



# Indigenous Framework Review

Version 1.1

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**Summary:** This review is to introduce Indigenous approaches to disaster preparedness in Hawai'i and other Indigenous communities to create disaster response plans. Recovering from disaster and creating a resource for community disaster resilience plans based on the importance of community connections such as, aloha in Hawai'i as one of the core values to build a strong sense of neighborliness connection as a disaster preparedness tool. Cultural Frameworks used in cultural training includes Hawai'i-based, Pacific Islander-based cultural and linguistic frameworks to, the cultural and linguistic priorities for this project are specific to Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders. The purpose of this approach is to achieve cultural relevance in social and cultural determinants of behavioral health specific to islanders.

## Background

To achieve cultural relevance, this curriculum emphasized the social and cultural determinants of behavioral health specific to islanders, as informed by content experts and literature review. A guiding principle of this approach includes but is not limited to the National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) in Health and Health Care, *Nā Pou Kihī*, *Kumu Hōnua Maui Ola*, *Mā'awe Pono* and other health frameworks based on Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander epistemologies (ways of knowing) aimed to address the social and cultural determinants of health to achieve health equity (Kaholokula, 2017; Leo, 2009, Kahakalau, 2019). Central to *Nā Pou Kihī* is the acknowledgement of historical trauma. For this reason, our series sought to affirm the lived experience of the populations we serve that find colonization and illegal occupation to be the primary disaster upon which others are built. Nature is not a disaster but a critical opportunity for community strengthening.

Social and cultural determinants of behavioral health such as secure access to food, housing, childcare, jobs and school, may be viewed as signs and symptoms of behavioral health issues due to the stress and social isolation that can result from maintaining these basic human needs. Trainings aimed to increase the capacity of providers, clinicians, and cultural practitioners to recognize social and cultural determinants that hinder mental health and place families, communities and individuals at risk of behavioral health issues such as serious mental illness (SMI), substance use disorder (SUD), or co-occurring disorders (COD).

Our approach was also designed to build capacity for certified substance abuse counselors (CSAC) to incorporate disaster response prevention across the 12 Core Functions from a cultural perspective. By teaching linkages to providers in other areas of the health care and emergency response systems, as well as social, community and culture-based services that address the social determinants, we aimed to demonstrate how disaster preparedness is a necessary part of treatment from

screening and assessment to treatment planning, counseling, and referral.

Indigenous frameworks holistically benefit all communities by focusing on social, emotional, and cultural well-being. Australia's recognition of these community developed frameworks latches the gap between western and Indigenous and the intersection of historical and contemporary responses to disaster.

## Methodology

This evidence synthesis emphasizes the importance of recognizing Indigenous traditions and customs that have guided natural event preparedness and response. As part of the State of Hawai'i Department of Health, Alcohol and Drug Abuse Division, the State Disaster Response Cultural Training refers to Indigenous frameworks as a resource to respond to historical and cultural determinants of health. Literature searches were performed using Google, Google Scholar, the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa Library, local resources, as well as professional and personal networking initiated by project clinical advisors, cultural advisors, and the principal investigator. Written by undergraduate research assistants and graduate research assistants in the Māpuna Lab.

## Tribal Preparedness

U.S. and Canadian governments recognize the unique challenges presented to Indigenous communities during a disaster. The sovereignty between Tribal nations and settler governments often create discongruence in response efforts. To remedy this, British Columbia (BC) implemented the 2019 Emergency

Management Memorandum of Understanding that upheld BC First Nations as "full partners in the governance and operations of emergency management."

In 2013, President Obama amended the Stafford Act through the Sandy Recovery Improvement Act to allow federally-recognized American Indian and Alaskan Tribal Governments to request a Presidential emergency or major disaster declaration through their respective tribal liaisons. These policies serve as the start of integrating Indigenous knowledge and respecting cultural practices as an integral part of disaster preparedness for First Nations, American Indians, and Alaskan Natives. As a result, government agencies offer the following resources:

- The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) created the [Tribal Emergency Preparedness Law brief](#) to help agencies interpret Tribal Emergency Preparedness Law. This brief outlines tribal authorities, how federal Indian law works in emergency preparedness, and cross-jurisdictional coordination.
- The U.S. Department of the Interior has [The Bureau of Indian Affairs Emergency Management](#) (BIA EM) which acts as a coordinating body for federally-recognized tribes and government agencies like the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and Indian Health Service (IHS).
- The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services offers an [American Indian & Alaskan Native Disaster Preparedness Resource](#) as part of their

Public Health Emergency preparedness and planning. This resource outlines partner agencies for behavioral health tools during a disaster.

- Lastly, Canada's National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health's [Indigenous Disaster Response](#) page provides case studies that demonstrate how response efforts without tribal involvement have been “problematic” and describe their commitment to First Nation inclusion in both the planning and response.

## Recovering from Disaster

Currently the resources available provide tools for coordination with American Indians, Alaskan Natives, and First Nations but do not speak to the ways Indigenous people have experienced recovery from past disasters. ***We offer reframing disasters from adverse events to opportunities that maximize the resources these events may provide.*** For example, the Native Hawaiian framework of *Ka Hōnua Maui Ola* means The Earth's Healing. Heavy flooding and hurricanes are classified in the western sense as disasters. However, Indigenous ways of knowing see these natural events as a provision of resources, like an abundance of water, *waiwai*, equaling wealth. Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders view the response work as an opportunity for togetherness to build community resilience.

## Results/Findings

As the world experiences more frequent and more exacerbated disasters, many communities are turning inwards and using

Indigenous knowledge, cultural values and practices in recovery and rebuilding efforts. There are many lessons to be learned from how Pacific Islands communities - who are increasingly threatened by disasters - respond to adversity. These lessons are demonstrated in the annotated bibliographies that follow.

## Bibliography 1

Kenney, C. M., & Phibbs, S. (2015). *A Māori love story: Community-led disaster management in response to the Ōtautahi (Christchurch) earthquakes as a framework for action*. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 14, 46–55. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdrr.2014.12.010>

Kenney and Phibbs use the Actor-Network Theory to explore how Māori cultural values such as kotahitanga (unity), manaakitanga (hospitality), relationality (whanaunga-tanga) and rangatiratanga (leadership) shaped the Māori Recovery Network's response to the 2011 Christchurch earthquakes. At the foundation, the cultural value of aroha nui ki te Tangata – extend love to all people – served as the guiding principle in the Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu's (Christchurch's resident tribe) disaster response efforts. This principle “constitutes both a value and set of practices that must be learnt because the giving of time and self for the good of all, rather than the well-being of the individual, is considered a positive indicator of a person's mana.”

Because these values and practices are innate within Māori communities, it allowed for a swift stand up of the Māori Recovery Network and facilitated a well-coordinated response to the needs of both Māori and other Christchurch communities. Response

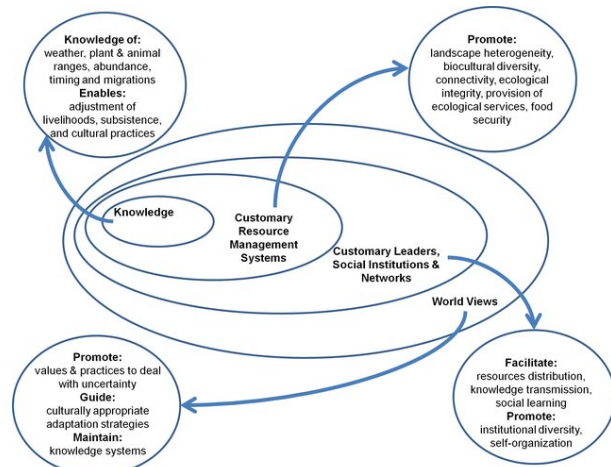
efforts included home visits to assess family and housing needs, delivery of food and care packages, mitigation and restoration to create a habitable community, and social support as embodied through the practice of kanohi ki te kanohi (face to face engagement). Kenney and Phibbs write that these Māori “cultural technologies” be utilized in pre-disaster planning and post-disaster response, however, the lack of Māori representation in national and local emergency management agencies work against supporting these proven cultured-based strategies.

## Bibliography 2

McMillen, H., Ticktin, T., Friedlander, A., Jupiter, S., Thaman, R., Campbell, J., Veitayaki, J., Giambelluca, T., Nihmei, S., Rupeni, E., Apis-Overhoff, L., Aalbersberg, W., & Orcherton, D. (2014). *Small islands, valuable insights: Systems of customary resource use and resilience to climate change in the Pacific*. Ecology and Society, 19(4).

<https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-06937-190444>

McMillen et al. describe the relationship between Indigenous and local knowledge (ILK) within Pacific Island communities and their resilience and adaptation to climate change. ILK is composed of many knowledge-practice-belief systems centered around the relationship that Pacific Islanders have with their environment. These systems include four areas: local knowledge of the environment, associated customary resource management systems, social institutions that guide management practices, and worldviews.



Years of environmental variability have disrupted the livelihood of Pacific Islands communities. Limitations on resources and tight feedback loops enable Pacific Islands communities to observe environmental strains more visibly than larger countries. Surviving through continuous environmental alterations has been a result of ILK utilization and modification to meet their current needs.

## Bibliography 3

Mcleod, E., Bruton-Adams, M., Förster, J., Franco, C., Gaines, G., Gorong, B., James, R., Posing-Kulwaum, G., Tara, M., & Terk, E. (2019). *Lessons From the Pacific Islands – Adapting to Climate Change by Supporting Social and Ecological Resilience*. Frontiers in Marine Science, 6. <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fmars.2019.00289>

Mcleod et al., describe how Pacific Islands communities are leading different projects focused on implementing sustainable climate change solutions. Local ecosystem-based adaptation (EBA) efforts introduce adaptability strategies which include traditional well revitalization, the application of climate-safe agriculture, and

implementation of protected areas throughout islands in Micronesia and Melanesia. These strategies increase the community's productivity and adaptability towards freshwater security, food security, and the protection of the land.

In Chuuk, the island of Oneisomw has faced challenges with freshwater security due to natural disasters such as drought and saltwater intrusion, along with human impacts such as pollution and waste from dumpsites. In response, Oneisomw residents revitalized traditional wells as an EBA implementation strategy to reduce any form of pollutants contaminating these water sources. Oneisomw also implemented a locally managed marine area (LMMA) to minimize coral reef threats like dynamite fishing, overfishing, coral and sand removal, and commercial harvesting. The LMMA is managed through their *mechen* traditional management systems. The *mechen* system institutes an agreement within the community as to when seasonal fishing is allowed and when the LMMA is closed for fishery management. Chuukese cultural values and respect for the *mechen* uphold these seasons.

Climate change also impacts food security, especially in the Pacific Islands. Traditional farming techniques such as shading crops with palm leaves and trees, and composting seaweed have been used to improve agroforestry cultivation and increase food access. On the island of Ahus in Papua New Guinea where fish are the primary food source, they have turned to Palau's traditional clam farming methods to help replenish their lagoons.

These projects are not without their challenges. Remoteness of islands, lack of

technical and financial capacity, and governance are just a few barriers to the expansion of these projects.

#### Bibliography 4

Lauer, M. (2012). *Oral Traditions or Situated Practices? Understanding How Indigenous Communities Respond to Environmental Disasters*. Human Organization, 71(2), 176–187.

<https://doi.org/10.17730/humo.71.2.j0w0101277ww6084>

Lauer uses the practice approach to examine how Indigenous communities successfully responded to the 2007 Solomon Islands earthquake and tsunami. ***The practice approach holds that there are three factors influencing disaster response: oral tradition, modern knowledge, and improvisation.*** Oral tradition includes transgenerational myths and stories revealing tsunami warning signs and protocol. Modern knowledge, or non-local sources of knowledge, include radio programs and newspaper articles that cite tsunami incidence elsewhere. Improvised response capacities refer to automatic physiological reactions as well as aftermath organization. ***Despite the catastrophic damage inflicted by the tsunami, the integration of all three factors led to relatively few fatalities.***

The 8.1 magnitude earthquake and subsequent tsunami was an unprecedented catastrophe in the Solomon Islands. Amidst deadly landslides and flooding, seven Indigenous communities in Roviana, Vonavona, and Simbo managed to survive with only nine fatalities. Household surveys and ethnographic interviews revealed no consistent reason that the majority fled to safety in time; rather, there were mixed



responses citing oral tradition, modern knowledge, and improvisation. In the aftermath of the disaster, survival and community rebuilding was successful due to an improvised “reciprocal exchange of food and supplies.” Cohabitation, sharing, and prayer were key values that prevented violence.

## Bibliography 5

Ali, T., Buergelt, P. T., Paton, D., Smith, J. A., Maypilama, E. L., Yungirra, D., Dhamarrandji, S., & Gundjarranbuy, R. (2021). *Facilitating Sustainable Disaster Risk Reduction in Indigenous Communities: Reviving Indigenous Worldviews, Knowledge and Practices through Two-Way Partnering*. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(3), 855. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18030855>

This article focuses on the Indigenous community, Yolŋu Galiwin’ku, in the Northern Territory of Australia where Indigenous and non-Indigenous work together to interpret and analyze theories and technique that resonate with community members to create a holistic, intersectional Indigenous philosophy on disaster risk reduction (DRR). Drawing from yarning circles with community members, researchers applied philosophy to social constructionist grounded theory and ethnography to demonstrate how histories of colonization exacerbate the need for Indigenous community-based DRR related to natural disaster.

In Yolŋu Galiwin’ku “wisdom and authority of elders in the community” are the core of vital knowledge, especially maintaining relational connections with nature to understand the early warning signs in preparation for disaster response. It is

important to ask permission from Elders, tribal leaders having the longest relationship with the environment with live-in experiences on preparedness and response, to draw from their knowledge and organization.

The emphasis of DRR on socio-cultural-environmental capacity to be responsive to relational worldviews that include ecological knowledge and systems of reciprocity were definitive aspects of Indigenous-led community frameworks.

## Conclusion

Indigenous knowledge, cultural values, and Pacific Island traditions have been used to guide and adjust the ways of living to mitigate changes brought on by adverse events. As support is growing for Native Americans and Alaskan Natives to be central in their disaster planning and response, the same support must be extended to Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders. Ultimately, the disaster of colonization as a non-native interruption of Indigenous knowledge systems has harmed Indigenous communities by undermining traditional knowledge and disrupting connection to survival-based ecological, cultural knowledge and practices. These harms are evident through social discord in post-disaster response efforts managed by settler governments in Indigenous communities. Thus, it is imperative to engage Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and other Indigenous communities in pre-disaster planning and post-disaster response.

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