2025

Ola Ka Huakaʻihele o Hiʻiaka

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Introduction: Project Overview and Purpose

This summary provides a high-level overview of the program development and evaluation findings from Ola Ka Huakaʻihele O Hiʻiaka, a culturally grounded train-the-trainer program designed to support healing, recovery, and wellness through Kanaka ʻŌiwi (Hawaiʻi) lifeways. For expanded insights, please refer to the full evaluation report.

Project Overview: Ola Ka Huakaʻihele O Hiʻiaka (OKHH) is a five-month training program rooted in the Kaʻao 5H process, a traditional Hawai'i storytelling arc that guides participants through personal and collective transformation. The Kaʻao 5H process is copyrighted by Dr. Taupouri Tangaro, who has granted permission to Kekuhi Kealiikanakaole & Kauila Kealiikanakaole of Lonoa Honua to teach and share. The A.H.I. process, copyrighted by Kekuhi Kealiikanakaole and Lonoa Honua, integrates ka'ao (stories), oli (chant), hula (dance), kilo (observation), hana no'eau (craft practices), and ʻāina (land)-based practices, welcoming ongoing cohorts in strengthening their relationships to self and environment. These two essential processes were brought together through OKHH.

Grounded in Hawaiʻi lifeways, the pilot program advances a culture-as-health approach (Yamane & Helm, 2022) by creating space for kaʻao (stories) and traditional practices within behavioral health and wellness settings, with the goals to:

- Ensure participants are equipped with the knowledge and skills to guide recovery and healing groups using the Kaʻao 5H process in the context of Hawaiʻi lifeways.
- Create the foundation for a community of practitioners who can engage in long term collaboration and support.
- Enhance overall wellbeing of participants.
- Create an environment for culturally safe intergenerational continuums in respective spaces:
    - Mental and behavioral health supervision
    - Cultural practitioner cross-sector relationship building

An additional goal of the pilot implementation was to develop the Ola ka Huakaʻihele o Hiʻiaka curriculum and evaluation structure, which could be adapted to community-specific needs.

The Kaʻao 5H process is comprised of 5 stages:

1. Hua the Catalyst, The Why?
2. Haʻalele the Departure, Embodying flight from the community
3. Huakaʻi the Journey, A sequence of Life and Deaths

4. Hōʻina the Return, Reintegration back into community
5. Hāʻina the Refrain, Application of all stages of kaʻao

Participants: The cohort included 18 individuals from across Hawai'i, with the majority identifying as Kānaka aka ʻŌiwi (Hawaiian). Participants represented diverse roles, including cultural practitioners, behavioral health professionals, educators, and advocates for systems change. Many had lived experience with psychological distress and substance use and brought deep cultural engagement into the space.

Purpose: The program was designed to enhance practitioners' skills in kaʻao (storytelling) as well as foster environmental kinship and reciprocity. Through learning the "language of kaʻao" (the stages of a story from seed (Hua) to self-actualization (Hāʻina)), participants engage in deep personal reflection and growth. The ultimate goal is to equip practitioners to guide others in exploring and reclaiming their own stories and identities as a pathway to healing and self-actualization, or realizing one's full potential (Maslow, 1943; Positive Psychology, 2024).

Recovery Orientation: OKHH aligns with SAMHSA's working definition of recovery as *"a process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential"* (SAMHSA, 2012). The training framework emphasizes hope, empowerment, and connection, which are essential ingredients of recovery and healing, especially in a cultural context. By integrating traditional narrative (moʻolelo/ kaʻao) and land-based practices, Ola Ka Huakaʻihele O Hiʻiaka offers a holistic approach that addresses the mind, body, spirit, and community in the healing process. This mirrors SAMHSA's recognition that recovery is holistic and encompasses an individual's whole life, including cultural and spiritual facets (SAMHSA, 2012; SAMHSA, 2015; SAMHSA, 2023).

It is important to recognize that while Ola Ka Huakaʻihele O Hiaka is framed as a recovery-oriented training, the cultural grounding and the narrative framework it imparts provides significant benefits that extend well into the realm of treatment. For many individuals, the process of recovery is deeply intertwined with, and for some indistinguishable from, their experience of treatment itself. The integration of ʻāina-based practices, storytelling (kaʻao), and cultural teachings not only supports personal healing and growth but also provides concrete, culturally resonant modalities that can enhance treatment interventions. This work affirms that treatment, healing, and recovery are not linear or separate stages but are part of a holistic continuum where culture, identity, and connection are central to both treatment and long-term wellness. **Therefore, the tools and approaches developed in this project hold promise not only for those on recovery journeys but also for**

practitioners seeking culturally responsive prevention, treatment, and harm reduction frameworks that honor Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

Project Goals and Objectives

The Ola Ka Huakaʻihele O Hiʻaka project was designed with specific goals to support the efficacy, cultural grounding, and sustainability of Hawaiʻi-based healing and recovery approaches. These goals guided curriculum development, training, evaluation, and overall system impact:

- **Articulate the Efficacy of Cultural Approaches:** Develop clear, evidence- and practice-based narratives demonstrating the benefits of cultural healing practices in substance use recovery, especially for Native Hawaiians.
- **Develop Culturally Grounded Curriculum:** Create a comprehensive, adaptable curriculum centered on traditional Hawaiian culture and kaʻao storytelling, meeting the diverse and place-based needs of communities.
- **Train & Certify Practitioners:** Implement a "train the trainer" program equipping behavioral health and ʻāina practitioners with kaʻao skills to guide others through culturally-rooted recovery and healing.
- **Foster Community Engagement:** Build collaborative relationships with cultural leaders, healers, and local organizations to maintain cultural relevance and deepen connections to ʻāina as fundamental to health and healing.
- **Create Measurable Recovery & Healing Outcomes:** Establish culturally appropriate indicators to track participant recovery, cultural connectedness, and community impact through both qualitative and quantitative methods.

These goals set a clear pathway for Ola Ka Huakaʻihele O Hiʻaka to advance culturally-centered behavioral health practices while empowering both practitioners and communities.

For facilitator definitions and participant reflections on the "5 Hs" of the Kaʻao Framework, please see Appendix A in full evaluation report. For a draft of OHH's Theory of Change, see Appendix B.

Centering Kaʻao: Aligning Indigenous and Western Change Models

Including this section in the report is meant to serve as a practical guide for DOH-ADAD as the state entity supporting treatment and recovery providers. By showing how Kaʻao aligns with well-known Western models, we hope to provide ADAD with the language and confidence to include cultural healing modalities in their Requests for Proposals (RFPs) and provider guidelines. This framing also helps establish ways for ADAD to "vet" cultural approaches by recognizing that while the foundation is Indigenous, the processes resonate

with established behavioral health concepts. In this way, ADAD can support providers who center culture in treatment and recovery, ensuring that Indigenous frameworks like kaʻao are recognized as credible, fundable, and essential to Hawaiʻi's healing landscape.

In substance use recovery and healing, kaʻao is foundational, ka'ao is universal, every culture has stories. Our stories drive our healing. Grounding ourselves in story provides a pathway that is relational, collective, and anchored in one's connection to the world around them. Healing unfolds through the arc of kaʻao (Hua, Haʻalele, Huakaʻi, Hōʻina, and Hāʻina), each phase reflecting the natural cycles of transformation.

The table below aims to show the overlap of these Western interventions along the ka'ao process. This table is offered not to legitimize the ka'ao process in Western terms, but to provide ADAD with a crosswalk in language with commonly utilized interventions for addressing substance use disorders. It should be noted that while CBT and Stages of Change are short-term interventions, ka'ao, like recovery and healing, is a lifelong process.

Mapping Western Models Within the Kaʻao Process

Kaʻao Phase	Concept Description	Stages of Change (supportive alignment)	CBT (supportive alignment)	Narrative Therapy (supportive alignment)
Hua	The Catalyst; the impetus; the initiation; the seed; the why of the journey;	Precontemplation, Contemplation	Identifying core thoughts and beliefs that sustain use; raising awareness of cognitive patterns	Externalizing the problem story; surfacing curiosity
Haʻalele	The Launch - the finality of departing oneʻs previous reality for a new reality;	Preparation	Thought–behavior connection: linking intentions to specific triggers, choices, and coping strategies	Ritual/commitment; naming intentions
Huakaʻi	The Journey (often containing spiritual or cultural significance) -	Action	Practicing new skills; cognitive restructuring; applying healthier	Re-authoring narrative with lived experiences

	The journey through the process.		coping strategies during challenges	
Hōʻina	The Return - After the journey, the return to your family, to society, to healthier relationships with substances.	Maintenance	Consolidating new thought–behavior patterns; relapse prevention through reframing and support	Solidifying new personal and collective stories
Hāʻina	The return to self & the self actualization process - Interpretation of oneʻs own learning from the kaʻao.	(Ongoing reinforcement, cycles repeat)	Reflection on long-term patterns; reinforcing positive identity shifts; integrating insights into daily life	Bearing witness, public storytelling, legacy

Cultural and Clinical Implications

In the lived experience of those struggling with substance use, change is rarely linear or individual. It unfolds in cycles, through intention, departure, struggle, return, and collective sharing (hōʻina/hāʻina). This mirrors Indigenous understandings of transformation, where healing is not a checklist of stages, but a living journey bound to story, ʻāina, ʻohana, and ancestors.

Kaʻao, then, is not simply a "tool" to be placed beside other models; it is the foundation. It is a living paradigm that shapes how we move through change and what it means to be in right relationship with ourselves, community, land, and the cosmos.

Within this arc, Western therapies can play a supportive role:

- **Stages of Change** can complement Kaʻao by giving practitioners language to notice readiness or motivational shifts. For example, someone exploring their Hua may look like "precontemplation/contemplation" in Western terms, but Kaʻao roots that stirring in ancestral connection and identity. Stages of Change can help name the moment, but Kaʻao explains its deeper meaning.
- **Narrative Therapy** emphasizes the power of story, which closely parallels the Kaʻao journey. It supports the externalization of trauma, separating the person from the problem, so that new meanings can be created. Yet where narrative therapy focuses on re-authoring, kaʻao expands the story into reconnection, tying it back to ancestry, ritual, ʻāina, and an exploration of the lessons and teachers along the way.

Narrative therapy techniques can support the process, but Kaʻao ensures that the story is more than individual reframing: it is cultural restoration through environmental kinship and pilina (connection).

- **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)** offers practical tools such as thought awareness, reframing, and coping strategies that can serve as useful accents within the larger Kaʻao journey. In practice, these techniques may surface at different phases: the quest for Hua can bring awareness to underlying beliefs and patterns; Haʻalele may involve the beginnings of reframing as one commits to leave behind what no longer serves; during Huakaʻi, coping skills can help navigate struggle and prevent overwhelm; and in Hōʻina, reinforcing healthier behaviors can support reintegration. Yet these strategies remain secondary to the depth of Kaʻao, which roots change in identity, culture, and collective belonging. It is this grounding in ʻohana, ʻāina, and ancestry that transforms short-term coping into long-term healing.

Unlike linear frameworks, Kaʻao supports healing as an ongoing, cyclical, evolving process. As people grow, encounter new challenges, or re-examine past experiences, they may move through these phases again, each time deepening meaning and connection. This is where kaʻao offers more than behavioral change: it sustains long-term healing by re-forming identity, restoring belonging, and reconnecting people to ʻohana, ʻāina, and ancestry.

This alignment makes clear: while Western models can illuminate pieces of the process, offer useful points of language, ways to name phases of readiness and change, externalize stories, or to track new agency,

kaʻao encompasses the whole of journey. It is the root, the foundation, the cultural and spiritual architecture of change. Western therapies, when respectfully woven in, can serve as complementary tools, but always in service to the deeper movement of kaʻao.

Alignment with SAMHSA Recovery Framework

One of the project's key aspects aimed to examine the alignment between Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Recovery Support framework an. However, across the Paeʻāina (archipelago), Hawaiʻi's recovery services are extremely limited. Adhering solely to SAMHSA's framing of what recovery looks like, does not fully encompass the depth of healing needed in Hawaiʻi with complex intergenerational, cultural, and historical traumas experienced.

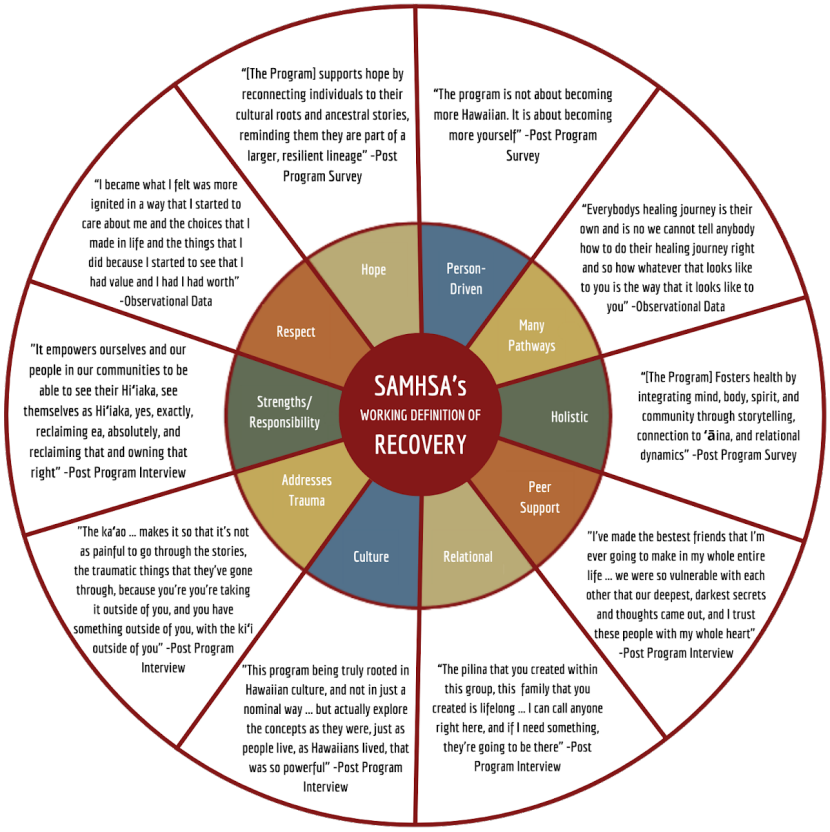
The responses from the Post Program Survey collectively emphasize that the program supports substance recovery through a culturally grounded, holistic approach that aligns with SAMHSA's definition of recovery, emphasizing hope, person-driven paths, many pathways, holistic healing, peer support, relational health, and respect (SAMHSA, 2012).

The Ola Ka Huaka'ihele o Hi'iaka program benefits individuals in substance recovery, their ʻohana, communities, and the community by:

- **Building supportive relationships** through hui (group) and collective journeys, reducing self-doubt and promoting shared healing.
- **Fostering resilience and hope** by sharing moʻolelo (personal and ancestral stories) (Lift Up Wellness, 2024; Morgan, 2000), enabling individuals to reflect, make sense of past decisions, and feel empowered to direct their futures.
- **Reconnecting people to their culture, identity, ʻāina, and place**, which restores belonging and supports deeper healing.
- **Encouraging active participation** in cultural and community practices, such as aloha ʻāina work, which reinforces wellness and purpose.
- **Utilizing storytelling and cultural frameworks** (like kaʻao) to address trauma without retraumatization, focusing on transformation and clarity of self (hua) (PMC, 2019).
- **Strengthening communal bonds**, highlighting that recovery is not just individual but also collective, involving environmental and ancestral kin (LaFrance, 2012).

Ultimately, the program serves as a transformational huakaʻi (journey) rooted in Kanaka ʻŌiwi (Hawaiian) worldview and values, creating a pathway of healing that is integrated, culturally affirming, and deeply relational.

Figure 18. How OKHH Supports SAMHSA's Definition of Recovery



As one participant reflected, "If you want to help me heal, you need to know my story and my culture. This training finally gave me that—and now I can do the same for those I serve."

For additional evidence, please see Appendix H of the full evaluation report: OHH Supports SAMHSA's Definition of Recovery.

Key Project Partners and Their Contributions

1. Lonoa Honua — Cultural Guides and Curriculum Developers

- **Role:** Lonoa Honua served as the cultural guides and knowledge-bearers for the project. They led the design and delivery of the Kaʻao-based curriculum and ensured the training was rooted in Native Hawaiian worldview and practices.
- **Curriculum Creation:** The team (Lonoa Honua & Papa Ola Lokahi) developed a comprehensive curriculum encompassing both online learning and in-person ʻāina-based sessions. This included creating Kaʻao guidebooks and repositories of worksheets, mele (song), oli (chants), ka'ao (stories) compilations, and artistic materials to support learning. For example, Lonoa Honua produced Kaʻao story booklets and reflection journals that guided participants through the five phases of

Kaʻao (Hua → Haʻalele → Huakaʻi → Hoʻina → Hāʻina). These resources allowed practitioners to map their personal journeys within the Kaʻao framework, exploring the resonance of their own life experiences with the stages of story and transformation.

- **Cultural Facilitation:** During the in-person gatherings, Lonoa Honua acted as cultural facilitators or kumu (teachers). They guided participants through protocols like oli (chanting), hula (dance as story embodiment), and mālama ʻāina (hands-on land stewardship). By doing so, they created a safe, sacred learning space where participants could practice cultural rituals and connect deeply with place. This guidance was crucial in helping practitioners grow cultural fluency in storytelling and experience the healing power of reconnection to ʻāina and kūpuna (ancestors).
- **Outputs/Highlights:** Lonoa Honua's work resulted in several supporting materials including a Kaʻao curriculum guide, artwork, resource guidebooks, and Kaʻao booklets which accompanied the place-based aspects of the project, featuring a collection of mele and moʻolelo tied to each phase of the journey. Participant feedback frequently highlighted the impact of these cultural teachings, many noted that learning the Kaʻao framework from cultural experts was transformative, instilling a new sense of identity and purpose grounded in ancestry and land.

2. 1001 Stories — Digital Storytelling and Documentation

- **Role:** 1001 Stories was contracted as the project's videographer and storyteller, tasked with documenting the training journey and creating film deliverables. This component ensured that the narratives emerging from the project were captured and shared, both for participant reflection and for broader dissemination.
- **Film Production:** The team produced four short films highlighting different aspects of the project. This series follows a cohort of behavioral healthcare professionals, ʻāina workers, and community leaders as they learn Kaʻao, a Hawaiʻi storytelling framework, and reflect on how they can use the lessons they learn on their journey to create systems change in their own work. Inspired by Hiʻiaka's mythic journey, participants explore how cultural practice can guide recovery and healing from substance use and offer new pathways of healing.
    - **Project Overview Film:** Introducing Ola Ka Huakaʻihele O Hiʻaka, its purpose, and the importance of cultural approaches in recovery.
        - Ola ka Huakaʻihele o Hiʻiaka: Summary Video
    - **Hoʻāumoe (Residency Time) Film:** Documenting the immersive residency experience where participants engaged deeply with cultural teachings, reflection, and community building. The project begins by asking: What is Kaʻao? We are introduced to the Kaʻao framework, and how it came to shape this project, as the participants prepare to launch into an epic journey.

        - Ola ka Huaka'ihele o Hi'iaka: Part 1 - The Catalyst
    - **Huakaʻi (Journeys) Film:** Following participants on their two huakaʻi (journey) to Hilo and Kauaʻi, capturing the connection to ʻāina, cultural practices, community connections, and shared learning in these sacred places. Following Hiʻiaka's path across the islands, participants step into the challenges and breakthroughs of Huakaʻi, discovering the transformative power of journeying together, and gathering knowledge they can share with their communities when they return. A visual documentation of the ʻāina-based learning days, including scenes of chant, hula, planting, service to the land, and group reflection. This film illustrates how traditional practices were interwoven with recovery and healing concepts, demonstrating the model of *"culture is health* (Yamane & Helm, 2022)*."*
        - Ola ka Huaka'ihele o Hi'iaka: Part 2 - The Journey
    - **Hoʻike (Demonstration) Film:** Showcasing participants' reflections and storytelling as they demonstrated their personal growth, healing journeys, and readiness to carry forward the lessons learned into healing our communities.
        - Ola ka Huaka'ihele o Hi'iaka: Part 3 - The Return
- **Participant Journey Stories:** Interviews and footage following select participants through their Kaʻao journey from initial intentions (Hua) through challenges experienced (Haʻalele/Huakaʻi) to personal transformation (Hōʻina/Hāʻina). These stories humanize the impact of the training, showing real examples of growth and recovery.
- **Outcomes and Reflections:** A concluding film capturing reflections from program staff, cultural guides (Lonoa Honua), and participants on what was learned and the way forward. It ties participant outcomes to the bigger picture of systems change (e.g., more culturally responsive care).
- **Outputs/Highlights:** The four films will serve not only as reporting and educational tools for the funder and stakeholders, but also as enduring storytelling resources for advocacy. They can be used to train other providers, sensitize policymakers to cultural recovery and treatment approaches, and inspire other communities. Notably, participants reported that being filmed and witnessing their own story on screen was validating; it helped them see their growth and hōʻike (demonstrate) their hāʻina, a form of celebrating healing achievements.

3. Pilina Center for Wellbeing — Evaluation using Indigenous Methodologies

- **Role:** Pilina Center for Wellbeing served as the project's evaluation partner, bringing a culturally grounded, Indigenous methodology to the assessment of Ola Ka Huakaʻihele O Hiʻiaka. The evaluation was not simply a technical exercise, but a

relational and ethical practice rooted in Kanaka ʻŌiwi (Hawaiian) epistemologies. The evaluation honored the sacredness of story, the centrality of pilina (relationships), and the importance of measuring what truly matters to the community. The evaluator was required to participate in the journey.

- **Culturally Rooted Evaluation Approach:** Pilina Center for Wellbeing led the evaluation using Indigenous methodologies rooted in Kanaka ʻŌiwi epistemologies. The evaluation was guided by principles of:
    - **Relational accountability**: Evaluation was conducted with and for the community.
    - **Contextual validity**: Cultural context was central, not peripheral.
    - **Multiple ways of knowing**: Data included moʻolelo, kilo (observation), oli, and spiritual insight.
    - **Spiritual integrity**: Evaluation honored ancestral presence and mauli ola (life force) (Wilson, 2008; LaFrance et al., 2012).
    - Such an approach aligns with best practices in Indigenous evaluation, where storytelling and metaphor are seen as valid data that "anchor evaluation to the culture of a people and place" (LaFrance et al., 2012; PMC, 2023). LaFrance et al. (2012) describe how indigenous evaluation methods keep context central, ensuring that what is measured truly reflects what matters to the community.
- **Tools and Measures:** A mixed-methods design was employed, integrating both Western and Indigenous tools to capture the full spectrum of participant experience and program impact. Key tools included:
    - **Pre- and Post-Program Surveys:** Included validated measures such as the Kukui Mālamalama (a culturally developed mauliola scale), Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), and SPANE (positive/negative affect).
    - **Talk Story Interviews:** Semi-structured, audio-only interviews with participants and facilitators, analyzed thematically using a decolonizing lens.
    - **Formative Post-Huakaʻi Surveys:** Open-ended reflections after each huakaʻi (journey) to assess immediate impact and guide program adjustments.
    - **Observational Data:** Ethnographic field notes from huakaʻi, capturing nonverbal communication, cultural engagement, and environmental context.
    - **Document Analysis:** Review of program materials, communications, and participant submissions to triangulate findings.
    - **Creative reflections:** Art, poetry, and storytelling

Culturally Aligned Indicators of Impact:

Rather than relying solely on clinical or deficit-based metrics, the evaluation prioritized culturally resonant indicators (LaFrance et al., 2021) such as:

- **Pilina** (relational connection)
- **Mauli ola** (spiritual wellbeing)
- **ʻIke kūpuna** (ancestral knowledge)
- **Kuleana** (responsibility)
- **Pili ʻuhane** (soulful connection)

These indicators were reflected in participant narratives, facilitator reflections, and observed behaviors throughout the program.

Key Findings

- **Transformational Learning**: Participants reported profound personal growth, increased cultural fluency, and a renewed sense of purpose. Many described the experience as "remembering" rather than learning and reconnecting with ancestral knowledge that lived within them.
- **Behavioral Integration**: Participants applied the Kaʻao framework in clinical settings, schools, and community spaces. They led oli, facilitated moʻolelo-based healing sessions, and used kilo to guide decision-making.
- **Spiritual and Emotional Resonance**: The program created a culturally safe space for vulnerability, healing, and reconnection. Participants described feeling "seen," "held," and "called home" through the rituals, stories, and land-based practices.
- **Identity Formation and Strengthening:** Several non-Native practitioners expressed increased humility and commitment to cultural listening. The approach served as a model for culturally responsive learning.
- **Statistically Significant Gains in Mauliola**: The Kukui Mālamalama scale showed a significant increase in mauliola scores post-program (Wilcoxon signed-rank test, $p = .018$), with a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.82$).
- **Systemic Ripples**: Participants began influencing their organizations, advocating for cultural safety, having kaʻao conversations, and mentoring others. The program seeded a growing network of culturally grounded practitioners across the paeʻāina.

Modeling Indigenous Evaluation:

This evaluation stands as a model for culturally responsive assessment. It demonstrates that Indigenous methodologies can yield rigorous, meaningful, and actionable insights—while honoring the sacredness of the work. As one participant shared, "We are the data." Their stories, transformations, and relationships are the most powerful evidence of impact.

For more information on program design and evaluation, please see the body of the full evaluation report

Collaborative Steps Forward

The evaluation highlighted essential systemic needs, such as culturally safe funding structures, expanded workforce development, and long-term community healing ecosystems, that will ultimately be essential for Hawai'i's healing to thrive. We recognize, however, that broad systems change takes time and must begin with achievable steps inside DOH-ADAD itself. With this in mind, Papa Ola Lōkahi offers the following one-year roadmap as a starting point. These recommendations translate the broader vision into practical, incremental actions that DOH-ADAD can take now, in partnership with cultural practitioners and community, to begin embedding the Ka'ao framework within its Treatment and Recovery Office.

Broader Recommendations

While the one-year roadmap focuses on incremental steps within DOH-ADAD, the evaluation also pointed to longer-term systemic supports that will be necessary to fully realize the impact of culturally grounded recovery and healing in Hawai'i. These broader recommendations provide the vision, which can be held alongside clear attention to fidelity and sustainability so that implementation remains both culturally rooted and systemically supported.

1. **Culturally Safe Funding Structures**
    a. Move toward flexible, multi-year funding that values relational and story-based healing processes (oli, kilo, pilina, mālama 'āina) alongside standard metrics.
    b. Train funders and administrators in cultural safety and non-extractive evaluation methods to ensure reporting and accountability honor indigenous practices.
2. **Workforce Development for Culturally Grounded Facilitators**
    a. Establish a long-term mentorship and train-the-trainer pathways rooted in Native Hawaiian pedagogy.
    b. Create fellowship or residency programs for cultural practitioners to work within addiction care systems.
    c. Develop compensation structures that reflect the value of cultural knowledge and practice.
3. **Integration into Behavioral Health Systems**

a. Support tools such as bilingual (ʻŌlelo Hawaiʻi/English) provider guides and cultural translation training for administrators.
b. Embed Kaʻao and other Native Hawaiian frameworks into state-level prevention, treatment, and recovery initiatives.
c. Build bridges between cultural practice and state-recognized evidence frameworks to ease integration.

4. **Long-Term Community Healing Ecosystems**
    a. Invest in cultural hubs, learning centers, and cultural sites as ongoing anchors for healing.
    b. Normalize off-site huakaʻi to connect with ʻāina.
    c. Support ʻohana-based programming and alumni gatherings to sustain the relationships built in training cohorts.
    d. Develop longitudinal tracking tools that center relational outcomes, community wellbeing, and cultural identity alongside conventional health measures.

Please see the Challenges section located in #6 on the full evaluation report for more supporting information.

Taken together, these recommendations call for DOH-ADAD to recognize cultural practice not as an add-on, but as a foundation for healing in Hawaiʻi. The next step is to ensure that fidelity and sustainability are built into every stage of this work, protecting kaʻao as the root, while developing the structures that allow it to thrive across provider sites and communities.

Fidelity and Sustainability

Fidelity is not about rigid replication; it is about protecting kaʻao as the foundation of healing.

As we look ahead, we know that DOH-ADAD's commitment to sustainability and fidelity is central. For this project, fidelity means staying true to kaʻao as the cultural foundation while allowing for the natural adaptations that occur across communities. The heart of fidelity is not a rigid manual but ensuring that every facilitator grounds their work in the five phases of kaʻao and in cultural protocols such as oli, moʻolelo, and mālama ʻāina.

Sustainability rests in people. By developing a train-the-trainer pathway, certifying facilitators, and supporting them through ongoing mentorship, we can grow a strong network of practitioners who carry this work forward with integrity. We envision building an alumni/practitioner network that continues to gather, practice, and refine together, so fidelity is maintained through community accountability and cultural guidance.

With DOH-ADAD's support, cultural healing modalities like kaʻao can be embedded in provider contracts and RFPs, ensuring they are not only allowable but recognized and valued. In this way, sustainability and fidelity become shared responsibilities, rooted in culture, reinforced by training and mentorship, and supported by state structures that honor Indigenous healing as essential to Hawaiʻi's recovery and healing system.

Roadmap for DOH-ADAD/Kaʻao Integration

We invite DOH-ADAD to take the following **achievable steps** over the next year to begin integrating the Kaʻao framework within the Treatment and Recovery Office.

1. Policy & Commitment (0–3 months)

- Make a formal commitment to support Kaʻao curriculum integration statewide (even if modest at first).
- Host a short Kaʻao orientation workshop for DOH-ADAD staff, led by Aunty Kekuhi and select practitioners from this pilot cohort, to build shared understanding.
- Identify trained cohort members who can serve as resource people to DOH-ADAD and as learning partners.

2. Workforce Mentorship & Site Engagement (3–6 months)

- Support continued mentorship for the current cohort to strengthen practice.
- Encourage site-based pilots by having cohort members bring training to their provider sites (treatment, sober living, recovery, ʻāina site).
- Participate (ADAD) in one pilot training to see integration in practice.
- Adjust Ana Kūkulu evaluation framework (story-based + quantitative), adapted from Ola Ka Huakaʻihele O Hiʻiaka, to fit the site.

3. Resource Development & Evaluation (6–9 months)

- Continue supporting pilot trainings with additional interested providers.
- Begin structured evaluation of site pilots, with support for data collection.
- Host a convening with DOH-ADAD, cohort members, and providers to share stories, lessons, and early findings.

4. Expansion & Institutionalization (9–12 months)

- Expand Kaʻao training opportunities to additional DOH-ADAD contracted providers statewide.

- Provide funding for evaluation, practitioner/provider resources, and sites.
- Explore long-term structures such as a mentorship program, TA hub, or ongoing cultural practitioner partnership to sustain Kaʻao integration.

Conclusion

This report has highlighted the purpose, activities, and impacts of the Ola Ka Huakaʻihele O Hiʻiaka project, demonstrating how the Kaʻao framework, as a foundational Hawai'i lifeway, grounds recovery and healing in a cultural and spiritual base that redefines what healing looks like in Hawaiʻi (Daniels et al., 2022; LaFrance et al., 2012; SAMHSA, 2012). Rooted in story, ritual, and ʻāina, this pilot affirmed that cultural practice is not supplemental to behavioral health, it is foundational.

The impact of this work has been profound at multiple levels. For participants, the journey cultivated personal growth, cultural fluency, and renewed confidence in their ability to serve (White et al., 2020; Repper & Carter, 2011). Many described the experience as "remembering" knowledge that was always within them, restoring identity and strengthening their sense of kuleana (privileged responsibility). Beyond the individual, ʻohana and community, these practitioners now carry tools and ʻike (knowledge) back into their professional roles, as counselors, administrators, educators, cultural practitioners, and peer leaders. In doing so, they are transforming the spaces they touch, from treatment centers and health centers to ʻāina-based programs and community organizations (Beach et al., 2005).

The ripple effects extend further still. Those served by cohort participants, the clients navigating substance use healing and recovery, students, incarcerated individuals, and families, are now being engaged through pathways that honor culture, connection, and collective identity. For many, this is the first time that services have reflected their own cultural grounding, offering not just treatment but belonging, dignity, and hope. The reach of this program thus extends to ʻohana and entire communities, fostering relational healing that transcends the individual.

At a systems level, the project has planted seeds of change within organizations across Hawaiʻi. Employers of cohort members are witnessing the benefits of staff who are more grounded, resilient, and culturally responsive. Agencies are beginning to see that investing in culture is also investing in staff retention, client engagement, and community trust. This shift is laying the groundwork for organizational cultures that embrace Hawaiian frameworks not as peripheral, but as core to effective service delivery.

Perhaps most importantly, DOH-ADAD itself has taken a courageous step in acknowledging the value of cultural approaches by supporting this project. That acknowledgement carries weight. It signals to providers statewide that Kaʻao and ʻike Hawaiʻi are not only valid but essential frameworks for health and healing. This internal shift within DOH-ADAD can ripple up the chain of systemic command, informing contracts, influencing funding priorities, and shaping statewide policy. As DOH-ADAD embraces cultural practice internally, it models for other agencies how systems can move toward cultural safety and decolonized approaches to care.

We view this pilot not as an endpoint, but as a beginning. The training illuminated what becomes possible when culture and healing are acknowledged as one in the same: practitioners more empowered, organizations more responsive, ʻohana more supported, and communities more whole (White et al., 2020; Beach et al., 2005). We mahalo DOH-ADAD for standing with us in this first step. With continued partnership, we can expand these ripples into lasting waves of change toward a Hawaiʻi where every story, and every recovery and healing journey is honored and uplifted in its fullest cultural and spiritual depth.

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