DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH EXPANDS MENTAL HEALTH ASSISTANCE IN RESPONSE TO THE ONGOING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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HONOLULU – The Hawai‘i Department of Health, in collaboration with CARE Hawaii, launched a new crisis counseling assistance program to provide support for children and adults experiencing challenges due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The expansion was made possible by a $2.1 million grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

The new program, called “Kū Makani – The Hawai’i Resiliency Project,” offers counseling, education, information, and resource navigation while promoting healthy coping, empowerment, and resilience. The phrase *‘a‘ali‘i kū makani* refers to the ‘a‘ali‘i plant which grows even in strong winds, reflecting the spirit of resilience and thriving under challenging circumstances.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has touched everyone in the islands, from keiki to kupuna,” said Amy Curtis, Adult Mental Health Division Administrator. “We are pleased to be able to provide yet another resource to help those of us who need some extra support right now.”

Residents can access “Kū Makani” by calling Hawai‘i CARES 1-800-753-6879 and selecting option #1 from 4:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Monday through Friday and state holidays, and 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday. Services are available for children, teenagers, and adults. Trained crisis counselors are located on each major island, including staff bilingual in Ilokano, Spanish, Hawaiian, Tongan, Vietnamese, Mandarin, Japanese, Palauan, and Samoan.

“It is normal to experience difficulty with adapting to the new challenges of managing work, school, family, or home due to COVID-19, to feel isolated or anxious, or to worry about meeting basic needs like having enough food or access to healthcare,” said Kathleen Merriam, Team Leader for Kū Makani. “If you or someone you love needs support, don’t be afraid to reach out.”

For general crisis support services not specific to the COVID-19 pandemic, including mental health resources, substance use treatment services, or help with isolation and quarantine, call Hawai‘i CARES 24 hours a day, 7 days per week at 1(800)753-6879 or text ‘ALOHA’ to 741741.

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PDF: Department of Health expands mental health assistance in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic