

ACT 104

S.B. NO. 759

A Bill for an Act Relating to Health.

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Hawaii:

SECTION 1. The legislature finds that access to health care is often complicated for rural residents. Many of the State's specialty practices are located in the urban portions of Oahu, and many medical specialists are unwilling to practice in underserved rural areas of the State. This inherent barrier to care underscores the severe need for comprehensive health care coordination in rural areas.

The legislature further finds that the department of health's office of primary care and rural health, in partnership with community organizations such as Community First, conducted a community health needs assessment for Hawaii island titled "Access to Care — Health for Our Communities". The assessment analyzed 3,287 resident survey responses and identified delays in health care delivery as residents' greatest obstacle to care. Nearly six in ten respondents reported delays, often due to the limited availability of specialists.

The legislature further finds that larger societal concerns, including affordable housing, the State's high cost of living, transportation difficulties, and child care challenges are barriers to care that disproportionately affect residents of underserved rural areas. To ensure health equity, the State must look beyond the symptoms of social determinants of health to address the root causes of negative health outcomes that disproportionately affect rural communities, low-income communities, communities of color, and sexual and gender minorities.

The legislature further finds that coordinated efforts at all levels are necessary to examine social determinants that impact a community's access to health care resources and to improve public health. The establishment of a strong health network in underserved areas will allow these areas to efficiently develop health care plans that encompass preventative and primary health care, specialty care, and urgent and emergency care. Comprehensive plans to align health care priorities with existing resources will foster collaboration between providers, avoid service duplication, and streamline care delivery for the State's most vulnerable residents.

The purpose of this Act is to require the office of primary care and rural health to oversee and support community efforts to collaboratively address the health and wellness needs of the State's most underserved rural residents and facilitate discussions between key community health and social service

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organizations to develop plans to address community needs highlighted by the Access to Care needs assessment.

SECTION 2. (a) The office of primary care and rural health shall oversee and support community efforts to collaboratively address the health and wellness needs of the State's most underserved rural residents and facilitate discussions between key community health and social service organizations to develop plans that align with appropriate providers' goals and objectives.

(b) The office of primary care and rural health shall include a one-time summary of community plans addressing the Access to Care needs assessment with the report that is to be submitted to the legislature prior to the regular session of 2024, pursuant to section 321-1.5, Hawaii Revised Statutes.

SECTION 3. This Act shall take effect upon its approval.

(Approved June 22, 2023.)