



# HAWAII ISLAND FENTANYL TASK FORCE

## NEWSLETTER

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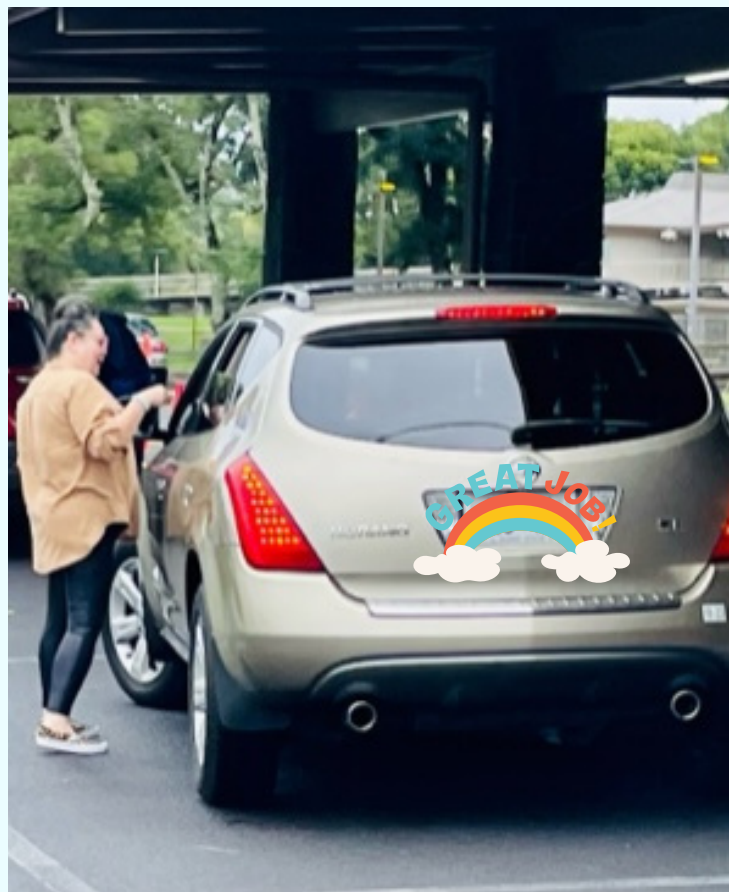
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**Kevin Kunz, MD**  
Addictions Specialist



**Wally Lau**  
Cultural Advisor



**Pua Carriaga**  
Task Force Admin Support

## ABOUT US

Fentanyl was first recognized on Hawaii Island in about 2017-2018. The origin of the Task Force began in November, 2021 when a 14-year-old girl died at home on Hawaii Island of a fentanyl OD. Although the cause of death was not officially confirmed until August, 2022, community members and health professionals knew quickly. A small group subsequently approached Major Mitch Roth, and the coalition now known as the Hawaii Island Fentanyl Task Force (HIFTF) was formed. The HIFTF organization started and remains a community coalition, and is not incorporated. As of December 31, 2022, there were 75 members representing various organizations throughout Hawaii.

## OUR PARTNERS

Addressing the fentanyl epidemic takes the work of many hands. That is why the HIFTF believes in collaboration. We are proud to collaborate with these partners, and welcome others interested in helping:

- Big Island Substance Abuse Council (BISAC)
- Boys and Girls Club of Hawaii
- Bridge House Hawaii
- CDC Foundation
- Community First Hawaii
- County of Hawaii Departments of:
  - ~ Fire/Emergency Medical Services
  - ~ Hawaii Police
  - ~ Mayor's Office
  - ~ Prosecuting Attorney
- Family Support Hawaii
- Going Home Hawaii
- Hawaii Island Recovery
- Hawaii Department of Health  
Adult Mental Health Division
- Hawaii Public Health Institute
- Hawaii Community College
- Hawaii Health & Harm Reduction Center
- Hawaii Island Community Health Center
- Hawaii Island Family Medicine Residency
- Hawaii Rise Foundation
- Healthy Mothers and Babies Coalition of Hawaii
- Hawaii State Rural Health Association
- High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA)
- Hilo Medical Center
- Hope Services
- Kipuka O Ke Ola Native Health Center
- Kona Community Hospital
- Ku Aloha Ola Mau
- Kumukahi Health and Wellness
- Lokahi Treatment Centers
- Men of Pa'a
- Neighborhood Place of Kona
- New Ohana Club of Kona
- Pū'ā Foundation
- State of Hawaii- Departments  
Education  
Governors' Office, Office of Wellness and Resilience  
Human Services-Adult Protective and Child Welfare Services  
UCERA, Hawaii Keiki Healthy and Ready to Learn
- United States Drug Enforcement Administration
- University of Hawaii- Hilo
- Vibrant Hawaii
- Waimea Community Association

### Vision

A community that is aware, informed, and empowered to prevent addiction, drug overdose, and other consequences of drug use on Hawaii Island.

### Mission

Our mission is to reduce the demand and supply of illicit drugs in all age groups, especially fentanyl through education, prevention, treatment, harm reduction and recovery support activities, and we support law enforcement and judicial initiatives.



# EDUCATION & PREVENTION

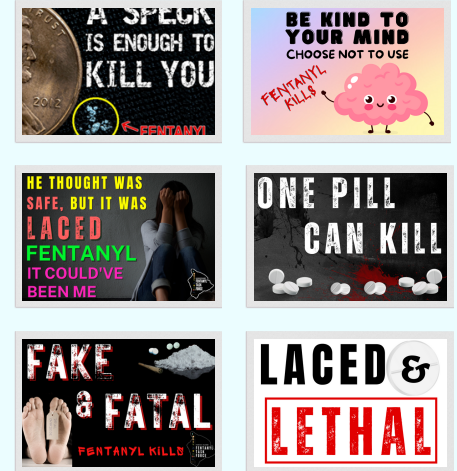
HITF strives to combat the Opioid Crisis through the expansion of education and prevention activities. With over 350 in-person and Zoom presentations, we have reached over 25,000 statewide. This has included presenting to various schools, government and business organizations, and social and civic clubs throughout the state. Notably, more than 80% of Hawaii Island public and private schools have received our "Choose Not to Use" presentation.

HITF has coordinated a few sign waving events and provided support to partner organizations promoting awareness of the dangers of Fentanyl. Waving signs with messages like, "Laced & Lethal", "One Pill Can Kill", "Fake & Fatal", "I Thought it was Safe, but it was Laced", and "Be Kind to Your Mind", the message is clear: Fentanyl is dangerous.

To date, HITF has distributed 4000+ boxes of Narcan throughout Hawaii Island. In addition to distributing Narcan, HITF members and volunteers provide training on how to administer it. This has been done at mass distribution events and at various presentations.

Our reach has expanded exponentially with the addition of our website and Social Media pages. Media coverage through local radio, newspapers, TV news stations, local TV networks including Na Leo TV and our local Hawaii Public Broadcasting System (Hawaii PBS) continues to feature our very own Task Force members- Dr. Kimo Alameda, Dr. Kevin Kunz, and Heather Lusk (HHHRC).

## HITF Posters and Media Messaging



## HITF Team with Bulk Narcan Shipment for Distribution



## Sign Waving Event with the Pū'ā Foundation



## Na Leo TV- Health is Everywhere with Dr. Kimo Alameda Featuring Senator Joy San Buenaventura



Ka'u Narcan Giveaway Event

Waimea Narcan Giveaway Event

# OUR NEWS CONFERENCE

On February 24th, HIFTF released a news conference urging the community to normalize buprenorphine as a treatment for opioid/fentanyl addiction. With the drug overdose epidemic escalating in Hawaii, Hawaii County is being hit the hardest, with at least one overdose death every 11 days.

Sold under some brand names including Suboxone, Subutex and Sublocade, buprenorphine is a safe and effective medication used to treat Opioid Use Disorder (opioid addiction). In persons with opioid use disorder, it decreases the death rate by 70% and stabilizes the lives of those struggling with opioid addiction.

Prior to January 12, 2023, the use of buprenorphine was highly restricted due to archaic, regressive federal regulations. Some of the largest barriers to this life-saving medication included a required registration waiver and time-consuming training for providers, along with patient caps on the total number of individuals a prescriber could treat. All of these restrictions have been lifted. Now all medical providers can easily prescribe buprenorphine to appropriate patients with opioid use disorder.

While the barrier to prescribing buprenorphine has been removed, there are still barriers to its optimal use. Dr. Kunz emphatically urged health professionals and the entire health care community in Hawaii to get on board, and bring their clinical and corporate practices up to date. Dr. Kunz addressed those struggling with opioid addiction with this heartfelt message: *"Please know that treatment is available. Don't give up. Treatment works. Recovery is possible."*

Dr. Kimo Alameda introduced Amanda Deguair to share her own experiences with opioid addiction, and her recovery through the use of buprenorphine. Amanda emphasized the fear of withdrawal and the fear of always wanting and needing them (opioids) being "paralyzing", and believes it is the biggest reason most stay in addiction.

Amanda shared finding one of the few doctors on the Big Island who offered Suboxone. "The Bup plan was clearly spelled out. I was led into an exam room and when my withdrawal was sufficient but not severe, I was given a tab of suboxone to put under my tongue. About 30 mins later, when the doctor returned, he turned the light on, and couldn't believe it! I felt more normal than I'd felt in 10yrs! I had walked into that office, terrified, craving a pill and my mind was racing. And within 30 mins, I felt like the fight was over and there was hope again. I also didn't feel "high". To not feel "high" and to not be craving a pill was unbelievable. Had I known what I was going to experience, I wouldn't have waited so long. I want to thank that doctor for not shaming me and making me feel like a "drug addict", in the sense that I was a bad person. He treated me with dignity and respect and that made getting help so much easier. I hope others find an understanding medical provider to help them live a new life as I did. Now that suboxone is more readily available to anyone who needs it, this is possible."

Amanda states that she been in recovery for 18 years, and credits her recovery to Suboxone and the support of a recovery group. Amanda is not alone in this thought. People with opioid addiction who have been treated with buprenorphine are quick to state that it has changed their lives for the better.

Click link below to see the online article:

<https://www.bigislandvideonews.com/2023/02/24/video-hawai%CA%BBI-island-fentanyl-task-force-holds-news-conference/>

## BUPRENORPHINE: THE GAME CHANGER



**Dr. Kevin Kunz**



**Amanda Deguair**



# OUR SUMMIT

Held on May 9th, National Fentanyl Awareness Day, HIFTF hosted the 2nd Annual Fentanyl and Addictions Summit in Waimea, Hawaii Island. A diverse group of over 200 individuals attended the summit. The summit promised attendees the opportunity to network with professionals and people with lived-experience, in search of best practices in reducing addictions and overdose deaths. It did not disappoint.

Opening remarks by Hawaii County Mayor Mitch Roth and Hawaii State Director of the Office of Wellness and Resilience, Tia Hartsock (on behalf of Governor Josh Green) showed Hawaii State and County's support of the Task Force's efforts. Also in attendance were Senators Herbert "Tim" Richards III, and Joy San Buenventura. Senator Joy San Buenventura shared updates on Senate Bill 671 a bill unanimously approved by Hawaii Legislature in April to decriminalize Fentanyl Test Strips.

Leading experts in the fields of addiction, prevention and treatment, and harm reduction provided information on their fields of expertise. Speakers representing Hawaii's finest in law enforcement, emergency services, and public health provided statistics on mortality data, emergency medical services encounters for heroin/fentanyl overdoses, and Narcan administrations and areas throughout Hawaii Island. HPD provided stats regarding personnel numbers assigned to areas throughout Hawaii Island, recovery stats, patterns of distribution, general investigation information, and information on canine officers. A panel comprised of HPD, EMS, and a DEA representative discussed ways on decreasing the supply of illicit drugs. As an added bonus, participants received a certificate of completion and earned 6 continuing education credits for their attendance. Attendees also heard lived experience from a person in recovery, as well as from a person who lost a loved one due to a fatal Fentanyl overdose. HIFTF also honored key figures working tirelessly in our community with the "Bowl of Light" Awards.





# SUMMIT NEXT DAY FOLLOW UP MEETING

The next day follow up meeting offered participants an opportunity to debrief the summit, as well as discuss next steps. Breakfast was provided. Nearly 40 participants attended, the excitement from the previous day still fresh on their minds. Participants broke out into groups to discuss the six priorities identified by the Task Force. The groups discussed and identified barriers, and strategized solutions. Also identified here were the committee heads as follows:

- **Education & Prevention:** Sally Ancheta
- **Harm Reduction:** Erin Samura, PharmD
- **Recovery:** Ili Tolentino
- **Data & Communication:** Dr. Kimo Alameda
- **Early Intervention:** DOE Representative (TBD)
- **Treatment:** Dr. Kevin Kunz

The general feeling of all before leaving was recognizing that while there is much work to be done, the task force was off to a great start.





# LEGISLATION

In January of 2023, Senator Joy San Buenaventura sought to introduce Bill SB671 to decriminalize fentanyl test strips in an effort to save lives. With one person dying from a drug overdose (often involving fentanyl) every 11 days on Hawaii Island alone, it was hard to believe that this method for reducing harm is illegal in the state of Hawaii. Members of the Hawaii Island Fentanyl Task Force were quick to approach State Senator San Buenaventura, Chair of Health and Human Services, with their concerns.

While fentanyl test strips are seen as a method to help prevent drug overdoses and reduce harm, under current Hawaii State Law, they are illegal in Hawaii and could carry up to a \$500 fine if found in possession. These strips are low cost, and quick and easy to use. While fentanyl test strips can help prevent deaths, there are still those who oppose them. One misconception includes the idea that test strips encourage drug use.

Current Hawaii State Law classifies Fentanyl Test Strips as "drug paraphernalia", which means "... all equipment, products, and materials of any kind that are used, primarily intended for use, or primarily designed for use, in planting, propagating, cultivating, growing, harvesting, manufacturing, compounding, converting, producing, processing, preparing, testing, analyzing, packaging, repackaging, storing, containing, concealing, injecting, ingesting, inhaling, or otherwise introducing into the human body a controlled substance in violation of this chapter. It includes but is not limited to: "... Testing equipment used, primarily intended for use, or primarily designed for use in identifying, or in analyzing the strength, effectiveness, or purity of prohibited controlled substances".

Senator San Buenaventura's bill sought to amend the existing law by excluding fentanyl test strips from the definition of "drug paraphernalia", and to instead add a new definition to be appropriately inserted and to read:

"Fentanyl test strip" means a small strip of paper that can detect the presence of fentanyl in:

- (1) Different kinds of drugs, including cocaine, methamphetamine, and heroin; and
- (2) Different drug forms, such as pills, powder, and injectable drugs."

In April 2023, the bill to decriminalize fentanyl test strips was passed unanimously and was awaiting Governor Josh Green's approval this summer. While drug overdose fatalities continue to rise, the most recent to break news was a mass overdose on June 4th, which involved five overdoses, two of which were fatal. It was confirmed that fentanyl was found on the scene.

On Thursday, June 22, Governor Josh Green signed new legislation, recategorizing fentanyl test strips as medical paraphernalia. Mahalo Governor Josh Green and Senator San Buenaventura for championing efforts to decriminalize fentanyl test strips and help save lives.



**Fentanyl Test Strips**



**Senator Joy San Buenaventura**



**Governor Josh Green signs bill decriminalizing Fentanyl Test Strips in a ceremony held at Hawaii Island Community Health Center's Kealakehe Clinic on June 22, 2023**

## WHAT'S NEXT?

And the good news continue to roll in! With the news of fentanyl test strips now recategorized as medical paraphernalia, what's next? Hawaii Health & Harm Reduction Center (HHHRC) received \$200,000 in grant funds from the CDC and is working on setting up vending machines at various locations throughout the state which will dispense naloxone (also known by the brand name Narcan) 24 hours a day (24/7) ideally. In addition to naloxone, these vending machines will also offer fentanyl test strips. This is huge news for harm reduction, as people can have access to these life-saving tools. The Hawaii Fentanyl Task Force is working with HHHRC and the Hawaii State Department of Health to secure various sites throughout Hawaii Island to house these vending machines. We will continue to keep you posted on the progress of these vending machines.

**Picture of a Narcan and fentanyl test strip vending machine in Kentucky.**



## LAST BUT NOT LEAST... OUR WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Hawaii Island Fentanyl Task Force's website went live this past April. Please visit us at [hifftf.org](http://hifftf.org) to learn more about who we are, and what we are about. Learn more about the priorities we are working on as a task force, who our partners are, events happening in the community, and see us featured in the news! Check out our recent summit, and review our five year strategic plan. If you'd like more information regarding the Hawaii Island Fentanyl Task Force, you can contact us via the website and through our Facebook page, or call (808)965-3083, or email [info.hifftf@gmail.com](mailto:info.hifftf@gmail.com).

