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women and sports:
she got game



Aleah Ortiz



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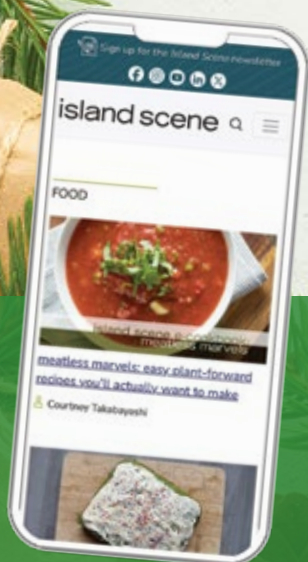
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EARL YOSHII



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fall issue : 2026 || islandscene.com

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Island Scene (ISSN 1064-8674) is published quarterly by the Hawai'i Medical Service Association – an independent licensee of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association. HMSA, 818 Ke'eaumoku St., Honolulu, HI 96814-2365.

Island Scene is published as a benefit for HMSA members. A copy of each issue is mailed to plan subscribers. Additional copies are available to dependents on request. Subscription: No cost for all HMSA plan members. Nonmembers, call (808) 948-6839 for subscription information. Periodicals postage paid at Los Angeles, California.

POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to *Island Scene*, P.O. Box 3850, Honolulu, HI 96812-3850.

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Island Scene, P.O. Box 3850,
Honolulu, HI 96812-3850

Editorial: (808) 948-6839

Circulation: (808) 948-6575

Advertising: (808) 227-5662

Email: feedback@islandscene.com

HMSA website at hmsa.com

Island Scene website at islandscene.com

COVER: Women and sports,
featuring trailblazers like Aleah Ortiz.
Article by Craig DeSilva on page 21;
photo by Brad Goda.

aloha members,



Change is constant.

Maybe what's different today is the speed at which that change is happening.

Just in this issue of *Island Scene*, you'll see how differently we're feeding students in schools, sharing rides to keep our roads safe, shining a spotlight on female athletes, and embedding artificial intelligence into our day-to-day lives.

How do we as individuals, how does HMSA as an organization, make sense of what often seems like the chaos of ambiguity and rapid change?

I had the honor and privilege of hearing retired U.S. Army four-star general and now national best-selling author Stanley McChrystal speak in Hawai'i recently. McChrystal was the leader of the Joint Special Operations Command at the peak of our battle with al-Qaida in Iraq. What he learned during his engagement was that the principles of success upon which the industrial revolution had delivered to the U.S. military (and most organizations at the time) were no longer effective. Scale, efficiency, hierarchy, and compartments worked well in a predictable world, but that's not the world we live in today.

It took him creating his "team of teams" in order for them to find success against the terror cells that were operating in a world that had changed: one in which everyone had all the information at their fingertips in real time.

The world had changed.

Today, adaptability, transparent and effective communication, and shared consciousness that lead to empowered execution are what make organizations, teams, and people successful.

This is what we're trying to evolve to at HMSA, to continue to support our mission to improve the lives of our members and the health of Hawai'i. It's what I hope you can also develop in your own 'ohana and personal ecosystem to make sense of and to flourish in the world we live in today.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be "Mark M. Mugiishi".

Mark M. Mugiishi, M.D., F.A.C.S.
Chief Executive Officer



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publisher's note

dear friends,

Fall can feel like a fresh beginning with school back in session and the weather (finally!) starting to cool down a bit. I also love the start of the holiday season.

Also in this issue, check out our holiday articles, including how gratitude is good for your health on page 28, holiday traditions from HMSA employees on page 50, and simple ways to reflect on the past year on page 54, very merry homemade gift recipes on page 58, and books that make great gifts on page 53.

Check out our holiday articles in this issue, and friends, as always. Whether you spend some time reading our pages or check out our website at islandscene.com, I think you'll find lots to learn and enjoy.

Happy Holidays, friends. Wishing you good health, time to recharge, and a year filled with gratitude, kindness, and joy.

Love,



Lisa Maneki Baxa
Publisher and Editor



As we finalized this issue in August, Lala and Moke swept through the state, bringing power outages, flooding, property damage, and major disruptions to daily life. In the days and weeks that followed, we saw the best of our Islands once again as first responders and utility crews worked tirelessly, neighbors helped neighbors, and organizations across the state came together to support recovery efforts.

This was a reminder that while storms can test us, our resilience, strength, and aloha help us weather them together.

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The following statement is required by the United States Postal Service, section 3685, title 30, to show ownership, management, and circulation of *Island Scene*.

Island Scene (ISSN 1064-8674) is published quarterly by the Hawai'i Medical Service Association — member of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association, an association of independent Blue Cross Blue Shield plans.

Island Scene is published as a benefit for HMSA subscribers and covered dependents.

A copy of each issue is mailed to plan subscribers. Additional copies are available to dependents on request. Subscription: free to all HMSA plan subscribers and dependents.

Island Scene is owned by HMSA. The address of the Office of Publication and General Business is 818 Ke'eaumoku St., Honolulu, HI 96814. As of Oct. 1, 2026, *Island Scene's* publisher and editor was Lisa Baxa (address given above). HMSA is a not-for-profit member-owned association with no stockholders. *Island Scene* has no bondholders, mortgages, or other security holders.

	Average number of copies of each issue during preceding 12 months	Actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date
Total Number Copies Printed	373,618	366,745
Mail Subscription (Requested)	372,831	365,946
Total Requested Circulation	372,831	365,946
Free Distribution	259	271
Total Distribution	373,090	366,217
Copies Not Distributed	528	528
Total	373,618	366,745
Percent Requested Circulation	99.93%	99.93%

around the 808

kaua'i

Adapting to Hanalei's flood reality

After the March 2026 Kona Low storms flooded parts of Hanalei, efforts to reduce road closures are driving renewed attention to watershed restoration. Community groups led by the Hanalei Watershed Hui are rebuilding lo'i kalo, wetlands, and natural floodplains to slow runoff and improve water quality.

But even with a new study this year, solutions to keep traffic moving through Hanalei remain limited because of the unique geography of Hanalei Bay. "You never think of the mauka being lower than the makai, and yet it is," says Maka'ala Ka'aumoana, executive director of the Hanalei Watershed Hui. "We determined that the only thing they could do to reduce the number of days of road closures is to elevate the road."



Hanalei Bay

Blending traditional practices with science, the Hanalei Watershed Hui continues working toward greater resilience when flooding comes, while recognizing the limits of large-scale infrastructure fixes.

maui, moloka'i, and lāna'i



Habitat for Humanity Maui's first home rebuild

Milestone in Lahaina fire recovery

Ten homes that Habitat for Humanity Maui built for Lahaina families were destroyed in the 2023 wildfires. But a symbol of hope, unity, and strength has emerged, as Habitat for Humanity Maui has completed its first rebuild, with support from volunteers, donors, partners, and community members.

"Lahaina is more than a place – it's a community deeply rooted in history, culture, and family," says Matt Bachman, executive director of Habitat for Humanity Maui. "Completing the first rebuilt home in the burn zone marks a family returning home and a community taking an important step forward together. It's a powerful reminder of what that truly means for Lahaina's recovery and future."

big island

Young readers battle of the books

Some see a reading list of 30 books as a tall task but 85 keiki across the Big Island were invigorated by the challenge.

The Friends of the Library – Waikoloa Region hosted the Fifth Annual Big Island Heluhelu Quiz Bowl, bringing together intermediate readers from Pāhoa to Waimea. Fifteen teams made up of fourth through seventh graders tackled questions from selected books.

Hawai'i Preparatory Academy's "Ka Makani Crashes the Underworld" team secured first place, followed by two teams from Kailua-Kona Public Library. Award-winning author Kristiana Kahakauwila served as the quizmaster.

"I'm so pleased to be part of this event that supports students who are readers already," says David Giff, chair of the quiz bowl steering committee. "I'm sure their enthusiasm flows to their friends and fellow students at their respective schools."

For more information, visit flwrhi.org/heluhelu-quiz-bowl.



DIANE JAMES



DIANE JAMES

Kristiana Kahakauwila (top photo), author of *Clairboyance*, served as quizmaster at the Fifth Annual Big Island Heluhelu Quiz Bowl

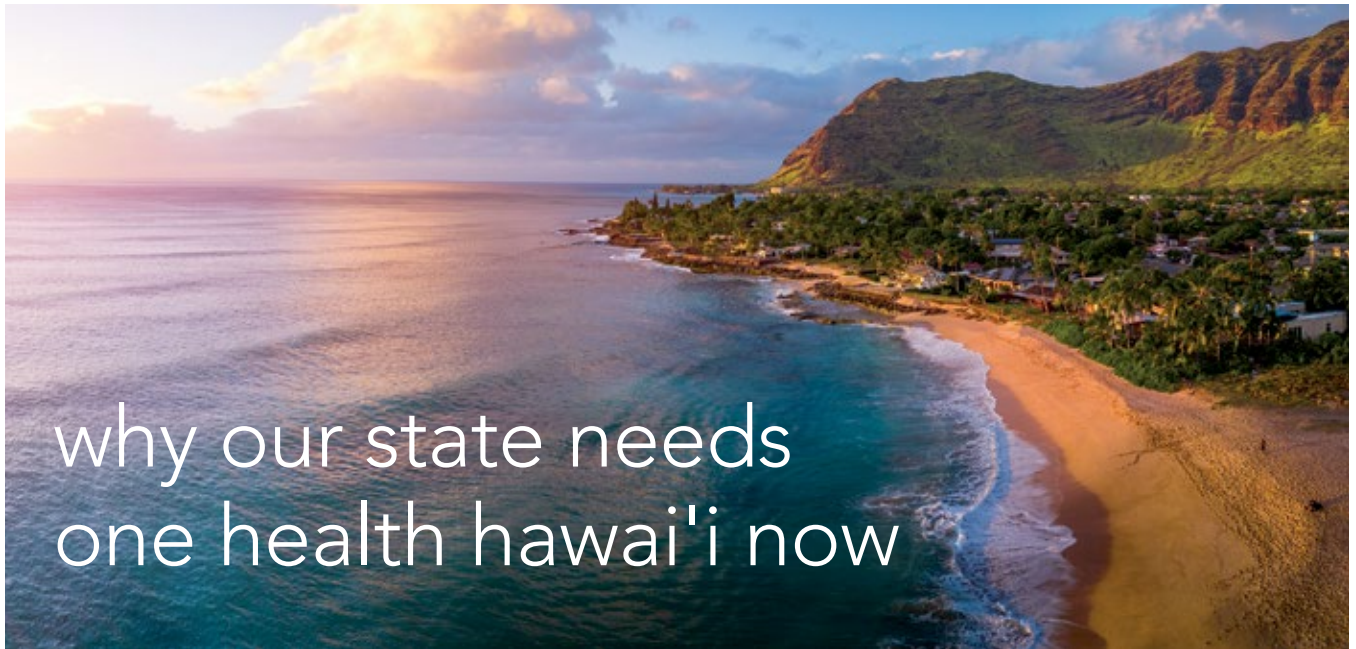
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More Time Together with Family

Hawaii's health care system can be hard to navigate. Through the partnership with HMSA and Hawai'i Pacific Health, One Health Hawai'i would bring your health plan and care team together so families can get the care they need.

Learn more about One Health Hawai'i at HealthierHawaiiTogether.com.





why our state needs one health hawai'i now

words Mark M. Mugiishi, M.D., F.A.C.S., HMSA CEO

This summer, I shared a note with all HMSA employees about why One Health Hawai'i is necessary for our state, and why it's necessary now. We'd also like to share that message with all of our members.

Ray Vara [president and CEO of Hawai'i Pacific Health] and I had the opportunity to speak to business leaders at the Chamber of Commerce Hawaii Business Luncheon. The purpose was to educate attendees on the potential benefits to Hawai'i of One Health Hawai'i.

I took the opportunity to more broadly share the challenges that we're facing in health care in Hawai'i today, and why fundamental change is necessary.

Two things are happening at once. The amount of money that we need to pay for health care is going up, and the amount of money that we actually have to pay for it is going down.

Utilization is up. Patients are older and sicker. Drugs and therapies are more expensive. Costs are higher.

We receive our health care funding from two primary sources: the government (Medicare, Medicaid, Affordable Care Act) and employers (commercial lines of business). And due to budgetary constraints and the downstream impacts of H.R.1 (previously known as the One Big Beautiful Bill Act), government funding is decreasing, dramatically.

In our current structure, where health plans and care delivery are separate and distinct, a health

plan like HMSA has three levers that we can pull to solve for the problem of increased costs with decreased government revenue:

- Pay providers less
- Charge employers more
- Reduce member benefits

All of these are ugly solutions. And ones that often result in HMSA being in the headlines of the news (and not in a good way).

It's why we urgently need a fourth solution. One that finds another lever to manage the increasing cost of health care.

- Coordinate and manage care better.
- Align incentives for right care, right place, right time.
- Streamline administrative costs.
- Focus on prevention and healthier communities.
- Finance desired outcomes.

These are the natural results of vertical integration: structurally tying financing to the delivery of health care. That's the vision behind One Health Hawai'i. And it's the change Hawai'i needs, today. ¹⁵

from farm to school cafeteria: greens grown next door

words Michelle Liu

It's lunchtime at Kahalu'u Elementary School in Kāne'ohe, and amid the cheerful chatter and chocolate milk cartons, there's something uniquely garden-fresh on the kids' trays: crisp microgreens harvested just three days earlier.

The vibrant blend of kale, mizuna, arugula, and amaranth was grown at a farm just steps away from campus. Tucked along the scenic Ko'olau Mountains, Kupu Place is known for its aquaponic lettuce, nutrient-dense microgreens, and edible flowers. But supplying greens to the school is a new venture. It's part of a push by the Hawai'i Department of Education (DOE) to bring fresh, locally grown produce to school cafeterias while strengthening connections among schools, food, and community.

"Being so close to Kahalu'u Elementary reinforces everything we believe in when it comes to island sustainability," says Anthony Mau, Ph.D., co-founder of Kupu Place. "There are essentially zero food miles, which means no need for transport and storage costs, and the product itself is more nutritious."



Kahalu'u Elementary School students were the first on O'ahu to enjoy fresh microgreens with school lunch.



EARL YOSHII



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Top: Anthony Mau, Ph.D., co-founder of Kupu Place, watering rows of microgreens.
Bottom left: Microgreens served as a salad for students to enjoy.
Bottom right: Anthony Mau

"There are essentially zero food miles, which means no need for transport and storage costs, and the product itself is more nutritious."

: Anthony Mau, Ph.D.
Co-founder of Kupu Place

This community-based sustainability model also emphasizes connection. Farmers have visited the school to talk story with the students and see how their hard work helps feed their community. In turn, the students have taken field trips to the farm to learn how the food they eat is grown and get some hands-on experience by planting seeds and watering plants.

"It's a different kind of learning, one that happens outside the classroom," explains Mau. "We're showing the kids how science works on the farm. They're getting their hands wet and feet in the mud, taking what they learn in class and seeing how it works in the field, then bringing that understanding back home."



Top: Microgreens aren't just green! These are Amaranth microgreens, known for its vibrant red color. Bottom: Microgreens grown at Kupu Place that will soon be on students' plates.

Kahalu'u Elementary was the first school on O'ahu to enjoy fresh, locally grown microgreens, but other schools across the state are also incorporating more local produce, like poi at Waikiki Elementary, lettuce at Waipahu High, and 'uala (sweet potato) at Hāna High and Elementary School on Maui.

"Locally sourced farm-to-school ingredients make our school meals fresher and improve student nutrition," says DOE Superintendent Keith Hayashi. "By connecting classrooms to local agriculture, we strengthen our farmers, keep resources circulating within our Islands, and move closer to a self-sustaining economy rooted in community, culture, and care for our 'āina."

"Locally sourced farm-to-school ingredients make our school meals fresher and improve student nutrition."

: Keith Hayashi
Superintendent, Hawai'i
Dept. of Education



STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

"It shows that something healthy and sustainable can really connect with people."

: Anthony Mau, Ph.D.



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Top: A fun and healthy lunch for students. Bottom: Microgreens are keiki-approved!

Back in the Kahalu'u cafeteria, that vision was put to the test when the microgreens were offered with a tried-and-true kid favorite: cheeseburgers. For many of these students, it was their first time trying microgreens, and their reactions were honest and unfiltered.

"They voted in front of us if they liked it or not, and the overwhelming response was they loved the microgreens," says Mau. "And that honest enthusiasm was so validating. When you have a kid who's trying this vegetable that's basically out of this world to them, and they say, 'This is my favorite vegetable,' that's so cool. It shows that something healthy and sustainable can really connect with people." ¹⁵



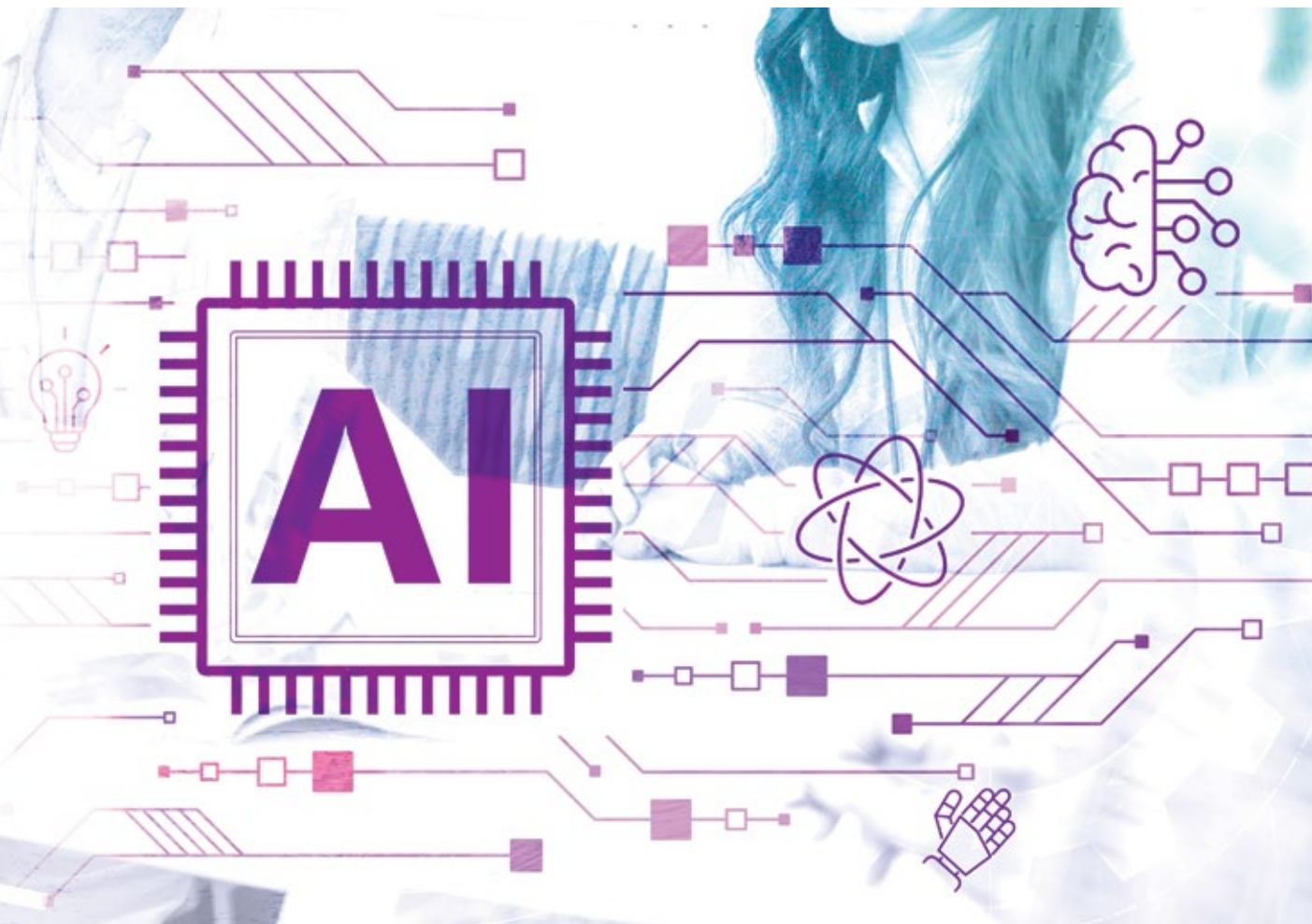
why ai literacy matters

words Courtney Takabayashi

photo illustration Brandon Young

You may not realize it yet, but artificial intelligence (AI) already influences how we learn, work, and make decisions. In Hawai'i, where communities are closely tied to place, culture, and relationships, grappling with AI goes beyond technology. It's become a shared responsibility, one that shapes who builds the systems, which is then woven into everyday life.

That concern is top of mind for Gloria Niles, chief academic technology innovation officer for the University of Hawai'i System. "Hawai'i is not a monolith," she says. "If we don't understand how these tools work, we risk having choices about our health, jobs, and children's education shaped by systems that were never designed with us in mind."



Take a moment

That's where AI literacy comes in. Thankfully, it doesn't require technical expertise or a background in computer science. Instead, it begins with recognizing when AI is involved, and knowing when to pause and ask a few basic questions: "Who created this tool, and for what purpose?" "What information does it rely on?" "Is it helping people make informed choices, or is it quietly making decisions for them?"

"Ethical use of AI begins with transparency and accountability," Niles says. "In education, that means teachers remain trusted guides and students learn to question AI-generated content instead of simply accepting it. In the workplace, it means preparing people before new tools are introduced."

AI literacy empowers users to move from passive use of AI technology to thinking more intentionally about how it fits into their lives. Students learn to evaluate

information instead of taking it at face value. Educators lead conversations about bias, accuracy, and appropriate use. Workers gain confidence to speak up about how AI tools affect priorities, workloads, and responsibilities.

Get started

The University of Hawai'i launched *Artificial Intelligence for Hawai'i*, a free, 12-chapter online course (aiforhi.hawaii.edu) created with local communities in mind. It offers a practical way to build foundational knowledge and use AI responsibly. Preparing for the future of AI in Hawai'i starts with informed participants who are willing to stay curious and stay engaged. **15**

This is the second in a series of articles on AI. Written by your very human Island Scene team.

driving change, one ride at a time

words Michelle Liu



Shayna Park Domingo (left) with her mother, Chanda Rae (right), remembering Azalia.

Azalia Park never missed the sunset.

The 21-year-old was a free spirit with a deep love for life and a laugh that was loud and infectious. She was always late but the first one at the airport when it came time to travel. Her favorite kind of food? Free.

As the oldest of three, Azalia loved her role as big sister. She'd go hiking with her siblings just because they asked, even though she had no depth perception and had trouble navigating steep terrain. Linkin was eight years younger. And Shayna, separated by a year and an ocean at the time Azalia was struck by a drunk driver.



COURTESY CHANDA RAE

Chanda Rae shares about her daughter, Azalia, during a SafeRide Hawaii event.



COURTESY CHANDA RAE

Volunteers are ready to dance in the nonprofit's annual Zumbathon fundraiser.

"I was in Oregon and I'd just spoken to her on the phone an hour earlier," recalls Shayna Park Domingo. "My brother was the one who called me about Zaley. My stomach just dropped."

On Dec. 18, 2020, Azalia was in a crosswalk, walking to Aloha Stadium to see the holiday lights when she was hit. She died three days later.

"Grief comes in so many different waves and emotions," says Park Domingo. "We felt the best way to navigate ours was to spread awareness."

Five days after Azalia passed, her family and friends waved signs against drunk driving at that intersection. Six months later, Azalia's mother, Chanda Rae, established the nonprofit SafeRide Hawaii.

"I didn't want to focus on the man who killed her," says Rae. "I wanted to focus on something I could control, where I could make a difference."

SafeRide Hawaii is powered by volunteers who pick up an intoxicated guest and their car from an event, getting both back home safely, no matter what time.

"There's no excuse to drive under the influence," says Park Domingo. "Not when there are so many services available. We want to prevent any other family from losing someone because of a careless decision to get behind the wheel impaired."

Prevention starts with education. SafeRide Hawaii visits high schools to teach students who are just learning how to drive about the dangers of impaired and distracted driving.

"It's about changing the culture around drunk driving," says Rae. "When we reach kids, they'll understand the importance of never starting in the first place."

The teen drivers are also learning how their choices can shift the conversation about impaired driving in their circles and beyond.

"We've made that impact with our own friends and community; making the right choice is now the only option," says Park Domingo. "Once that mindset becomes the norm, the culture shifts, and we'll stop losing people to drunk driving."

Until then, SafeRide Hawaii's volunteer drivers will be taking strangers home safely, one ride at a time. The drivers carry Azalia with them: her laughter, her love for sunsets and free food, and her instinct to always show up for people. **is**



If you're interested in volunteering as a driver, or to learn more, visit saferidehawaii.org.

For an HMSA video on SafeRide Hawaii, visit hmsa.com/SafeRideHawaii.

School's back and so is flu season.



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she got game

words Craig DeSilva

photos Brad Goda

The world of female sports has developed into a whole new ball game. It's not just a guy's game anymore. While women have been playing sports competitively for over 60 years, participation continues to rise thanks to many trailblazers, such as Aleah Ortiz, Miranda Schmillen, and Keala Tom.



Level playing field

For Aleah Ortiz, flag football isn't just a game. It's also about equality.

"I'm proud to be part of history in the making for Hawai'i sports," says Ortiz, who played for Kailua High School's inaugural girls flag football team, reaching the state tournament in her senior year. "We finally got our foot in the door being on par with the boys."

Ortiz always wanted to play football just like her older brothers. She became a cheerleader so she could watch their high school

games. No longer on the sidelines, Ortiz has made the most of her opportunities both physically and mentally. "Because if your mind is right, then your body is right," she says.

While balancing sports with schoolwork and everyday life has been a challenge, the sacrifices have paid off with a scholarship to play at Olivet Nazarene University in Chicago. Along the way, football continues to teach her many lessons on and off the field.

"You're not going to win all the time," she says. "But that's how you learn. Coach tells us that winning a game proves nothing if you're not learning or improving. So win with a purpose."

"If your mind is right
then your body
is right."

: Aleah Ortiz



League of her own

Growing up, Miranda Schmillen begged her mom to let her play basketball. Instead, she was enrolled in dance classes and pageants. She wasn't allowed to try out for the girls' basketball team until she started attending McKinley High School. She showed up every day for preseason practice and conditioning. She was not only chosen, but she made the varsity team as a freshman.

"Definitely not because I was a great basketball player yet," she says. "It was sheer determination. I worked hard 'cause I wanted to play so bad."

High school basketball led to opportunities to attend Mainland colleges on scholarships and travel to Europe for tournaments and basketball camps. Along the way, her teammates have become her family.

Schmillen, 31, knows her way around the court enough to earn a spot in a local men's league. And although she occasionally experiences sexism on the court, she tries not to let it get to her game.

"It's sad that even today we have to deal with stereotypes in women sports," she says. "If anything, it makes me want to play that much harder."

"I worked hard
'cause I wanted
to play so bad."

: Miranda Schmillen

Team player

Soccer didn't just make Keala Tom a better athlete. It made her a better person.

While many girl athletes are labeled as "tomboys," Tom was fortunate to have been surrounded by strong women who instilled the importance of resilience, strength, and authenticity. "Values that have stayed with me throughout my professional career outside of sports," she says. "It's important to embrace what makes you different."

Soccer has been a part of Tom's life since age 5. She played for Leahi Soccer Club, in high school for Sacred Hearts Academy, and in college at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles and the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

Tom, 30, has a competitive edge. But soccer also taught her when to pull back to do what's best for the team, a lesson that she applies to her job as enterprise program manager at HMSA. "Not everyone is going to be a starter," she says. "Sometimes, it's about stepping into whatever role the team needs most."

Although Tom doesn't play soccer anymore, she has this advice for young athletes: "Work hard but also remember to have fun and enjoy being a kid," she says. "In the end, it's just a game." 15



"It's important to embrace what makes you different."

: Keala Tom



from the basketball court to the courtroom

Hawai'i Supreme Court Justice Sabrina McKenna got hooked on playing basketball during 7th grade P.E. class. But she was told to only cover half the court and play defense. Those were the girls rules at the time. They thought girls couldn't handle running full court. "That got me upset," she recalls. "I was pretty competitive even back then."

So McKenna spent her lunchtime shooting hoops on her own. Her love of the sport grew all the way to the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, where she tried out for the emerging Rainbow Wahine basketball team, created shortly after Congress passed Title IX. The 1972 law authored by the late Rep. Patsy Mink provided equal opportunities for girls and women in athletics and academics.

McKenna not only made the team. She was awarded a scholarship. She credits Title IX for giving her that opportunity, which allowed her to continue on to law school and eventually be appointed to the state's highest court.



Sabrina McKenna with the UH Wahine basketball team during the 1977-78 season.

BRAD GODA

COURTESY SABRINA MCKENNA



Patsy Mink co-authored Title IX in 1972.



Patsy Mink with the freshman class of the 89th Congress in 1965.

Ahead of her time

Mink championed Title IX to change some of the barriers girls and women faced in school and the workplace. Mink herself was shut out from going to medical school. But she never gave up. When she was told she couldn't be a doctor, she became a lawyer instead. The third-generation Japanese-American from Pa'ia on Maui trailblazed many paths. She was the first Japanese-American woman to practice law in Hawai'i and the first woman of color and of Asian descent to be elected to Congress. Title IX has been her lasting legacy. The law also benefited men, allowing them to seek careers in nursing and other jobs that were once reserved for women.

Mink died in 2002. In 2014, President Barack Obama posthumously awarded her the Presidential Medal of Freedom and said: "Every girl in Little League, every woman playing college sports, and every parent – including Michelle and myself – who watches their daughter on a field or in the classroom is forever grateful to the late Patsy Takemoto Mink."

Continuing the legacy

McKenna never got a chance to thank Mink for helping to open doors for her and others. "Just think that in 1972, women made up only 7% of law school graduates and only 9% of medical school graduates," says McKenna. "There was only one woman judge. Today, 50% of judges in Hawai'i are women."

After nearly 55 years since Title IX's passage, female athletics really have come a long way.

"Title IX was an absolute game changer," she says. "And seeing the caliber of the athletes today is just unreal. I'm excited to see the opportunities they now have."



Sabrina McKenna played four seasons on the inaugural Rainbow Wahine basketball team.



Read an interview with Wendy Mink, Patsy Mink's daughter, about her mother's legacy at islandscene.com (search Patsy Mink).



Jasper Ho at Spill the Tea Café

how one teen found his community at spill the tea café

words Michelle Liu

photos Romeo Collado

Jasper Ho's plan at 14 was to die at 14.

When he turned 15, he remained highly suicidal for the next three years, as he faced relentless bullying while exploring his identity as a transgender youth.

"It felt like my whole role was the psych patient, the 'crazy kid,'" he says. "Everyone's expectations of me were really low, so I felt, why try anymore?"

After spending most of his teenage years in and out of psychiatric units, struggling with severe depression, self-harm, and suicidality, Ho's turning point came at 18. He became determined to break out of the hospital cycle and he found a lifeline with Spill the Tea Café, Hawai'i's only teen-focused mental health clinic. Ho didn't plan to stick around, but the acceptance and connection he found at the nonprofit changed his trajectory and put him on a path toward healing.

"The people here are a different kind of kind. They see every piece of good in you and help you see it in yourself."

: Jasper Ho

"The people here are a different kind of kind. They see every piece of good in you and help you see it in yourself," he says. "For the first time, I wasn't thinking about surviving to see the next day; I could see a future."

As the oldest at the café, Ho quickly became a mentor to LGBTQ+ teens who were navigating their own journeys. The role also helped him reclaim his identity and find purpose in supporting the kids who looked up to him.



Teens can drink boba at the bar, hang out and play video games, or play basketball.



Kiki Rosario, outreach coordinator at Spill the Tea Café, meets with Ho.



Private, soundproof pods allow for individual therapy sessions while teens hang out inside the café.



Ho lighting up a billboard in Times Square in partnership with The Trevor Project, raising awareness for LGBTQ+ equality.

"Before, I was Jasper the kid who wanted to die all the time," he says. "But then I became Jasper, the possibility model, and I felt a duty to be that role model in a genuine way and help these kids. It showed me that I was more than my suffering, and that I had something to live up to and keep moving forward."

Today, Ho is 22 years old and studying psychology at the University of British Columbia, a path he chose after years of seeing doctors and therapists who didn't understand trans youth or gender-affirming care. He hopes to become a clinical social worker for adolescents, particularly trans kids, so they don't have to go through what he went through or ever feel alone.

Ho also remains deeply involved with Spill the Tea Café. As president of the café's youth advisory board, he advocates for the café's patrons, helping them feel safe, supported, and at home. And he's still a mentor to many of the café's kids, sharing his experience and helping them imagine futures beyond their current struggles.

"It's not going to feel like this forever. I know it never feels like it's going to get better when you're in the thick of it. But even if you're in the dark and you can't see the light at the end of the tunnel, know that it's there," he says. "There's a community behind you, and they're going to help you find the light."

"One day, you're going to love who you are. You're going to look in the mirror, and you're going to smile in a way that doesn't feel fake. And all the people that you've spent your entire life looking up to, or wishing that you had in your life, you're going to become that person. And it'll be beautiful." 

For more information on how to support Spill the Tea Café, visit spilltheteacafe.org.

For a video on Spill the Tea Café, visit hmsa.com/SpilltheTeaCafe.

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Nov. 12, noon-1 p.m.

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Nov. 16, 10-11 a.m.

HMSA Center in Hilo

Nov. 21, 11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

HMSA Center in Pearl City

Dec. 8, 11 a.m.-noon

1010-1840211

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Online at hmsa.com

Dec. 17, noon-1 p.m.

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Oahu



HMSA Building

818 Keeaumoku St., Hau Room
10 a.m.-noon
Monday, Oct. 12, Nov. 9
Saturday, Oct. 3, Oct. 24, Nov. 28,
Dec. 19, & Feb. 6

HMSA Center in Pearl City

1132 Kuala St., Suite 400
10 a.m.-noon
Monday, Oct. 19 & Nov. 16
Saturday, Oct. 10, Oct. 31, Dec. 5 &
Jan. 16

Aina Haina Library

5246 Kalanianaʻole Hwy.
10 a.m.-noon
Tuesday, Nov. 10
Wednesday, Oct. 21

Ala Moana Hotel

410 Atkinson Dr., Anthurium Room
11 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
Tuesday, Nov. 10
Friday, Nov. 20
1-2:30 p.m.
Tuesday, Oct. 27
Thursday, Oct. 15

Big City Diner – Kaneohe

46-056 Kamehameha Hwy., D-01
10 a.m.-noon
Thursday, Oct. 15
Friday, Nov. 13
10:30 a.m.-noon
Friday, Oct. 30

The Filipino Community Center

94-428 Mokuola St.,
Flores Ballroom
Noon-1:30 p.m.
Wednesday, Nov. 4
Thursday, Nov. 19
2-3 p.m.
Thursday, Oct. 15
Friday, Oct. 23

Financial Benefits Insurance

1311 Kapiolani Blvd., Suite 504
11 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
Monday, Nov. 16
Tuesday, Nov. 3 & Nov. 24
1-2:30 p.m.
Monday, Oct. 19

Liliha Library

1515 Liliha St.
10 a.m.-noon
Tuesday, Oct. 20, Nov. 10, &
Nov. 17
Saturday, Nov. 14
4-6 p.m.
Thursday, Nov. 12 & Nov. 19

Hawaii Island



HMSA Center in Hilo

303A E. Makaala St.
10 a.m.-noon
Saturday, Oct. 17 & Nov. 14

Financial Benefits Insurance – Hilo

111 E. Puainako St., #705
11 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
Wednesday, Oct. 21 & Nov. 18
Thursday, Oct. 15 & Nov. 12

Mana Christian Church

67-1182 Lindsey Rd.
10 a.m.-noon
Wednesday, Oct. 21, Nov. 18, &
Dec. 2
Thursday, Oct. 15 & Oct. 29
Noon-1:30 p.m.
Friday, Oct. 23 & Nov. 6

Premier Benefits Consultants – Hilo

1437 Kilauea Ave., Suite 204
10 a.m.-noon
Tuesday, Oct. 13 & Oct. 27

Suite Possibilities – Kailua-Kona

75-5915 Walua Rd.
10 a.m.-noon
Wednesday, Oct. 14 & Oct. 28
Saturday, Oct. 17 & Nov. 14

Maui



HMSA Center in Kahului

70 Hookele St., Suite 1220
10 a.m.-noon
Saturday, Oct. 10 & Nov. 21

Maui Beach Hotel

170 W. Kaahumanu Ave.
10 a.m.-noon
Tuesday, Oct. 20, Oct. 27, Nov. 3, &
Nov. 17
10:30 a.m.-noon
Friday, Oct. 16

Kauai



All Saints Church

4-1065 Kuhio Hwy.
12:30-2 p.m.
Tuesday, Oct. 20

Hanapepe Library

4490 Kona Rd., Meeting Room
11 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
Monday, Nov. 9 & Nov. 23
1-2:30 p.m.
Monday, Oct. 26

Kauai Chamber of Commerce

4268-I Rice St., Pili Pili Room
10 a.m.-noon
Saturday, Oct. 24 & Nov. 21

Online

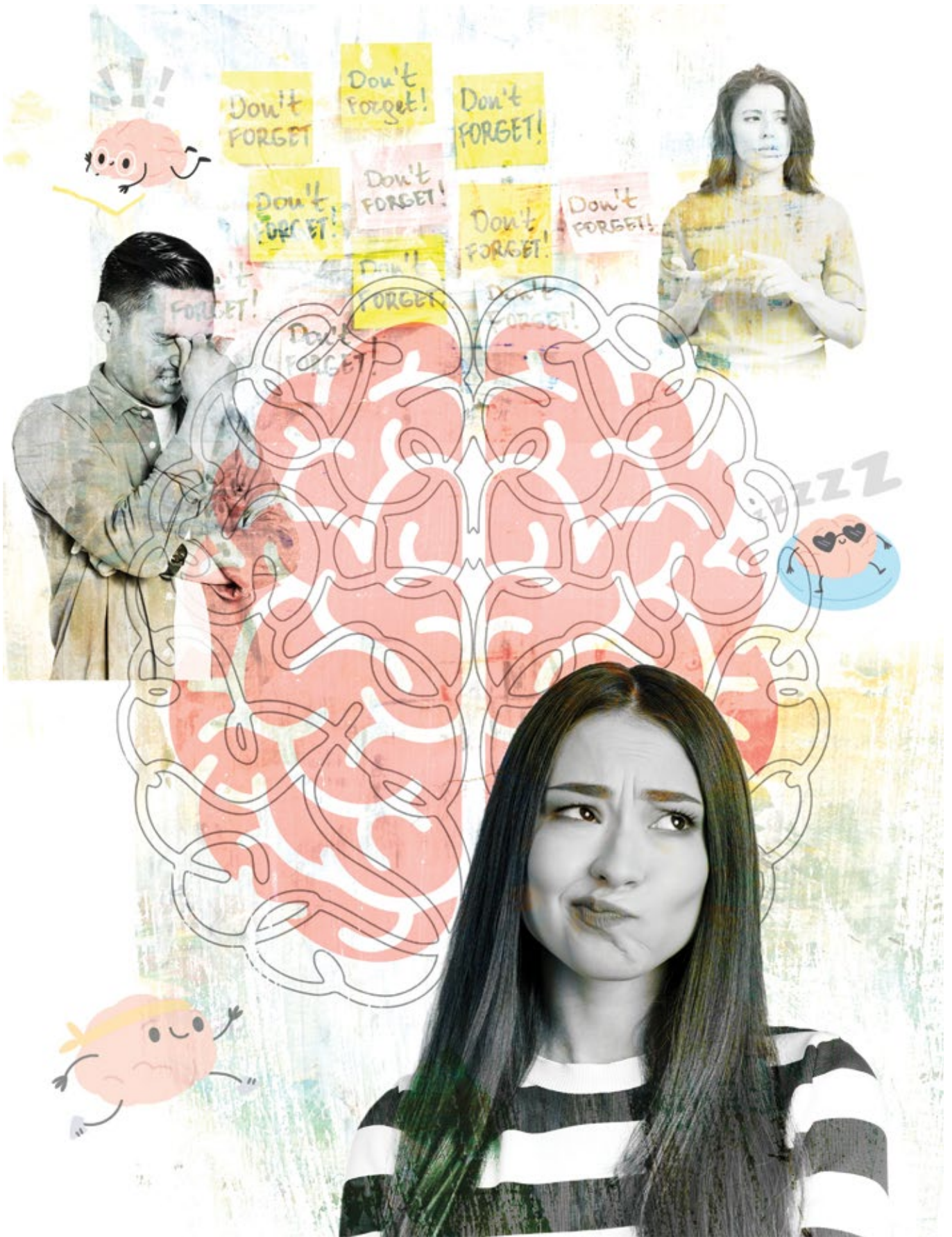


Oahu Presentations

10 a.m.-noon
Monday, Nov. 30
Tuesday, Nov. 10
Wednesday, Oct. 14
Thursday, Oct. 29
Friday, Oct. 2 & Nov. 20
Saturday, Jan. 9 & Feb. 13

Neighbor Island Presentations

2-4 p.m.
Monday, Nov. 30
Tuesday, Nov. 10
Wednesday, Oct. 14
Thursday, Oct. 29
Friday, Oct. 2 & Nov. 20



train your brain to slow down aging

words Michelle Liu

photo illustration Brandon Young

Our brains start to shrink in our 40s, sometimes even in our 30s.

This gradual loss of brain volume especially affects the frontal and temporal lobes, which are important for decision-making, memory, and language. Processing speed also slows. You may notice you have to reread something a few times before it sticks, or that you've forgotten why you walked into the kitchen.

This is a normal part of aging, says Rachel Song, Ph.D., a board-certified neuropsychologist who founded Hawai'i Neuropsychology. What's more important than how often something happens is the type of change you're seeing, including:

- Forgetting entire conversations or events, not just small details.
- Repeating the same questions without realizing it.
- Getting lost in familiar places.
- Difficulty managing finances, such as missed payments or unusual spending.
- Trouble completing familiar tasks.



Rachel Song, Ph.D.

"Cognitive health is at the core of how we operate day to day," says Song. "If cognitive changes are noticeable enough that the person or their family members are worried, that alone is reason enough to bring it up with a health care provider."

There is some good news: While aging brings changes, our brain can adapt and rewire itself to help reduce the risk of cognitive decline. Studies show that nearly half of dementia cases may be linked to risk factors we

can address like high blood pressure, smoking, obesity, depression, and physical inactivity.

"This means there's meaningful opportunity to protect brain health through everyday choices," says Song.

1. Keep learning.

Try a new hobby, learn a new skill, or play strategy games. Regularly challenging your mind can give your brain a mental workout, keeping it active.

2. Get moving.

"Exercise helps improve blood flow to the brain and supports the health of brain cells involved in learning and memory," says Song.

3. Eat well, get enough sleep, and stay socially connected.

A healthy diet and quality sleep are foundational to cognitive function, as is an active social life, which can improve attention and memory.

We can't stop our brains from changing as we get older, but cognitive decline doesn't equate to a lower quality of life.

"The brain becomes a bit slower with age, but it also becomes more experienced and often more resilient," says Song. "Many older adults continue to function at a high level. They may take a bit longer to process information, but they bring depth, judgment, and experience." **15**

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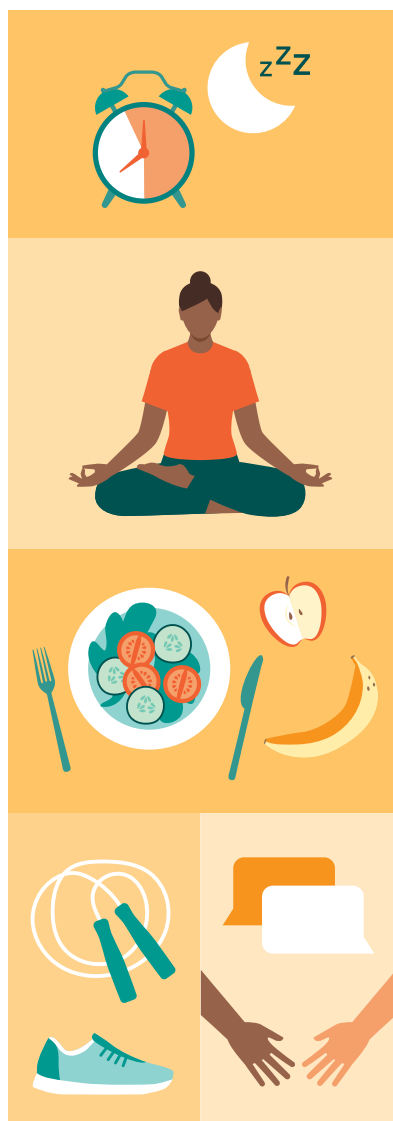
These providers joined HMSA's
network between March 21 and
June 20, 2026.

For a complete list of HMSA
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balancing the pillars of health

words Keely Kalama-Lakey



While you hear experts say to sleep well, manage stress, exercise, socialize, eat right, and maintain gut health, an important point is often missed. These behaviors, often called the pillars of health, are connected. Ignoring or skimping on some pillars negatively affects the others.

For example, chronic stress can disrupt your gut health and interfere with sleep. Insufficient sleep can impact gut health and your ability to manage stress, exercise, and make good food choices. These are a couple of the many ways each pillar relies on others. The good news is it works the other way, too. The better you address each pillar, even just a little, the more you improve the others.

"Lifestyle behaviors form the pillars of health because they directly influence how the body functions, including effects on metabolism, immune response, hormone regulation, and brain function," explains board-certified internist, lifestyle medicine physician, and HMSA medical director Rupal Gohil, M.D. "Addressing one area in isolation can still be helpful but progress may be limited if other pillars are out of sync. It's like trying to drive a car with one strong tire and three underinflated ones. You still move forward, but the ride is inefficient, harder on the system, and eventually something wears down."

Tips to get started:

- **Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day.** Sleep when you first feel drowsy to avoid getting a second wind, making it harder to fall asleep later.
- **Use breathwork to help manage stress.** Inhale, then exhale for twice as long. Continue for two-five minutes (stop if dizziness occurs) to support immediate and longer-term stress relief.
- **Support gut health with a range of foods.** Incorporate spices, lean proteins, unrefined grains, and fresh produce.
- **Increase nutrition.** Add one extra serving of fruits or vegetables each day.
- **Move after meals.** Take a short walk after eating to support digestion and daily activity.
- **Prioritize in-person connection.** Make time each day to talk story with a neighbor, friend, or co-worker.

"Everything doesn't have to be perfect. Small, consistent improvements across multiple areas tend to have a greater impact than focusing intensely on just one," says Dr. Gohil. [15](#)

This is the introduction to a series on the pillars of health. Next, we'll focus on sleep health, its impact on your overall health, and more tips.



seven types of rest to help you feel your best

words Summer Nakaishi

photo illustration Brandon Young

It's 2 p.m. Your eyes are heavy, your brain is foggy, and that third cup of coffee is calling your name. You're getting seven hours of sleep, so why are you still exhausted?

According to Sandra Dalton-Smith, M.D. and her book *Sacred Rest*, sleep and rest are two different things. Sleep matters, but you may be neglecting the kind of rest your body needs to recover.

Rupal Gohil, M.D., board-certified internist, lifestyle medicine physician, and HMSA medical director, breaks down how to identify Dr. Dalton-Smith's seven types of rest and shares helpful tips to refill our tanks.



Rupal Gohil, M.D.

Body restoration

Physical rest includes sleep but also involves slowing down and engaging in gentle movement. While sleep allows for physical repair and hormonal regulation, ongoing overexertion without recovery can keep the body in stress mode, contributing to chronic fatigue.

You may need physical rest if: You feel “tired but wired” or frequently run down.

Try: Taking short breaks, restorative yoga, or slow walks. Stop pushing through fatigue as a default response.

Managing cognitive load

Mental rest relieves nonstop thinking and constant problem-solving. Without it, focus drops, and irritability and stress-related fatigue increase.

You may need it if: You're feeling overwhelmed or small challenges seem harder to manage.

Try: Time blocking, building pauses between meetings or tasks, or practicing deep breathing exercises.



Space to be honest about your feelings

Emotional rest means finding ways to feel authentically you. Suppressing emotions drains significant energy and can quietly contribute to anxiety, self-criticism, and emotional exhaustion.

You may need emotional rest if: You're always apologizing or dwelling on mistakes, or often anxious.

Try: Creative expression like journaling, music, or art. Make time for hobbies you genuinely enjoy. Practice self-compassion over constant critique.

Seeking the right relationships

Social rest doesn't necessarily mean isolation. It's about spending time with people who are supportive and energizing rather than draining.

You may need social rest if: You're feeling exhausted after socializing or disconnected even when surrounded by others.

Try: Limiting draining interactions, prioritizing relationships that make you feel comfortable being yourself, or choosing environments that feel positive and uplifting.

A break from constant stimulation

Screens, notifications, and bright lights keep your nervous system continuously activated. Sensory rest calms overstimulation, making it easier to relax, focus, and eventually sleep more deeply.

You may need sensory rest if: You're more easily irritated by sounds or lights.

Try: Taking screen breaks, dimming lights in the evening, reducing background noise, or spending more time outdoors.

Inspiration without pressure to produce

Creative rest reconnects you with beauty and inspiration, and it helps you nurture joy, which can become lost when life starts to feel overly task-driven.

You may need creative rest if: Life feels dull or forced or you feel uninspired or stuck.

Try: Visiting a museum or gallery, listening to music, reading poetry, or surrounding yourself with beauty that sparks a sense of discovery.

Connection to something bigger

Spiritual rest provides a sense of meaning beyond daily responsibilities. It reminds us that our value is not measured solely by achievement or productivity. For some, this comes through faith or religious practice; for others, it may come through nature, community, service, or time spent reflecting on what gives life meaning.

You may need spiritual rest if: You feel hopeless or trapped even if things are going "well."

Try: Reflecting on values that matter most to you, practicing gratitude, or engaging in meaningful service.

An integrative medical approach matters because most symptoms don't exist in isolation. Fatigue, poor sleep, and burnout often reflect overlapping biological, psychological, and lifestyle factors.

Looking at the whole person – their lifestyle and habits – can help identify what might be contributing to symptoms and guide practicable, sustainable solutions. **15**

If you have questions about persistent fatigue, follow up with your primary care provider.



Gratitude is good for your health

words Keely Kalama-Lakey

It turns out that saying “thank you” does more than show your good manners. Experts say intentionally expressing gratitude offers mental and physical health benefits and improves social connections.

Research highlighted by Harvard Health showed that people who feel more grateful tend to have better sleep, fewer symptoms of depression, and stronger social connections. Gratitude has also been linked to better heart health, including lower risk of heart disease. Gratitude may help by improving mood, reducing stress, and strengthening relationships.

Practicing gratitude changes your focus toward a broader view of life. It’s not just positive thinking; it’s resetting your mindset.

Gratitude is different from positive thinking. Gratitude makes you regularly notice what’s supportive or meaningful, even when life is difficult. It doesn’t require you to deny stress or pain. Positive thinking emphasizes optimism and

reframing situations to expect better outcomes. Both can be helpful, but they work differently and serve different emotional needs.

Research by the Greater Good Science Center suggests that gratitude doesn’t need to take a lot of time to be effective. Just take 15 minutes a day, two to three times a week, to write down things you’re grateful for and benefits can appear after a couple of weeks of regular practice. Households can do it together to strengthen family bonds. Children learn to transform their thoughts into a grateful mindset while parents help set an example while strengthening their own emotional well-being.

Even without expert input, we all know gratitude feels good. Appreciating trade winds on a sunny day feels better than doom scrolling and feeling thankful for your loved ones is better than worrying about work.

The best part is that gratitude costs nothing and has no side effects. **15**



finding joy in “grandma hobbies”

words Sarah Pearson

photo illustration Brandon Young

When anxiety hits, my mind usually feels like it’s running full speed, sprinting through thoughts and feelings until everything starts to blur. I’ve lived with anxiety for most of my adult life, and I know many people can relate. The constant chatter was loud and all consuming, and I was always searching for ways to keep my mind busy.

One day, in a quiet grocery store, I happened upon a crochet kit to make a small chicken. Although I didn’t have any crochet experience, I decided to pick up the kit and give it a try. After some trial and error (and many, many online tutorials), I learned the stitches and crocheted my first little chicken.

For the first time in a long time, my mind felt quiet. I stayed focused by counting stitches and remembering which one came next. Before long, I became a bit of a crochet machine. It brought me peace, a sense of calm, and comfort.

There’s been an emerging trend of the younger generation taking up hobbies we typically associate with “grandma hobbies,” like knitting, crocheting, bird watching, and gardening. Science shows that these cozy, low intensity activities help us step away from everyday stressors and ease anxiety.

Hobbies gently occupy our brains in a way that’s soothing and therapeutic, calming overstimulation and stress, according to research by the National Center for Biotechnology Information. Hobbies can encourage creativity, movement, social connection, and a sense of purpose. A 2025 study

found that older adults who regularly engage in many of the same activities often associated with grandmothers tend to live longer, have lower risks of major diseases, and benefit even if they start later in life.

Anxiety and depression are becoming increasingly prevalent across all communities and are now the second leading cause of long-term disability worldwide, affecting people’s happiness, health, and day-to-day quality of life. This makes everyday calming practices more important than ever.

Incorporating easy, cozy grandma hobbies can be an inexpensive and accessible way to support mental health and well-being. So, pick up a knitting needle, explore a scrapbooking kit, or reach for your favorite gardening shears. Let’s keep our hands busy in ways that bring a little more calm, purpose, and joy to our lives. **15**



For more resources to help with stress and well-being, check out the HMSA workshops at hmsa.com/well-being/workshops/ or scan the QR code.



health matters



Every social interaction counts

Connecting socially is good for your health. Experts say it can help people live longer, healthier lives. Conversely, chronic loneliness can lead to higher stress levels, weakened immune function, poor sleep, and increased risk of heart disease.

To increase opportunities to socialize, you can join a group like a walking club, take an in-person or online class, or do volunteer work. Websites like Hawai'i-based Volunteer Ally (volunteerrally.org) or VolunteerMatch (idealists.org/volunteermatch) can help you find a program to match your interests.

Even brief, lighthearted interactions can give you a sense of connection. So, check in regularly with friends or family; talk story with your neighbor; or have a friendly chat with a store clerk.



Older adults and dehydration

Studies suggest that about one in four people age 65 and older are dehydrated. This might happen because the sense of thirst weakens with age, kidneys are less efficient at conserving water, and some medications can increase fluid loss. Illness, heat, and mobility issues can add to the risk.

Even mild dehydration can cause fatigue, headaches, dizziness, and confusion. Common signs you may need more fluids include dark urine, infrequent urination, dry mouth, and feeling lightheaded. To stay hydrated, drink fluids regularly and don't wait to feel thirsty. Eating water-rich foods like fruits and vegetables helps, too. If you have questions about dehydration, check with your primary care provider.

Know before you go: Beach conditions

If you're looking for a new beach to visit or want to check current beach conditions, the state's Safe Beaches Today website has helpful information for you. The site shares water advisories, including bacteria levels and brown water alerts. It shows descriptions and conditions by island and beach to help you choose the best spot. Visit safebeachday.com/state/hawaii.

Remember that conditions can change quickly, so pay attention to warning signs when you arrive or ask the lifeguard to learn more.



introducing hmsa's akamai advantage select plus plan

words Lynn Shibuya

Are you a Medicare Advantage member looking for a more coordinated, connected health care experience? HMSA is here with you. During the Medicare annual open enrollment period from Oct. 15 to Dec. 7, 2026, eligible members can choose from health plans, including a new, premium value plan for members who prefer integrated care management.

HMSA Akamai Advantage® Select Plus (HMO) offers O'ahu residents access to a curated provider network of quality physicians and other health care providers who work together to deliver coordinated care. The plan is designed to:

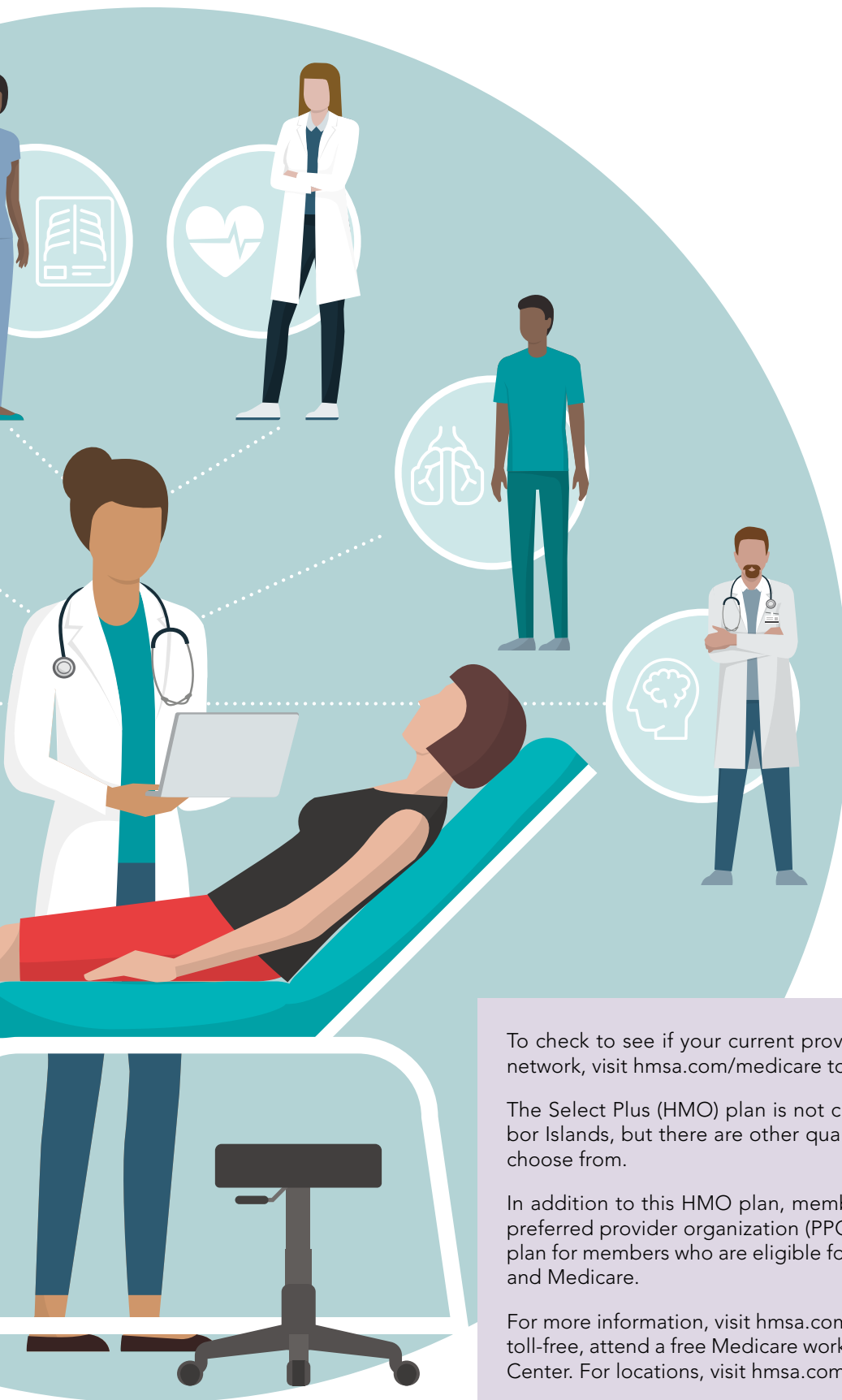
- Coordinate care through a specialized health maintenance organization (HMO).
- Enhance the overall care experience by strengthening the patient-provider relationship.
- Deliver the right care in the right setting.
- Lower health care costs.
- Provide members with an affordable, high-value Medicare Advantage option that offers a different mix of benefits and care support.

"Select Plus demonstrates our continued commitment to our current and prospective Akamai Advantage members," said Kim Takata Endo, HMSA's vice president of Medicare and Duals. "This HMO plan offers enrollees access to a curated, high-quality network designed to measurably improve the member experience, quality health outcomes, and affordability."

The bottom line: With today's changing Medicare landscape in mind, HMSA continues to evolve, evaluate, and look for new ways to support our members today and in the future. **15**



HMSA Akamai Advantage® is a PPO plan with a Medicare contract. Enrollment in HMSA Akamai Advantage depends on contract renewal.
HMSA Akamai Advantage® Select Plus is an HMO plan with a Medicare contract. Enrollment in HMSA Akamai Advantage Select Plus depends on contract renewal.



To check to see if your current provider is in the Select Plus (HMO) network, visit hmsa.com/medicare to search the provider directory.

The Select Plus (HMO) plan is not currently available on the Neighbor Islands, but there are other quality health plans for members to choose from.

In addition to this HMO plan, members statewide can choose from preferred provider organization (PPO) plans and a D-SNP (dual care) plan for members who are eligible for both HMSA QUEST (Medicaid) and Medicare.

For more information, visit hmsa.com/medicare, call 1 (800) 660-4672 toll-free, attend a free Medicare workshop, or learn more at an HMSA Center. For locations, visit hmsa.com/contact.



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1010-1840201

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*Additional services are provided at no extra cost to eligible members enrolled in HMSA's Oral Health for Total HealthSM program.

1010-1840209



when antibiotics don't work: what next?

words David Frickman

you've taken every pill exactly as prescribed, but you're still not feeling better. When antibiotics don't work, it's important to understand why and what to do next.



Brian Wu, M.D.

"Antibiotics are medicines designed to kill bacteria," says Brian Wu, M.D., HMSA senior medical director and practicing pediatric pulmonologist. "If they're not working, it either means you don't have a bacterial infection, or that specific antibiotic isn't effective for that infection."

Many common illnesses, like colds, are caused by viruses. In those cases, antibiotics won't help at all. "A common cold is a virus, so antibiotics aren't going to do anything," Dr. Wu says. Most colds improve within seven to 10 days, though a mild cough can last longer.

If symptoms persist after finishing antibiotic medication, your next step should be to contact your provider. Dr. Wu recommends that whenever you see a doctor for a sick visit, you ask and clearly understand the answers to three key questions:

- What is it?
- When should I expect to feel better?
- When should I be concerned enough to call you or seek additional medical care?

Overuse of antibiotics can lead to side effects, repeat visits, and antibiotic resistance. In fact, about 30%

of infections treated with antibiotics didn't need them. "We want to be good stewards of antibiotics," Dr. Wu says, noting that unnecessary use can make them less effective in the future.

Using antibiotics appropriately protects your health and helps manage costs by preventing unnecessary prescriptions, reducing follow-up care, and avoiding expensive treatments caused by resistance or side effects.

To stay healthy and reduce the spread of illness, focus on simple habits: wash your hands, get adequate rest, and avoid close contact when you're sick. Wearing a mask and limiting exposure to others can help protect vulnerable family members.

If you have a cold, home care is often the best treatment. Rest, fluids, and time are key. "There's nothing that modern medicine can give you to get over most colds," Dr. Wu says. In most cases, supportive care and patience are the best remedies, along with recognizing when it's time to seek care.

Knowing when antibiotics aren't needed and what to do when they fail can help you recover safely while avoiding unnecessary costs and side effects. If you have questions about antibiotics, please talk to your provider. 

For a video on antibiotics, visit hmsa.com/AntibioticsVideo.



for your benefit

Simple access to your benefits

HMSA makes it easy to manage your health plan with a simple, convenient tool called My Account. Designed to put your information at your fingertips, My Account gives you a personalized view of your benefits, resources, and coverage details all in one place.

Once you log in from the hmsa.com homepage, you can quickly access important features that help you stay informed and organized. Members can view coverage statements, check claims history, and review plan benefits anytime. You can also track your plan accumulators, including your deductible and out-of-pocket maximum, so there are no surprises.

My Account lets you request or print HMSA membership cards and explore available discounts. Affordable Care Act and Medicare members can pay their premiums online. With everything in one secure location, managing your health plan has never been easier. My Account helps you stay connected, prepared, and in control of your care.





Care anywhere in Hawaii

HMSA's Online Care® makes it easier for members to get care when and where they need it.

Through secure phone or video visits, members can connect with providers for common health concerns like colds, rashes, allergies, and minor infections. Online Care can help save time by reducing travel, wait times, and time away from work or family.

Available to eligible HMSA members, the service offers convenient access to care from home or on the go. Please check your HMSA plan benefits.

It's one way HMSA supports healthier lives by bringing trusted medical care closer. Go to hmsa.com/OnlineCare to learn more.

Amwell is an independent company providing hosting and software services for HMSA's Online Care platform on behalf of HMSA.

Save on prescriptions

HMSA Akamai Advantage® Dual Care (PPO D-SNP) members, remember that you have a Medicaid Value Add benefit.

The benefit further lowers D-SNP members' cost share for covered Part D prescription drugs to \$0 for all tiers. This change happened automatically in the spring; members didn't need to do anything. You'll continue to receive this benefit as long as you qualify for Extra Help from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.



For more information about Extra Help, go to hmsa.com and search for Extra help 2026, scan the QR code, or call (808) 948-6000 or 1 (800) 660-4672.

The PPO D-SNP plan is available to people who qualify for Medicare and are enrolled in HMSA QUEST (Medicaid).

HMSA Akamai Advantage® Dual Care is a PPO D-SNP plan with a Medicare contract and is a state of Hawaii Medicaid Managed Care Program. Enrollment in HMSA Akamai Advantage Dual Care depends on contract renewal.





hmsa holiday traditions

words Kristen Nemoto Jay

illustrations Ariana Hirata

It's nice to relive fond memories. To help inspire your own holiday traditions or add to the ones you already have, here are some of our HMSA employees' favorite traditions during the holiday season. Enjoy!



Let the festivities begin

"Every Christmas Eve, our big family of 30-plus cousins gets together for a night full of fun traditions. We kick things off with a gingerbread house contest judged by our tūtū, then share dinner before heading out to go caroling and see the neighborhood's Christmas lights with hot chocolate in hand. When we get back, Santa arrives with a gift for each grandchild, and we all open them together at the same time."

- China Andrade, Community engagement specialist

Community event

"For the past 13 or 14 years, I've helped make the kadomatsu (traditional Japanese decorative bamboo arrangements) at Taishoji Soto Mission for the New Year. We make 25 to 35 kadomatsu – depends how many people come to pitch in. And then if you help, you get to take one home, which is nice."

- Dean Fuke, HMSA Center senior regional manager



Wow, lau lau

"My wife, Trisha, and I host the New Year's celebration at our home for our extended family of 60+ aunties, uncles, and cousins. It's a tradition that started with Trisha's family. We serve Hawaiian food and the whole family is part of making the lau lau and different Hawaiian food dishes for the party."

- Dale Goya, Vice president of Account Management and Sales



Movie night and lights

"After we eat our Thanksgiving meal, we love watching all the *Home Alone* movies (the ones with Macaulay Culkin). And on Christmas Eve, we like getting in the car or walking the neighborhood to take the grandkids to look at Christmas lights."

- Kim Hera, HMSA Center Kahului manager

'Ohana time

"Each year, we make it a priority to unite with our immediate family, parents, siblings, children, and more, for both holidays and vacations. Our immediate family alone numbers over 25 and our extended family gatherings often grow to more than 50 people. Given that many of us live on the West Coast, and some now reside in Hawai'i, these reunions are especially meaningful."

- Frank Hurtarte, Senior vice president and chief people officer

Tree love

"One of my favorite traditions is decorating our Christmas tree with my two boys (ages 16 and 13). For me, it's really fun to reminisce about how we obtained each ornament (many of them were made by the boys when they were younger), and to debate about placement of each. It kind of signifies the true start of the season for me!"

- Ben Morgan, Vice president of Customer Service and Advocacy



Something sweet

"I make desserts every year. For Thanksgiving, pumpkin crunch and cupcakes for the kids. For Christmas, cheesecake (with cherry and blueberry toppings on the side) and cupcakes again for the kids. Then for New Year's, chocolate trifle (but we call it dump cake), layered Jell-O and broken glass Jell-O."

- Jaime Nakamura, HMSA Center Lihue assistant manager



All about the sides

"For Thanksgiving, we typically prepare traditional side dishes such as stuffing, mashed potatoes with gravy, and green bean casserole. As we're not big on turkey, we substitute it with chicken, usually ordering it from Popeyes, KFC, or Zippy's."

- Yong Sohn, HMSA Center Honolulu manager

'Auld acquaintance

"One of my favorite family traditions is gathering with my 'oldest' friends for Christmas Eve dinner. We've known each other since I was 10 years old, and over the years, our circle has grown to include our families and even new friends we've picked up along the way. Every year, we take turns choosing a different restaurant – always making sure it can fit the 12 to 14 of us."

- Joann Taula, HMSA Center Pearl City manager



For more holiday traditions from the HMSA 'ohana, visit islandscene.com/more.



Get protected. Get your flu shot!

**Getting the flu can throw off work, school, and daily life.
The flu shot is the first and most important step for prevention.**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends an annual flu shot for everyone age 6 months and older who doesn't have any risk factors. Flu season typically starts in October, peaks in December, and can last into spring.

Contact your provider or pharmacy if you have any questions or to schedule your flu shot.



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1010-1940212

joy to the reader

words Summer Nakaishi



HMSA readers share giftable book recommendations. From left: Summer, Ewan, Indie (top), and Finn.

gifting books can be tricky, but they're also a thoughtful way to encourage your recipient to schedule a little me-time while discovering a story they may not have picked up on their own. Not only are books consumable (with your eyes), but they can also be shared, regifted, and, if we're lucky, enjoyed for a lifetime.

Here are some giftable books recommended by our members (and me).

For the cozy reader who could use a little magic:

Before the Coffee Gets Cold
By Toshikazu Kawaguchi

Time travel via caffeine? Magical back-alley cafe? Check and check. My mom gifted me this book after she had read it herself, and years later, it's one I still reread from time to time. Based on a play, this novella is like a warm hug, following four characters, each hoping to fix a perceived roadblock. Though they can't change the present, their time travel experiences remind them to find peace through human

connection. Like a cooling cup of hot coffee, the book reminds us of the impermanence of life.

For the animal lover who's low on time:

Dog Songs
By Mary Oliver

"I gave this to my mom as a birthday gift a few years ago, after I read it myself," says HMSA member Ewan, proud fur dad to goldendoodle Ollie. "It's a series of short poems and essays that explore the canine-human bond through the lives and deaths of the many dogs that Mary Oliver owned. It's touching, amusing, and occasionally thought-provoking. It's a great book to pick up and read a little at a time, whenever you have a few minutes to spare."

For the trivia night champion in-training who loves fun facts:

How to Surf a Volcano
By William Potter and Richard Wilson

Seven-year-old HMSA member Indie recommends this educational

book that mixes comic-style adventures with scientific facts. "It's good for kids who want to learn about earth science," says Indie. "As an example, it shows how the northern lights are made. I wanted to see if I could make them on my own, but I learned that I can't – you need solar wind and a magnetic field."

For the dreamer who loves mystery and adventure:

Moon Base Alpha series
By Stuart Gibbs

If your gift recipient is into out-of-this-world excitement, 11-year-old HMSA member Finn recommends the *Moon Base Alpha* trio, consisting of *Space Case*, *Spaced Out*, and *Waste of Space*. It's the year 2041 and 12-year-old lunarnaut Dashiell Gibson solves mysteries with his fellow Moonies. "I would give this to a friend because it's a really interesting mystery about a group of people who live on the moon, and the main character is from Hawai'i," says Finn.



simple ways to reflect on the year

words Summer Nakaishi

art Garry Ono

Before “new year, new me” season hits, take a step back.

In our daily blur of routines and distractions, it's easy to move from one year to the next without pausing to consider its significance. We often pressure ourselves to keep innovating, keep improving, keep exceeding, keep going, going, going. But moving forward without reflection can leave you feeling, perhaps, a little disconnected. By looking back, you're giving your intentions direction and space to move forward with clarity.

Think of end-of-the-year reflection as a mental health cleaning for your brain. Instead of detouring around the mental clutter, we can sift through our memories, see what brought the most joy, and weed out the habits we'd like to toss. Get rid of the clutter that subconsciously drains our energy.

Write it down

Journaling can be a simple way to begin, whether it's on your computer or phone, or putting pen to paper, for just a few minutes a day (or week). Some writing prompts to consider:

- What felt different this year?
- When did I feel happiest? The most confident?
- What challenges did I overcome?
- What skills did I build or strengthen?
- What surprised me in a good way?
- What relationships supported me the most?
- What habits no longer help me?

Keep it simple

If journaling isn't your jam, reflecting doesn't always require writing it out or invoking a new habit. Choose any practice that feels natural. You could:

- Save your favorite photos in a “best of 2026” folder.
- Create a mood board or digital collage.
- Record voice notes or a video.
- Make a list of your favorite things of the year.

Putting it together

Once you've reflected on photos or prompts, review your collection and look for common themes.

Ask yourself:

- What moments stood out? Did you enjoy being outdoors? Traveling?
- Where were you happiest spending free time? When were you the least happy?
- Did certain emotions repeatedly pop up?

Maybe you noticed certain patterns like feeling overscheduled and needing more rest. Or maybe you felt happiest when learning something new or taking a walk outside with a friend.

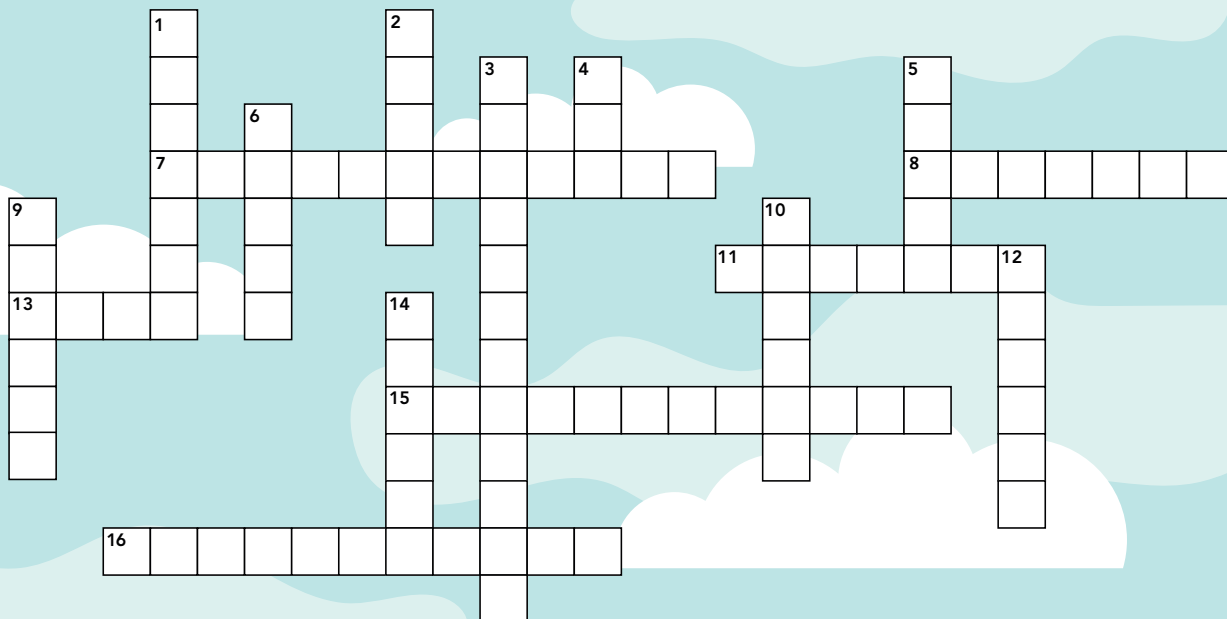
In the end, remember that there's no pressure to find all the answers. Reflecting on the year is a chance to pause, appreciate our achievements, and examine areas where we can improve. Note what worked, what didn't, and what we'd like to carry into the new year.

By reflecting, we're reorganizing our mental clutter. Giving our memories meaning and value can help us live with more focus and gratitude. 

keiki corner

Fall fun in Hawai'i crossword

Use the clues to fill in the crossword with fall themed words inspired by life in Hawai'i.



Across

7. Holiday in November when people give thanks
8. Orange squash used to make Jack-o'-lanterns
11. To gather crops
13. Leaves fall from this
15. On a chilly night, a mug of this with marshmallows hits the spot (two words)
16. Sweet root vegetable also known as 'uala (two words)

Down

1. What keiki wear on Halloween
2. A spooky word for something that says, "Boo!"
3. What to say on Oct. 31 to receive candy (three words)
4. Traditional garland made out of flowers, leaves, or shells (Hawaiian word)
5. Sweet fruit used in pies and fall treats
6. A place where you can pick pumpkins
9. Season between summer and winter
10. 'Ohana is the Hawaiian word for this
12. A bird that's popular on the fourth Thursday of November
14. Something you say when you feel thankful (Hawaiian word)

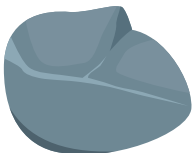


Nature scavenger hunt

As the summer heat cools down and we settle into autumn, it's the perfect time for a walk around the neighborhood, a nearby park, or even your backyard. See how many of these you can find:



- ☐ A leaf bigger than your hand
- ☐ Something that smells good
- ☐ A bird you've never seen before
- ☐ A rock with an interesting shape
- ☐ A plant with three or more colors
- ☐ Something that makes a sound in the wind
- ☐ A place that feels peaceful
- ☐ Something that reminds you of home



S'mores bites

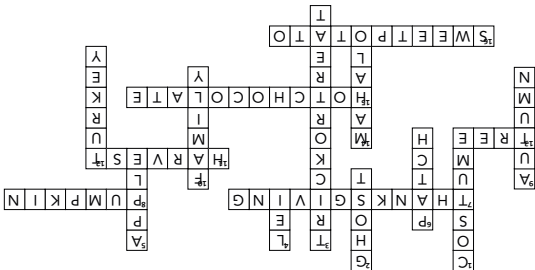
S'mores are a classic treat, and making them mini keeps things fun and manageable for little hands. These bite size s'mores are easy to put together, perfect for sharing, and a great way for keiki to help in the kitchen. No campfire required!

You'll need:

- Honey graham cracker cereal
- Chocolate chips
- Mini marshmallows

Instructions

Adults, heat the oven to 350 degrees F. Line a baking tray with parchment paper. Kids can lay honey graham cracker cereal on parchment paper, add one chocolate chip to every other piece of cereal, and add a mini marshmallow to the rest of the pieces of cereal. Adults, place the tray in the oven for 3-5 minutes, just until the marshmallows puff and the chocolate softens, then remove from the oven. Once it's cool to the touch (but still warm), press a chocolate chip piece of cereal with a marshmallow one to make a tiny but delightful sandwich. Let cool slightly, then enjoy!





very merry holiday treats

words Michelle Liu

photos Lew Harrington

food styling Marjie Beaton

Get in the festive spirit with these homemade holiday treats that are perfect for gifting and gatherings! From savory to sweet, they'll be a hit among all your loved ones (and remember to save some for yourself).



Furikake Party Mix

Parchment paper

20 oz. crispy cereal (Mix different kinds for variety!)

3-4 cups add-ins of choice (e.g., pretzels, corn chips, nuts, etc.)

Glaze

½ cup unsalted butter

½ cup pure maple syrup

¼ cup avocado oil

¼ cup granulated sugar

3 Tbsp. low-sodium shoyu

1.7-oz. bottle nori furikake

Preheat oven to 250 degrees F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

In a large bowl, add cereal and add-ins of choice. Toss well to combine.

To make the glaze, melt butter in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Once melted, add maple syrup, avocado oil, sugar, and shoyu. Stir to combine until sugar is dissolved.

Drizzle glaze evenly over dry ingredients. Use a silicone spatula to mix well. Sprinkle furikake over mixture. Stir until furikake is evenly mixed. Transfer to prepared baking sheet.

Bake for one hour, tossing every 15 minutes, until golden and crispy. Let cool completely. Makes 15-24 cups.

Approximate nutrient analysis per tablespoon (for glaze only): 90 calories, 7 g fat, 2.5 g saturated fat, 10 mg cholesterol, 200 mg sodium, 7 g carbohydrate, 0 g fiber, 7 g sugar, 0.5 g protein



Peppermint Chocolate Bites

1 cup walnuts
10 pitted medjool dates
2 Tbsp. unsweetened cocoa powder
½ tsp. peppermint extract
¼ tsp. salt
⅓ cup dark chocolate chips
1 tsp. coconut oil
1 candy cane, crushed

In a food processor, process walnuts, dates, cocoa, peppermint extract, and salt until mixture has formed a dough.

Form into 12 balls slightly smaller than 1-inch. Place on plate and set aside in freezer.

In a small bowl, melt chocolate with coconut oil in microwave in 20-second intervals, stirring in between.

Take balls out of freezer and dip half the ball in melted chocolate. Sprinkle with crushed candy cane. To stay firm, keep refrigerated until serving. Makes 12 balls.

Approximate nutrient analysis per ball: 150 calories, 9 g fat, 2.5 g saturated fat, 0 mg cholesterol, 50 mg sodium, 18 g carbohydrate, 2 g fiber, 14 g sugar, 2 g protein



Salted Maple Cookie Bars

Dough

1½ cups almond flour
¼ cup coconut flour
¾ tsp. cinnamon
¼ tsp. sea salt
¼ cup coconut oil, melted
⅓ cup almond butter
3 Tbsp. pure maple syrup
1 tsp. vanilla extract

Parchment paper

Maple-date layer

10 pitted medjool dates
¼ cup almond butter
3 Tbsp. pure maple syrup
1 tsp. vanilla extract
¼ tsp. sea salt
2 Tbsp. almond milk

Chocolate drizzle

½ cup dark chocolate
1 tsp. coconut oil

Flaky sea salt, for topping

To make the dough, mix almond flour, coconut flour, cinnamon, and sea salt in a large bowl. Add ¼ cup melted coconut oil, ⅓ cup almond butter, 3 Tbsp. maple syrup, and 1 tsp. vanilla extract. Stir until dough forms.

Line 8x8-inch pan with parchment paper. Press dough evenly into pan. Place in freezer while preparing next layer.

For the maple-date layer, blend dates, ¼ cup almond butter, 3 Tbsp. maple syrup, 1 tsp. vanilla extract, and ¼ tsp. sea salt in a food processor. Add almond milk gradually until smooth and thick. Spread evenly over dough layer.

For the chocolate drizzle, in a small bowl, melt chocolate with 1 tsp. coconut oil in microwave in 20-second intervals, stirring in between. Pour chocolate evenly over date layer. Place pan in freezer for 2-4 hours to set.

Remove from freezer. Sprinkle with flaky sea salt. Slice into bars. Store in airtight container in freezer for a firm texture. Makes 16 bars.

Approximate nutrient analysis per bar (not including flaky salt): 250 calories, 17 g fat, 6 g saturated fat, 0 mg cholesterol, 125 mg sodium, 23 g carbohydrate, 4 g fiber, 16 g sugar, 5 g protein



For DIY finishing salt instructions for practical and thoughtful gifts, go to islandscene.com/more.

chickpeas: the bean with many names (and uses!)

words Michelle Liu

When I was in high school, a friend asked if I liked chickpeas or garbanzo beans. I hesitantly responded, “garbanzo beans?” He guffawed and said, “Michelle, they’re the same thing!” That’s certainly a fun fact I’ll never forget about this legume, which also goes by Bengal gram, Egyptian pea, and Kabuli Chana. These beans are truly full of surprises!

Magical liquid

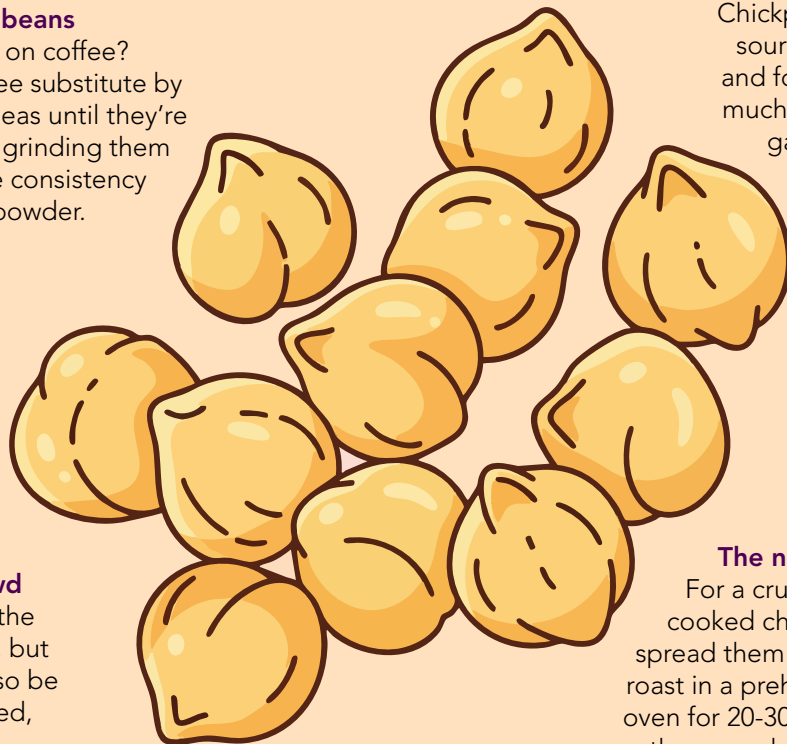
Aquafaba, the liquid in a can of chickpeas, whips up just like egg whites, making it perfect for vegan meringues, mayonnaise, and baked goods.

Brewing beans

Cutting down on coffee? Make a caffeine-free substitute by roasting dry chickpeas until they’re dark brown, then grinding them until they’re the consistency of coffee powder.

Gut check

Chickpeas provide a good source of fiber, protein, and folate. But eating too much can cause bloating, gas, and diarrhea.



Colorful crowd

We may know the beige kind best, but chickpeas can also be black, green, red, or brown.

The new popcorn

For a crunchy snack, pat cooked chickpeas dry, then spread them on a sheet pan and roast in a preheated 425-degree F oven for 20-30 minutes. Then keep the oven door closed until the oven is cool.

More than a one-trick bean

Use chickpeas as the base in hummus, or add them to salads, soups, or even baked goods!



For chickpea recipes, see page 64 and go to islandscene.com/more.

dump dinners





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They may not have the most enticing name, but dump dinners deliver exactly what we want on some nights: low-effort meals that involve little to no prep. Just dump all the ingredients in a dish and let the oven do the work.

Meatball Casserole

- 1 24-oz. jar marinara sauce
- 3 cups water
- 1 Tbsp. Italian seasoning
- 1 tsp. garlic powder
- 1 tsp. onion powder
- 1 16-oz. box uncooked rotini pasta
- 1 14-oz. bag frozen, fully cooked beef meatballs, thawed
- 2 cups shredded mozzarella cheese
- Basil, for garnish, optional

Preheat oven to 425 degrees F.

In a 9x13-inch baking dish, whisk together marinara sauce, water, Italian seasoning, garlic powder, and onion powder.

Add uncooked pasta and thawed meatballs to dish. Stir to combine, spreading everything evenly in the sauce. Use a wooden spoon to gently press noodles and meatballs down so they're submerged in liquid.

Cover dish tightly with foil, making sure that the foil does not touch the sauce. Bake for 35 minutes.

Remove foil and stir gently. Sprinkle mozzarella cheese evenly on top. Bake uncovered for 5-10 minutes, or until cheese is melted. Garnish with fresh basil if desired. Makes 8 servings.

Approximate nutrient analysis per serving: 460 calories, 16 g fat, 6 g saturated fat, 45 mg cholesterol, 800 mg sodium, 54 g carbohydrate, 2 g fiber, 7 g sugar, 24 g protein

Chicken Piccata with Orzo

- 1 10.5-oz. can cream of chicken soup
- 1 cup chicken broth
- ¼ cup lemon juice
- ¼ cup capers
- 8 oz. uncooked orzo
- 2 lbs. skinless, boneless chicken breast, thinly sliced
- 1 tsp. garlic powder
- ¼ tsp. salt
- 1 tsp. black pepper
- ½ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- ¾ cup panko breadcrumbs
- 3 Tbsp. butter
- 1 lemon, thinly sliced, plus more for garnish
- 2 Tbsp. chopped parsley, for garnish.

Preheat oven to 375 degrees F.

In a large bowl, combine canned soup, broth, lemon juice, and capers.

Add uncooked orzo to 9x13-inch baking dish. Pour soup mixture over orzo. Stir to combine.

Place chicken breast slices evenly on top of orzo. Season with garlic powder, salt, and black pepper. Top with Parmesan cheese, panko, butter, and lemon slices. Cover tightly with foil. Bake for 30 minutes. Remove foil. Bake an additional 25 minutes, or until chicken is no longer pink in the center and panko is golden brown.

Garnish with sliced lemons and parsley. Makes 8 servings.

Approximate nutrient analysis per serving: 370 calories, 12 g fat, 5 g saturated fat, 100 mg cholesterol, 700 mg sodium, 32 g carbohydrate, 1 g fiber, 2 g sugar, 33 g protein

Roasted Chickpeas and Artichokes with Lemon

3 14.5-oz. cans chickpeas, rinsed and drained
2 14.5-oz. jars artichoke hearts, rinsed and drained
2 lemons
1 shallot, chopped
½ cup olive oil
Salt and black pepper, to taste
1 cup crumbled feta cheese
¼ cup chopped fresh parsley
Cooked rice or baguette, for serving, optional

Preheat oven to 375 degrees F.

Add chickpeas and artichoke hearts to 9x13-baking dish. Zest one lemon and then juice it over chickpeas and artichoke hearts. Thinly slice the remaining lemon. Add lemon slices, shallot, and olive oil to dish. Season with salt and black pepper. Stir to combine.

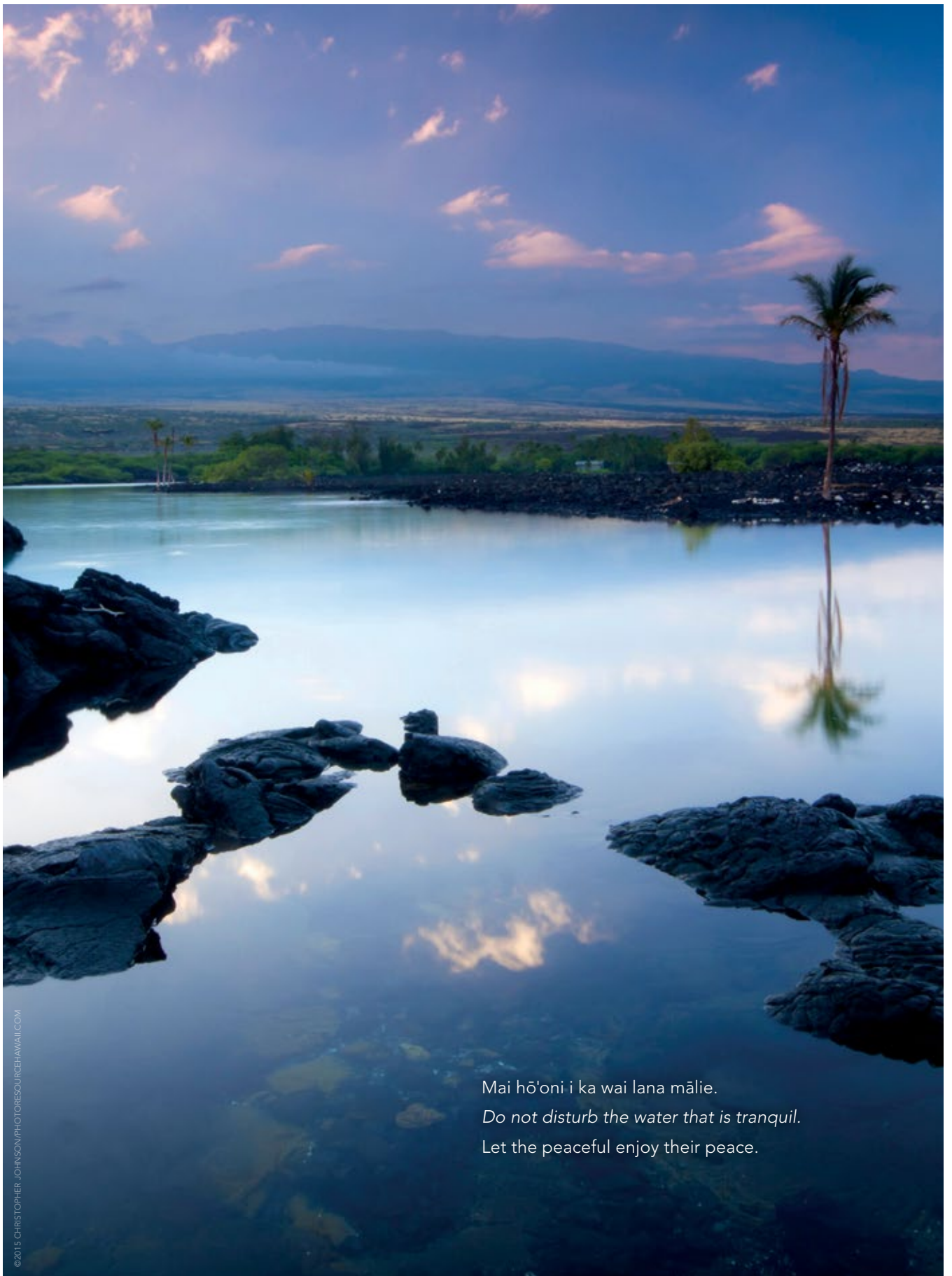
Cover dish tightly with foil. Bake for about 30 minutes. Uncover and add feta and parsley. Bake for an additional 15 minutes, until feta has melted slightly and liquid is bubbly. Serve with rice or baguette if desired. Makes 8 servings.

Approximate nutrient analysis per serving (not including salt to taste, rice, or baguette): 430 calories, 22 g fat, 5 g saturated fat, 15 mg cholesterol, 800 mg sodium, 48 g carbohydrate, 16 g fiber, 8 g sugar, 16 g protein



For dump dinner recipes your kids will love (or maybe at least try?), go to islandscene.com/more.





Mai hō'oni i ka wai lana mālie.
Do not disturb the water that is tranquil.
Let the peaceful enjoy their peace.

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"When our baby was born and needed
the NICU, knowing we had HMSA
gave us peace of mind."

- **Gagala Family**, HMSA members
and Ewa Beach residents.



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