

**Dr. Michael Epp.** The Pacific Island Health Officers Association (PIHOA) is a non-profit organization led by the Ministers, Secretaries, and Directors of Health of the U.S.-Affiliated Pacific Islands (USAPI). The USAPI include the three U.S. Flag Territories of Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa, and the three Freely Associated States (independent nations in a special compact relationship with the United States) of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Republic of Palau, and the Federated States of Micronesia (Pohnpei, Kosrae, Chuuk, and Yap).

The USAPI are populated by more than 500,000 people who live on hundreds of islands and atolls spanning millions of square miles of ocean and crossing five Pacific time zones. PIHOA's mission is to improve the health and well-being of USAPI communities by providing, through consensus, a unified credible voice on health issues of regional significance."

## **Government of the Federated States of Micronesia**

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### **FSM INFORMATION SERVICES**

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Today: **May 25, 2010**

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## **STATE OF HEALTH EMERGENCY DECLARED BY THE PACIFIC ISLAND HEALTH OFFICERS' ASSOCIATION**

Press Release #0510-15

Palikir, Pohnpei – FSM Information Services

May 20, 2010

On May 24, 2010, the Pacific Island Health Officers Association declared a Regional State of Health Emergency due to the epidemic of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in the United States Affiliated Pacific Islands (USAPI), which include American Samoa, Guam, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of Palau, and the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands.

"These islands have some of the highest rates of non-communicable disease in the world. Diabetes, heart diseases, strokes, cancer and other NCDs are killing off Pacific peoples, placing a significant burden on their daily functionality, and threatening the national security of these

island countries and territories,” explained Dr. Stevenson Kuartei, PIHOA President and Minister of Health of the Republic of Palau. “Non-communicable diseases impair workers, increase absenteeism, cause untold suffering to patients and families but also lead to increased health care costs, including off island medical referrals.”

Besides declaring a Regional State of Health Emergency, the declaration directs the PIHOA Secretariat to partner with a wide variety of groups to develop a regional NCD policy that will help coordinate partners and resources more effectively and make an array of recommendations to donors, health agencies, legislatures, regional associations, traditional leaders, community- and faith-based groups, and other sectors besides health, including agriculture, education, and trade.

“This isn’t just a problem for the health sector,” continued Dr. Kuartei, “ We need to convert to healthier diets, eliminate tobacco use, limit alcohol consumption and significantly increase physical activity, and to do this, we need parents, farmers, fishermen, media, legislators, presidents, governors, traditional leaders, pastors, business people, educators, health providers and planners to be mobilized. What is needed is a whole of society approach. While there are promising efforts and programs, the current approach just isn’t working overall. It’s too fragmented, badly coordinated, non-integrated and depends too much on just the health sector. Things are not going to get better unless the society is mobilized because right now, we’re headed for social and economic catastrophe.”

“As a non-governmental organization, PIHOA can’t pass legally binding declarations,” said Michael Epp, Executive Director of PIHOA, “but it can pass declarations with considerable moral and ethical significance. This is that kind of declaration, an urgent call to all of society for immediate action.”

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