational, health, and economic opportunities. There are also a lot of undocumented Pacific Islander immigrants here in California so many of us are interested in ensuring that our families are kept together and that humane immigration policies like AB 60 are implemented,” said Alisi Tulua, Director of Programs at Empowering Pacific Islander Communities.

The report can be found at EPIC’s website (www.empoweredpi.org) or Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Los Angeles’ website (www.advancingjustice-la.org/demographics).

A Community of Contrasts: Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in California was made possible through the generous support of the Wallace H. Coulter Foundation, the Cyrus Chung Ying Tang Foundation, and Bank of America.

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**Empowering Pacific Islander Communities** was founded in 2009 by a group of young Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander professionals based in Southern California. EPIC’s mission is to promote social justice by fostering opportunities that empower the NHPI community through culturally relevant advocacy, research, and development.

**Asian Americans Advancing Justice** is a national affiliation of five leading organizations advocating for the civil and human rights of Asian Americans and other underserved communities to promote a fair and equitable society for all. The affiliation’s members are: Advancing Justice – AAJC (Washington, D.C.), Advancing Justice – Asian Law Caucus (San Francisco), Advancing Justice – Atlanta, Advancing Justice – Chicago, and Advancing Justice – Los Angeles