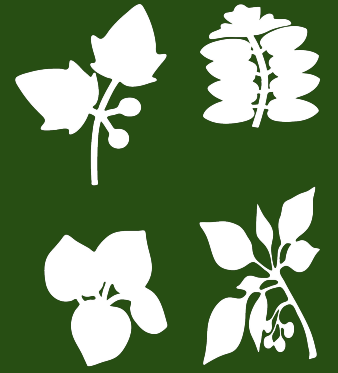




# Ten Year Follow Up Study on Dermatologic Access in Hawai'i



Katelyn Stenger BS,<sup>1</sup> Heather M. Zimmerman BSN,<sup>1</sup> Ralina Karagenova MS,<sup>1</sup> Ryan Keli'i Shontell PhD,<sup>1</sup> Douglas W. Johnson MD,<sup>1,2</sup> and David J. Elpern MD<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Hawai'i John A. Burns School of Medicine, <sup>2</sup>The Queen's Health System, <sup>3</sup>The Skin Clinic

## Background

A 2014 study on access to dermatology care for Medicaid patients in Hawai'i found that only 23% of dermatologists accepted all Medicaid plans, while 12% accepted some, leaving 65% unable to treat Medicaid patients.<sup>1</sup> Hawai'i faces physician shortages in dermatology, exacerbated by a high UV index and a tropical climate that increases dermatological issues.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, a recent study revealed that Native Hawaiians experience later-stage melanoma diagnoses, leading to higher mortality rates compared to Whites and Asians.<sup>3</sup> Many Native Hawaiians are uninsured, with 34% relying on Medicaid, highlighting a significant social disparity.<sup>4</sup> This paper aims to follow up on the 2014 study to assess changes in dermatology access for Medicaid users in the past decade as well as to analyze wait times with a focus on our neighboring islands in the state of Hawaii.

## Methods

We contacted all publicly listed, board-certified dermatologists in Hawai'i to request an appointment for a changing mole, specifically mentioning QUEST 'Ohana, a Medicaid insurance option. QUEST 'Ohana was selected because it is one of five Medicaid managed care organizations in the state.<sup>5</sup> We also inquired about general Medicaid acceptance and appointment wait times.

Data was collected on 57 dermatologists, with exclusion criteria being those who had relocated, traveled intermittently to Hawai'i, were retired, or worked for federal entities like the VA. This left 52 dermatologists: 7 from Kaiser and 44 in private practice. Some may have affiliations with both settings, but this did not significantly affect Medicaid acceptance, as many of these offices declined QUEST. Overall, 35 dermatologists gave information on wait time. For calculating Medicaid access, Kaiser dermatologists were excluded since they had their own form of Medicaid, Kaiser Quest, leaving our final sample size was 45 dermatologists for Medicaid calculations.

Island	Amount of dermatologists	Mean wait time (days)
Big Island	3	99
Maui	5	36.4
O'ahu	26	30.7
Kaua'i	1	168

Table 1: Wait time in days to be seen for a changing mole, separated by islands of Hawai'i.

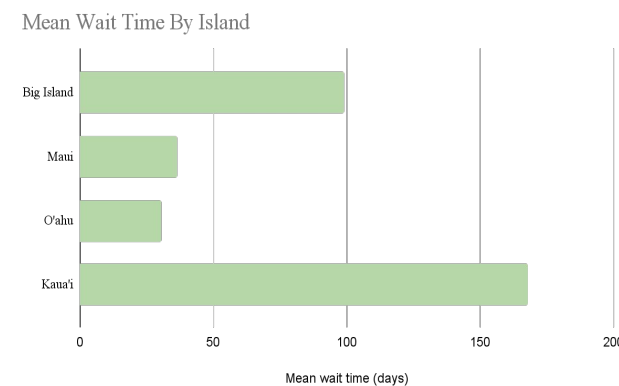


Figure 2: Wait time in days to be seen for a changing mole, separated by island of Hawai'i.

## Results

Wait times on Maui, Kaua'i, and the Big Island were longer than on O'ahu, which has a more metropolitan environment and a less severe physician shortage (Table 1, Figures 1, 2). Of 52 offices, 35 provided a wait time upon learning the insurance type was QUEST, though some declined to estimate wait times after hearing the insurance type.

Of the 52 dermatologists surveyed, 34.6% (18) did not accept Medicaid, while 65.4% (34) accepted some form of QUEST. On the different islands of Hawai'i, Maui and O'ahu had similar rates of dermatologists accepting Medicaid at 60% and 62% respectively, while Big Island had the smallest percentage at 25% accepting Medicaid (Table 2, Figure 3). Kaua'i only had one publicly listed dermatologist who did take Medicaid. After excluding the 7 Kaiser dermatologists, 45 remained, and there was a drop in dermatologists accepting Medicaid with 60% (27) accepting at least one form of QUEST and 40% (18) not accepting any. Compared to the 2014 data, there was an increase from 35% in 2014 to 60% in 2024 taking at least one form of Medicaid.

Dermatologists were also stratified by certification in Mohs micrographic surgery or dermatopathology. Only six board-certified Mohs surgeons practice in Hawai'i, with all but one accepting QUEST. There was one board-certified dermatopathologist who also practiced general dermatology. Notably, all dermatologists associated with larger organizations that offer self-sponsored insurance accepted their own form of QUEST.

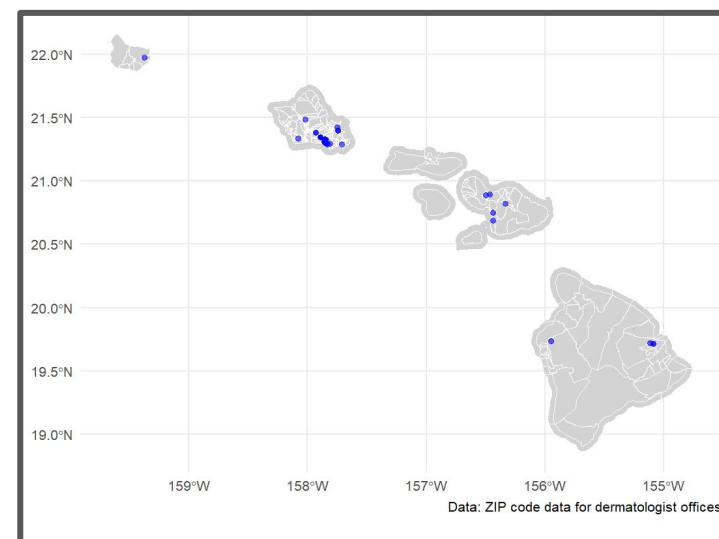


Figure 1: Distribution of dermatology offices by zip code in Hawai'i. Zip codes with higher numbers of offices have larger point markers.

	Take Medicaid	Does not take Medicaid	Total
Big Island	1	3	4
Maui	3	2	5
O'ahu	22	13	35
Kaua'i	1	0	1

Table 2: Medicaid access separated by islands of Hawai'i.

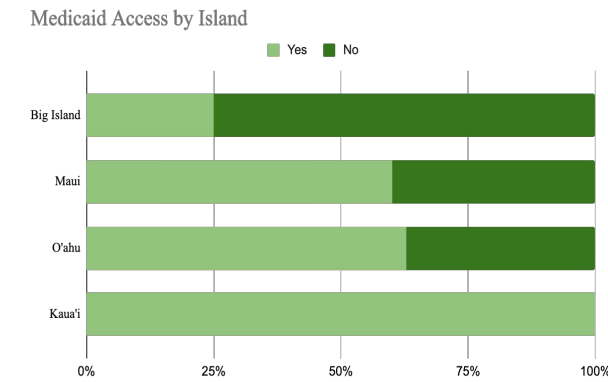


Figure 3: Medicaid access separated by islands of Hawai'i.

## Conclusion

The percentage of dermatologists in Hawai'i who take Medicaid has increased from 35% in 2014 to 60% in 2024. Wait times on neighboring islands have also improved, dropping from approximately 182.6 days in 2014 to 42.57 days in 2024; however, when analyzing general dermatologists separately, the average wait time is 38.2 days.

Despite these improvements, Hawai'i still faces a significant shortage of physicians and dermatologists, worsened by many refusing to accept Medicaid patients. Approximately 25% of the general population and at least 34% of Native Hawaiians rely on Medicaid. Hawai'i's tropical climate and geographical location contribute to a higher prevalence of dermatological diseases, highlighting the need for targeted solutions.

Establishing a dermatology residency in Hawai'i could address low Medicaid acceptance by training doctors familiar with local dermatological challenges and social determinants of health. Many specialists relocating to Hawai'i may underestimate the high cost of living and unique operational challenges, which could deter them from accepting Medicaid.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, a deeper understanding of community-specific social determinants often comes from lived experience, suggesting that localized training could be beneficial. A thorough evaluation of the factors contributing to this disparity is essential, along with open discussions. Future studies should examine Kaiser's expansion in the state and its effects on dermatological access. By addressing these ongoing issues, we can improve health outcomes for all residents of Hawai'i.

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