



The Impact of COVID-19 on Pacific Islander Communities and OIA's Support Through CARES Act Funds; More Encouraged to Apply

(OIA, March 16, 2021) Pacific Islander communities in Hawai'i, Guam, Washington, and Arkansas were among the most impacted by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) global pandemic in 2020.

Pacific Islanders in Hawai'i were more than twice as likely to die from or to be hospitalized by COVID-19 than other racial and ethnic groups, after adjusting for age and genderⁱ. According to the Hawai'i Health Department, Chuukese, Marshallese, and Samoans were identified among the most impacted. On Guam, Chamorros and Chuukese made up the highest proportions of hospitalized cases, making up just over 30 percent of the total hospitalizations combined. Furthermore, a reportⁱⁱ issued by the Guam Department of Public Health in December 2020 identified ethnicity as a risk marker for COVID-19 mortality with Chuukese having the highest fatality rates overall on Guam. While comprising only 7.1 percent of Guam's population, those identifying as Chuukese accounted for 16 percent of total cases and 31 percent of COVID-19 deaths.

Reports in the Summer of 2020 found impacts on Pacific Islander communities in the U.S. mainland to have been equally stark. In Spokane County, Washington, though Marshallese make up less than one percent of the county's population, they were reported to represent nearly one third of all COVID-19 cases in the countyⁱⁱⁱ. Similarly, in Northwest Arkansas, Marshallese, who made up between 1.5 to 3 percent of the total population of Benton and Washington counties, accounted for 19 percent of all COVID-19 cases and 38 percent of the reported deaths^{iv}.



Cemetery in Springdale, Arkansas where nearly 50 Marshallese have been interred who passed away from COVID-19 and related complications.
Photo: Marshall Islands Journal/Albius Latior

Pacific Islander organizations such as the Marshall Islands COVID-19 Task Force and other local church and community volunteers throughout the United States have mobilized to help their respective communities and the Office of Insular Affairs (OIA) has been pleased to provide some CARES Act funding in support of certain not-for-profit organizations working to bridge the gap for these Pacific Islander communities:



Workers from the Marshallese Educational Initiative, to which OIA has provided funding, carry food deliveries at the Marshall Islands Consulate in Springdale, Arkansas. Photographs of the Presidents of the Marshall Islands hang on the wall. Photo: Slate.com

- In [February 2021](#), *We are Oceania*, a non-profit organization in Hawai'i with Micronesian cultural and linguistic expertise, was awarded \$1,033,100 in CARES Act funding to help Pacific Islander communities in Hawai'i. Funds will help train and provide specialists fluent in target Pacific Islander languages to answer and respond to queries about the pandemic, manage food drive efforts, deliver PPE, and provide cleaning supplies.

Listen to Josie Howard, *We are Oceania* Program Director tell the story about their efforts to support Pacific Islander communities in Hawai'i in an [OIA Conversation on YouTube](#).



- In [August 2020](#), the *Marshallese Educational Initiative (MEI)* in Springdale, Arkansas was awarded \$207,076 to support Marshallese in Springdale Arkansas. The funds will support the Marshallese Resource and Educational Center in outreach and awareness efforts related to COVID-19 and other related services.
- In [May of 2020](#), Mañelu's *Micronesia Resource Center One Stop Shop (MRCOSS)* on Guam received \$151,550 to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate information, assistance, and workshops during and after the pandemic to communities on Guam. Mañelu's MRCOSS is focused on keeping Micronesian families on Guam informed, aware, and safe during the pandemic. MRCOSS is also providing job training in order to help those who have lost employment due to COVID-19, to successfully re-enter the workforce.



The Office of Insular Affairs (OIA) has been pleased to be able to support Pacific Islander communities where the needs are great. In [February 2021](#), OIA announced that a limited amount of CARES Act funding remains available to prepare for, prevent, and respond to COVID-19. OIA invites island governments and organizations, in particular those serving insular area and Pacific Islander communities dealing with COVID-19, to submit an application for funding through OIA. For more information on how to apply for these CARES Act grant funds, please visit: <https://www.doi.gov/oia/financial-assistance>.

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ⁱ Data from the Hawai'i State Health Department, reported by the [Honolulu Civil Beat in November 2020](#).

ⁱⁱ Data Guam Department of Public Health and Social Services, reported by the [Pacific News Center in December 2020](#).

ⁱⁱⁱ Data from the Spokane Regional Health District reported by the [Spokesman-Review in June 2020](#).

^{iv} [COVID-19 Disparities Among Marshallese Pacific Islanders](#), Essay, Volume 18, January 7, 2021, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.