NEW SERVICE FOR KŪPUNA SIMPLIFIES COVID-19 VACCINATION REGISTRATION PROCESS; CAPABLE OF MORE THAN 1,000 CALLS PER DAY

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HONOLULU – A new service is making it easier for Oahu kūpuna who are not comfortable with the online registration process for their COVID-19 vaccinations. Trained specialists available seven days a week are providing personalized assistance to help those age 65 and above navigate the registration process, secure appointments and also help eligible individuals arrange for transportation to a vaccination provider.

The call center — a collaboration among the Executive Office on Aging, an attached agency of the Hawai‘i Department of Health; the City and County of Honolulu’s Elderly Affairs Division; Aloha United Way’s 2-1-1; and St. Francis Healthcare System — emerged as a collective solution to coordinate vaccines for kūpuna who have limited access to technology and face language barriers.

“The Department of Health alone cannot implement all of the different aspects of the state’s multi-faceted vaccination plan,” said Dr. Libby Char, director of the Hawai‘i Department of Health. “The best ideas are coming from our community partners. We are grateful for those who are deeply committed to kūpuna, who recognized their needs, and found a solution to fill this need.”

“Kūpuna make up a significant percentage of our state’s total population, and the Executive Office on Aging and our Policy Advisory Board on Elderly Affairs have been tireless advocates of vaccination access for our kūpuna,” said Caroline Cadirao, director of the state’s Executive Office on Aging. “We’ve listened to concerns and insights from the community, leveraged the expertise of our partners, and came up with this solution. It speaks to the power of collaboration.”

“We are proud to have Derrick Ariyoshi, administrator of our Elderly Affairs Division, and other partners working together to make it easier for our kūpuna to get vaccinated” said Honolulu Mayor Rick Blangiardi. “The City and County of Honolulu played a pivotal role in bringing the state and nonprofit partners together. When we have the assurance that our kūpuna are being taken care of, we can have peace of mind, and this will allow us to focus on economic recovery to improve our quality of life.”

Hawai‘i Department of Health made vaccinations available to those 65 and above — on Monday, March 15, because vaccine supply from the federal government has increased and the state had made significant progress in vaccinating healthcare professionals, residents of long-term care facilities, frontline essential workers and kūpuna 75 and older.

Seniors or family caregivers can simply call 2-1-1 to begin the registration process. Aloha United Way's (AUW) 2-1-1 team of about 20 trained specialists and supervisors is responsible for the initial intake process. Information is then securely transferred electronically to the St. Francis Healthcare System call center team which will follow up with kūpuna who have called AUW's 2-1-1 within 24 to 48 hours. St. Francis will then help these kūpuna schedule a convenient vaccination date, time and location, depending upon the availability of vaccine doses. St. Francis is using a sophisticated Salesforce application to manage and process the information and efficiently manage the scheduling process.

St. Francis is partnering with a number of vaccination providers, including Hawai‘i Pacific Health, The Queen's Medical Center, CVS Longs Drugs, Walgreens, and independent pharmacies. St. Francis also arranges for transportation for eligible seniors to take them to a vaccination site, if necessary.

“The process that we have developed is scalable and has allowed us to ramp up to be ready to serve the large number of those who are 65 years and above,” said Melissa Ah Ho-Mauga, St. Francis Healthcare System's vice president – client services. “It's a great feeling to be working on this as a team to continually improve the way we serve kūpuna.”

“National trends show that vaccine accessibility improves when a convenient, central intake phone number is the backbone,” said Lisa Kimura, AUW's vice president of community impact. “AUW's 2-1-1 helpline is a natural fit for this effort because we already provide essential information to Hawai‘i residents of all ages who need local resources like medical care, food banks, legal assistance, and more. We also have language translation services on stand-by so that language is not a barrier for those who call.”

High standards in customer service and information referrals are some of the reasons 2-1-1 was selected for this collaborative effort. Jennifer Pecher, AUW's director of community impact said the call center's specialists are specifically trained to handle complex inquiries and they are guided by Information and Referral Services standards set by the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems. Since the pandemic arrived in Hawai‘i, the helpline's call volume increased by 600%, prompting Aloha United Way to hire and train additional 2-1-1 specialists.

The kupuna call center, operated by 2-1-1, will receive calls seven days a week, from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. Translation services are also available.

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