



National Lieutenant Governors Association

NLGA State Strategies on Health **Hawaii Lt. Governor Josh Green: *Housing IS Healthcare!***

Hawaii faces one of the worst homelessness epidemics in the country, with the highest rate of homelessness per capita in the nation – a problem exacerbated by the COVID pandemic. Identifying and implementing solutions to the homelessness crisis is my top priority as Lieutenant Governor.

Approximately 15,000 homeless individuals live in Hawaii, a population that is disproportionately Native Hawaiian, and one that faces an average life expectancy of just 53 years old – almost 30 years less than the general population.

Homelessness and chronic illness go hand-in-hand. Individuals facing homelessness suffer high rates of mental illness, addiction, and PTSD. Without a stable place to call home, homeless individuals face high levels of stress, cleanliness and hygiene challenges that can cause infections, heightened risk for injuries, exposure to the elements, and a greater chance of exacerbating existing medical illnesses.

Beyond the medical ramifications that homelessness brings, there is also an enormous economic impact to Hawaii. Chronically homeless individuals are a majority of the highest Medicaid utilizers in the state, with 3.61% of Medicaid users consuming 61% of the state's \$2 billion annual Medicaid budget. Just 13,000 people spend \$1.2 billion in Medicaid each year, with almost total overlap between the high utilizers and the chronically homeless population.

The good news is that we know combatting homelessness will improve health outcomes for Hawaiians. From a budgetary perspective, housing Hawaii's chronically homeless would result in at least \$300 million per year in Medicaid savings. We're implementing several solutions to holistically address homelessness in the state:

- **Kauhale:** Permanent, supportive housing units within small communities for the chronically homeless, consisting of tiny homes clusters and communal areas for restrooms, cooking, and gathering.
- **Hawaii Homeless Healthcare Hui (H4):** A public-private partnership supported by regional health systems and philanthropists to provide services to homeless individuals, while relieving the medical and financial burden on emergency rooms to treat chronic illnesses. H4 will also fund and operate Joint Outreach Centers, where homeless individuals can receive free medical and mental healthcare services.
- **Permanent Supportive Housing (Housing First):** Policies to emphasize affordable and transit-oriented housing, as well as expand Section 8 vouchers and support rapid re-housing initiatives.
- **Assisted Community Treatment:** Through a 2019 law, individuals deemed to be a danger to themselves or others, or are otherwise suffering from mental illness, will receive treatment. Addressing underlying mental illnesses can often remedy the causes of homelessness in some individuals.

For more information, review my [10-Point Plan on Homelessness](#).

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