



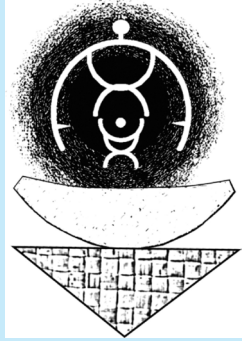
## Hawaiian Style:

# Integrating Hawaiian Values to Increase Diabetes Self-Management Skills for Native Hawaiians

by Michelle Malia Hiraishi



Diabetes is a health epidemic in our nation and the incidence of diabetes for the indigenous Native Hawaiian population is even greater. Hui Malama Ola Na `Oiwi has implemented a culturally competent and culturally appropriate diabetes education class that is helping Hawaiians afflicted with diabetes manage their chronic disease and improve their quality of life.



## Challenge

Native Hawaiians face immense health disparities when compared to other populations. One of the most critical of these is diabetes, which affects 1 in 15 Hawaii residents, but increases to 3 in 15 for the Native Hawaiian population. Meanwhile, within the state of Hawai`i, and especially Hawai`i Island (The Big Island), community resources offering care, education, and support are very limited. Native Hawaiians traditionally view treating our bodies with pharmaceutical medicine as opposed to natural means of healing causes one's body, mind, and spirit to be unbalanced and not in lokahi or harmony. Therefore, we often struggle to balance those traditional beliefs with western medicine. Additionally, relationships are a fundamental aspect in all of Hawaiian culture, and without a connection there is no progress. Historically, the western approach to medicine is in direct opposition to Hawaiian beliefs and values.

## Solution

Hui Malama Ola Na `Oiwi ("Hui Malama") provides diabetes education that has significantly reduced barriers for Native Hawaiians. Hui Malama promotes holistic health and active lifestyles, and bases programs on the traditional Hawaiian concept of wellness, giving attention to all aspects of life—physical, mental, and spiritual—in order to restore lokahi and overall balance. One of the agency's most successful programs is "Mai Ka Mala`ai" (From the Garden), a ten-session diabetes education and awareness class that meets weekly for 2½ hours. The course incorporates pre- and post-class clinical screening, weekly "Diabetes 101" education, weekly Specialist presentations, a healthy meal served at each session, and a "mala" (garden box) with soil and vegetable seedlings built at each family's home. Attendees are encouraged to bring their family members and/or "supporters" to be part of the class.

## Results

Graduates of Mai Ka Mala`ai have shared that the classes are non-threatening and easy to understand because of localized language and cultural sensitivity, which has made a difference in their ability to better understand their chronic disease. Data shows amazing improvement in numerous diabetes and other chronic-disease related risk factors. For example, in 2013 a whopping 92% of attendees lowered their hemoglobin A1c, 80% reduced their body mass index, and over 90% reported increasing their daily fruit and vegetable intake and increasing their daily physical activity.



*“Not only did I learn many things about my affliction, I also gained confidence and hope that I could truly manage my diabetes.”*

*- Graduate of Mai Ka Mala`a*

## Sustainable Success

The uniqueness of Hui Malama’s health education is not necessarily in the content delivered during classes, as the curriculum utilized is standardized from various sources (i.e. American Diabetes Association, Department of Health, etc). What is unique is the delivery of that information. The agency presents health information “local-style”, using local vernacular, in a respectful yet familiar and non-formal manner, thereby putting attendees at ease and increasing their receptivity and engagement. Cultural customs are honored and encouraged (i.e. time included for greeting of others, prayers, and songs of thanks, etc), and traditional Hawaiian values and practices are integrated into all aspects of the program’s delivery.

### Contact

**Michelle Malia Hiraishi**  
Hui Malama Ola Na `Oiwī  
Native Hawaiian Health Care  
System, Hawai`i Island  
69 Railroad Ave, Suite A-3  
Hilo, HI 96720  
808-969-9220 phone  
808-961-4794 fax

## Your Involvement is Key

In delivering health education, it is critical that local customs are honored and local values are incorporated. Likewise, it is paramount that the information is presented in a “non-clinical” style. We need you to support AA and NHPI communities by adopting policies to advance the following evidence-based and practice based strategies: support the production and marketing of healthy and fresh foods, support active living land-use planning and development, and ensure inclusion of AA and NHPI communities on state and local planning, advisory, and decision-making bodies.



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