

## Column: Hawaii homeless services burden Chinatown

- By Lee Stack, Teddy Chong and Chu Lan Shubert-Kwock
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COURTESY DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

Honolulu Mayor Kirk Caldwell, speaking, and other officials marked the first anniversary of the Punawai Rest Stop in Iwilei in January.

We wish to thank the Star-Advertiser for its informative article detailing plans to use federal CARES Act funding to acquire property in Chinatown for yet another homeless facility in our small, nationally historic “cultural gem,” as the mayor likes to call it (“[New IHS facility among virus-related city projects](#),” May 14).

For the past seven years of the Caldwell administration, several initiatives to provide homeless services have been launched in Chinatown. The city hygiene center opened in the newly established Safe Haven facility. The H4 (Hawaii Homeless

Healthcare Hui) medical triage site opened. LEAD (Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion) started to work in the area. Housing First and Section 8 vouchers have been distributed to people with drug and alcohol addictions for accommodations in city housing in Chinatown.

Since approximately 70% of city-owned affordable housing complexes are in the Chinatown area, this means that a disproportionate number of people with serious addictions are being housed in Chinatown. The city refuses to disclose the actual number of vouchers distributed for this area.

The city assured Chinatown businesses and residents that these facilities and services would improve the area, lead to reductions in homelessness and a better neighborhood. Have things improved over the past seven years? Anyone who visits the area or the website [chinatownwatch.com](http://chinatownwatch.com) knows that the opposite is true.

Chinatown has become a nexus for homeless with serious addiction and mental health issues — people who at all hours roam naked, shout obscenities, defecate, drink and do drugs on the streets and in the parks. People whom the city and service providers label “resistant to services.”

Further, the Institute for Human Services (IHS) venture does not meet the funding criteria specified in the CARES Act, and would duplicate services already planned and funded as part of the currently operating Punawai Rest Stop near IHS in the Iwilei area.

A city-published document says, in part, that the CARES Act requires [Coronavirus Relief Funds](#) be used only to cover necessary expenditures incurred due to the public health emergency with respect to the 2019 coronavirus disease, and were not accounted for in the city budget approved as of March 27, 2020 (when the CARES Act was enacted).

The \$19.7 million Punawai facility is operational on the first floor, but the second-floor medical triage center and third-floor respite beds/apartment units remain unfinished three years later. Area Councilmember Carol Fukunaga has stated: “Although I helped fund the acquisition/establishment of the Punawai Rest Stop facilities in Iwilei between 2016-2018, the city has not released the second floor for a medical triage clinic to the H4 program between 2019-2020. There is no medical clinic at that site today.”

Why does the city not finish that stalled project, on land that was acquired for that purpose, prior to funding property acquisition for different service providers to operate a similar facility approximately a half-mile away? Not only is this a duplication of services, but it reveals a lack of overall planning, community consultation and over-concentration of services in a small, culturally significant, densely commercial and residential district.

The address of the proposed new IHS facility is one block from nine residential towers totaling over 5,500 residents, as well as a school, a neighborhood park with playground equipment and many small Chinatown businesses.

Our organizations oppose the use of CARES Act funds for such a venture, and call for the city to complete the promised H4 medical triage unit at the Punawai Rest Stop and to distribute Housing First vouchers equitably across county districts.

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