



PRESS RELEASE

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\$14 million grant to support Pacific Islander cancer research

The University of Guam and the University of Hawai'i Cancer Center were each awarded five-year grants totaling more than \$14 million to mitigate the impact of cancer on Pacific Islanders through cancer research, career training, and community outreach. The collaboration between the two universities, known as the Pacific Island Partnership for Cancer Health Equity (PIPCHÉ), will be funded by the National Cancer Institute through Aug. 31, 2025.

Funds from the PIPCHÉ are used to support the research infrastructure needed to address significant cancer health disparities in the Pacific.

“PIPCHÉ has been truly transformational for research here at UOG for this region,” said Rachael Leon Guerrero, Ph.D., RD, co-principal investigator of the grant and vice provost of research and sponsored programs at the University of Guam. “Before PIPCHÉ, there was very little cancer and health-related research occurring of relevance to Guam’s population. Now we have multiple federal research grants studying cancer, child obesity, cardiometabolic health, and dementia.”

PIPCHÉ is the only NCI-funded, Pacific-based partnership that addresses cancer disparities in the peoples of Hawai'i, Guam, and other U.S.-affiliated Pacific Islands, which include the Northern Mariana Islands, American Sāmoa, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Palau. It also provides research training for students and early career scientists while engaging communities in outreach activities to advance knowledge, awareness, behavior change and public health policy in Guam and Hawai'i.

“We use cancer research as a platform to bring equity and resiliency to the indigenous Pacific peoples,” said Neal A. Palafox, M.D., MPH, a UH Cancer Center researcher and the principal investigator of the grant at UHCC. “... The investment has brought forward indigenous Pacific cancer researchers and scientific leaders, relevant Pacific-based interventions to address cancer disparities, and has increased the capacity for both institutions to understand and achieve cancer health equity in the Pacific.”

The first PIPCHE grant was awarded to the University of Guam and the UH Cancer Center in 2003. Since then, the funds have supported 25 research projects, trained more than 100 underrepresented students and early career scientists, contributed more than 100 peer-reviewed publications, and, in the last cycle alone, acquired more than \$34 million in additional external funds to explore research questions that are unique to the Pacific region.

“The 17 years have been a fun and eye-opening voyage,” Palafox said.

Cancer prevention and control in the Pacific are shared missions between the UH Cancer Center, the University of Guam, and their collaborators. The PIPCHE provides a platform to do much more than either institution can accomplish alone.

The efforts of this partnership are directed by Leon Guerrero and Palafox as well as UOG School of Health Dean Margaret Hattori-Uchima, Ph.D., RN, and UH Cancer Center Director Randall Holcombe, M.D., MBA, together with a team of more than 50 investigators and staff at the partnering institutions.

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Photo caption:



2020-pipche-team

Pacific Island Partnership for Cancer Health Equity leaders at a Program Steering Committee Meeting held in February 2019 at the University of Guam. (From left) Neal A. Palafox, UHCC; Engelberta Thompson; Helen Whippy; Carl Vogel, UHCC; Katsuri Warnakulasuriya; Rachael Leon Guerrero, UOG; Margaret Hattori-Uchima, UOG; and Steve Patierno.

Photo courtesy of University of Guam