

# RESTORING HAWAII'S HEALTH

*To balance health and economic rebound, isles need a solid medical system, good behaviors, safe travels*



By Dr. Jill Hoggard Green, Dr. Mark Mugiishi and Raymond P. Vara Jr.

**C** OVID-19 has presented Hawaii with the greatest health, economic and societal challenges of our time. It has disrupted and seismically altered the way we live, work and connect with one another, as we face the daily threat it has introduced into our lives. And it's not over yet. What we do next and our ability to step up as individuals and collectively as a community will determine our future for generations to come.

As health-care representatives on the House Select Committee on COVID-19 Economic and Financial Preparedness, we are focused on combating and managing the virus but are also mindful of its broader health and social implications. The economic hardship resulting from our response to the virus now poses a threat to our communities that could be catastrophic and long-lasting.

Today, we are asking the public to stack hands on the successful implementation of the state's Safe Travels and pre-travel testing program, along with supporting everything else we must do to preserve and protect our home and restore our economy.

We must find a way to safely address the alarming fact that we are currently the worst

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## ISLAND VOICES



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## Roadmap offers solutions for economic resiliency

By Rob Nobriga, Terry George and Lynelle Marble

COVID-19 has only widened the gap of economic inequality in our state and exposed our vulnerabilities as an island economy dependent on tourism. Employment in the tourism industry fell by 60% at the start of the pandemic and today remains at less than half its pre-pandemic levels. This means that 80,000 of our people are still unemployed. Where will all these people find new jobs? How will we transition all these displaced workers into new roles and new industries that are more resilient against economic shocks?

In the face of these severe challenges, a multi-sector partnership has developed a plan called the "Talent Roadmap" to spur economic recovery, provide economic advancement for all of Hawaii's residents, and ensure a qualified local applicant for all job openings.

One of the main goals of the roadmap is to address the mismatch between educational attainment and labor-market needs in Hawaii. To create more alignment, the roadmap identifies three sectors that state and community leaders should prioritize:

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## ISLAND VOICES



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# HEALTH

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state in the nation as measured by our overall economic performance (GDP) and our high rate of unemployment. The state's Safe Travels program may not be perfect right out of the gate, but it gives us a fighting chance to revive our economy and address one of the most significant public health threats to our future.

We believe that restoring the economic future of our state starts with ensuring our health, which is directly tied to the economic health of our community. It is a balance that requires us to move safely, but move forward. As we gear up for a gradual increase of visitors and for residents to return to work, here are three basic principles that we believe need to happen:

## 1. Build the proper public health infrastructure

Managing public health during a pandemic of this magnitude is not easy and requires significant collaboration between the state, counties and private health-care partners.

Government officials have taken action to address gaps in the health-care system, including procuring more tests and equipment and staffing more than 500 con-

tact tracers in recent weeks. They are also opening quarantine facilities for potential cases and have brought in additional nurses on a temporary basis to strengthen our health-care system.

We learn new information about COVID-19 almost daily, and the governor's new COVID-19 leadership team is managing this pandemic based on what we know today and by adjusting as new information comes available.

## 2. Practice safe behavior

We must all take responsibility for our community's health and safety.

This is something we must all demonstrate every day through our own personal behaviors. It means we must all wear our masks, avoid gatherings, practice proper hygiene (especially washing our hands), isolate when sick, be mindful of social distancing, and get vaccinated during flu season.

The fact that our infection case counts and test positivity rates have decreased in recent weeks indicates that thanks to more people practicing these behaviors, we are already making progress.

## 3. Ensure travel safety

We must ensure that visitors and returning residents traveling to Hawaii arrive with an acceptably low infection rate.

The pre-arrival testing

program that launched on Oct. 15 (which requires travelers to test negative for COVID-19 within 72 hours of departure to avoid quarantine on arrival) does this by making it extremely likely that the prevalence of infection on the plane is LOWER than the prevalence in our state.

Layered with the state's other safety measures including health-screening forms, infrared thermal testing at Hawaii airports, safety protocols by airlines and hotels, and vigilance in the hospitality industry, we believe the state is approaching the reopening of travel in a safe and responsible manner.

Build proper public health infrastructure. Practice safe behavior. Ensure travel safety. If we follow these three principles, we can adapt to life with the virus until a better solution comes along. More importantly, we'll be protecting Hawaii for us today and for our children tomorrow.

# ECONOMY

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>> **Health care, including both clinical and community health.** This sector will continue to grow to address the needs of the current public health crisis and the state's aging population.

>> **Technology, including IT, biotechnology and clean-energy occupations.** This sector has seen significant growth over the last decade and will continue to drive demand for skilled workers.

>> **Skilled trades, including sustainable agriculture, manufacturing and construction.** This sector continues to be strong with notable growth in such new areas as aquaculture and sustainable agriculture.

These sectors are recession-resilient and offer workers high-wage, high-growth career pathways. Within these three sectors, the roadmap sug-

gests focusing on expanding work-based learning opportunities by working with local industries and offering programs that rapidly re-skill our workforce.

We are already seeing the roadmap in action with such programs as the Kupu 'Aina Corps, which provides employment opportunities at conservation and agriculture-based host sites statewide. Another example is the Oahu Back to Work partnership between the University of Hawaii community colleges, UH-Manoa and the City and County of Honolulu that offers free courses for Oahu residents for such classes as certified nurse aide training and forklift operator certification.

Hawaii Pacific Health also has a successful medical assistant program that offers high school students an introduction to the health-care field. These projects are shovel-ready to invest in now and can be scaled or replicated in other areas to meet the needs of our residents and our local businesses. Moreover, the Roadmap identifies new sources of public funding and offers suggestions for private-public partnerships to help fund these programs.

The Talent Roadmap was also vital to securing \$13 million in federal CARES Act funding for a workforce and training program called Hana Career Pathways between the UH community colleges, Chamaine University and the Workforce Development Council. Hawaii was one of only eight states selected for this federal grant; the funds will be used to build more education to career pathways within the three priority sectors identified in the roadmap.

We know many difficult decisions lie ahead as we face shrinking budgets. Now is the time for our leaders to come together and invest in these high-priority sectors that will create a more resilient economy and provide family-sustaining wages for our people. We call upon our decision-makers to use the Talent Roadmap to plan Hawaii's economic recovery and prioritize where we spend our precious resources.

By expanding work-based learning, rapidly re-skilling and credentialing our residents, and advancing industry-driven solutions, we can move our people and state to recovery and long-term resiliency.

