

# Hawaii

## Easy Access Project Eases Immigrants into a New Life

“Without the volunteer physicians who offer medical services to new immigrants, they would have no place to turn to until they find employment. This delay of proper health care increases the risk for the spread of infectious diseases to the general population.”

—Arnold Villafuerte, Program Director  
Hawaii State Department of Health, Easy Access Project

### Public Health Problem

In 2009, the Catholic Church canonized Father Damien as a saint for his work with patients who have Hansen’s disease (leprosy) in Hawaii. Infectious diseases such as Hansen’s disease may no longer threaten most U.S. communities, but they arrive regularly in Hawaii. Each year, more than 4,000 legal immigrants enter Hawaii from countries with high rates of infectious diseases. This puts more than one million Hawaiian residents at risk for contagious diseases such as tuberculosis (TB), polio, measles, diphtheria, whooping cough, and mumps.

Hawaii has the nation’s highest rates of TB—almost three times the overall U.S. rate—and of Hansen’s disease. Health officials in Hawaii also must watch for infectious diseases that are uncommon in the rest of the country (such as dengue fever, a viral disease that is widespread in the tropics) and for emerging illnesses from Asia and the Pacific, where many immigrants originate.

According to CDC, vaccines are one of the most effective weapons against infectious diseases. However, for many of the illnesses arriving in Hawaii, no vaccines exist. Health workers at the Hawaii State Department of Health (DOH) always feel a sense of urgency

about preventing the spread of these illnesses from immigrants to the local population.

### Taking Action

Since 1995, the Hawaii DOH has worked to protect residents and visitors from serious, preventable infectious diseases with funding from CDC’s Preventive Health and Health Services (PHHS) Block Grant. Today, the Easy Access Project relies on this funding, which provides language-appropriate and culturally sensitive health services to newly arrived immigrants.

Federal law mandates that all immigrants from countries with high rates of infectious diseases must report to the Hawaii DOH for TB testing. In partnership with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and the Lanakila Health Center in Honolulu, the Easy Access Project offers free or low-cost medical referrals for other health issues while clients wait for screening results.

In 2010, PHHS Block Grant funds helped the Easy Access Project to continue the following efforts:

- Project staff interviewed newly arrived immigrants to determine their health needs and referred them for appropriate treatment.

**Healthy People Objective**  
Counseling about health behaviors

**PHHS Block Grant Funding**  
Represents 75%–99% of total program costs



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## Taking Action (continued)

- Outreach and education services were offered to clients, along with referrals for health services including vaccinations, priority preventive care, and counseling on health behaviors related to nutrition, physical activity, and tobacco use.
- The Easy Access Project built and maintained relationships with key community health centers, volunteer physicians, and dentists to provide free or low-cost services.

## Impact

Each year, many grateful clients write letters thanking the Easy Access Project for making their transition to Hawaii and the United States easier. "I now know about important health issues and where to go for help. Thank you," says a Filipino mother of two.

Thanks to PHHS Block Grant funding, the Easy Access Project has reduced the risk of preventable illnesses in Hawaii by providing necessary screenings for infectious diseases and basic health services to immigrants. In 2010, the Hawaii DOH reported the following accomplishments for the Easy Access Project:

- Of the 4,293 new immigrants who came to live in Hawaii, 81% received initial health assessments, needed vaccinations, and referrals to health and social service programs.
- Easy Access Project translators used culturally appropriate materials to teach patients about healthy behaviors and communicable diseases.
- In 2010, the Easy Access Project leveraged PHHS Block Grant funds to provide an estimated \$100,000 in medical services through BCWW's network of 60 volunteer health care providers.

For more information on the PHHS Block Grant, go to [www.cdc.gov/phhsblockgrant](http://www.cdc.gov/phhsblockgrant)

For more information on Healthy People, go to [www.healthypeople.gov](http://www.healthypeople.gov)



## PHHS Block Grant Supports Hawaii's Healthy People Priorities

The PHHS Block Grant provides flexible funding that states can use to prevent and control chronic diseases, respond quickly to outbreaks of infections and waterborne diseases, and address their specific public health needs. States can align their programs with any of the Healthy People objectives.

Hawaii uses its funds to address the following five health objective priorities:

- Unintentional injury deaths.
- Community health promotion programs.
- Counseling about health behaviors.
- Data for all population groups.
- Rape or attempted rape.

For a complete list of funded health objectives, go to <http://www.cdc.gov/phhsblockgrant/statehpprior.htm>