

# The Pacific Substance Abuse and Mental Health Initiative

Closing the Gap, Pacific Islander Health • June/July 2000

The Pacific Substance Abuse and Mental Health Initiative (PSAMHI) is an ongoing collaboration between the six Pacific Island jurisdictions, a technical assistance team, and officials of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

The National Asian Pacific American Families Against Substance Abuse (NAPAFASA) and the Office of Minority Health (OMH) provide administrative assistance. "It is important that programs are in place before mental health and substance abuse problems become too big to adequately address," said Ford Kuramoto, Executive Director of NAPAFASA.

"Lifestyle changes are taking their toll on the peoples of the Pacific," said Bruce Grant, SAMHSA project coordinator. "Consequently, we are seeing increasing substance abuse and mental health problems."

PSAMHI has three major goals:

1. Establish a professional certification process;
2. Prepare a cadre of substance abuse and mental health educators and trainers to meet community needs; and
3. Provide a forum for collaboration and resource sharing among participating jurisdictions.

The project has met most of its goals and its usefulness will extend beyond the life of the grant. The PSAMHI Collaborating Council, which has representatives from each participating government, will seek additional funding to expand its programs. The jurisdictions remain committed to funding staff to be part of the Council.

SAMHSA is also involved in an extensive, Pacific wide research project with the University of Hawai'i to study how changes in traditional lifestyles affect mental health and substance abuse in Pacific cultures. Five U.S.-Associated Pacific jurisdictions participate.

Through these projects, SAMHSA, OMH, and NAPAFASA would like to ensure that the Pacific not only remains on the agenda, but that the islands have the capacity to develop and sustain programs of their own design, suitable for their cultures.

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