

**ISLAND SECURITY POLICY INSTITUTE**

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**POLICY BRIEF**

# The Last Hospital on the Island

## *Public Health Emergency Infrastructure Policy for Geographically Isolated Island Communities*

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- **Island communities' dependence on sole-provider healthcare facilities creates a public health emergency vulnerability with no continental equivalent — a hard ceiling on surge capacity that cannot be relieved through regional redistribution.**
- **Post-COVID public health infrastructure investment has not adequately addressed island surge capacity — focusing on supply chain resilience and stockpiling without addressing the physical and workforce capacity limitations of island healthcare facilities.**
- **Pacific Island territory healthcare systems — where the federal government has unique responsibility — are particularly vulnerable, with facility ages, staffing levels, and equipment inventories documented as inadequate for surge scenarios.**

When COVID-19 reached Hawaii in March 2020, Maui Memorial Medical Center — the only hospital on Maui — had 54 ICU beds with approximately 85 percent normal occupancy.<sup>1</sup> A surge scenario consuming 120 percent of capacity would produce, in a continental healthcare region, a patient transfer and redistribution response. For Maui, that surge scenario would produce a medical airlift operation to Oahu limited by available medivac flights per day — a hard ceiling on the critically ill patients the island could transport to backup capacity.

## Policy Recommendations

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1. Fund island hospital surge capacity infrastructure investment — physical expansion, mobile surge capacity deployment, telemedicine infrastructure — through HHS and FEMA programs specifically designed for sole-provider island healthcare facilities.
2. Develop island-specific public health emergency preparedness standards establishing shelter-in-care protocols, pre-positioned pharmaceutical and equipment reserves, and medical evacuation capacity requirements reflecting actual surge management options.[FN]
3. Commission comprehensive public health emergency infrastructure assessments for Pacific Island territory healthcare systems to inform HHS investment decisions and legislative appropriations.

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## NOTES AND REFERENCES

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## ABOUT THE ISLAND SECURITY POLICY INSTITUTE

The Island Security Policy Institute (ISPI) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization based in Honolulu, Hawaii. ISPI produces practitioner-led research, policy analysis, training programs, and commissioned research on public safety, emergency preparedness, insider threat, and security policy for island and coastal communities worldwide. ISPI is registered as a federal contractor on SAM.gov under NAICS 541720. Warren Pulley, Founder & Executive Director.

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