



COMPREHENSIVE REPORT ON THE NEEDS AND RECOVERY OF FILIPINO SURVIVORS OF THE LAHAINA FIRES

This report provides a comprehensive analysis of the needs and recovery experiences of Filipino survivors of the August 2023 Lahaina fires. It is the result of 16 months of dedicated research by Tagnawa, a grassroots organization formed in response to the early lack of recognition and representation of Lahaina's Filipino community, and the Hawai'i Workers Center. The term tagnawa - an Ilokano word meaning reciprocity and community care - reflects our mission to address the unique challenges faced by Filipinos, who make up a significant portion of Lahaina's population.

The data presented is drawn from multiple surveys and interviews conducted from one month after the fire to December 2024. Crucially, data collectors were members of the Filipino community, including fire survivors themselves, who engaged participants not as researchers, but as members of the community speaking their own languages. This approach fostered connection and trust, allowing survivors to share their stories, without which this research would not exist.

Our findings highlight the critical need for culturally informed recovery strategies. To ensure equitable resource distribution, it is essential that policymakers recognize and address the specific cultural practices, strengths, and needs of the Filipino community.

This report outlines actionable steps for lawmakers to build upon the resilience, tenacity, and adaptability of Filipino survivors. These recommendations are not only vital for ensuring a just recovery but also offer a model for inclusive, community-centered disaster response that uplifts marginalized voices.

KEY FINDINGS

757

A total of 757 Filipino fire survivors were surveyed and interviewed.

54%

of Tagnawa needs assessment survey respondents chose the Ilokano surveys and 15% took the Tagalog surveys, with a total of 69% respondents choosing the non-English surveys.

68%

There was significant representation of women (68%) in the initial survey, and a majority of families reported elderly (68%) and child (58%) household members.

84%

Ilokano families reported significantly higher rates of having elders living with them (84%) vs English (56%) and Tagalog (58%) respondents.

National disaster models such as FEMA housing programs are eroding Filipino culture and immediate families are now separated into smaller units, losing the cohesion of their extended support networks.

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- English, Ilokano, and Tagalog speaking respondents reported different recovery needs and experiences. English-speaking Filipinos indicated the greatest access to basic needs and therefore prioritized housing issues higher than Ilokano and Tagalog respondents. Tagalog respondents showed the least access to basic necessities such as food, water, and household goods. Ilokano and English respondents rated housing as a higher priority than Tagalog respondents.
 - Financial aid is consistently marked as a top need for Filipino survivors; in the initial needs assessment, 94% of respondents indicated they needed financial aid. One year later, when asked how they could be best supported in the recovery process, aside from housing, 38% of respondents expressed the need for financial aid.
 - Ilokano and Tagalog-speaking immigrants faced language barriers and unfamiliarity with local and state government systems, exacerbating their need for translation services and advocacy.
 - Approximately 68% of Filipino respondents lived in non-standard multigenerational households pre-fire, complicating eligibility to receive aid and even finding accommodations to fit multigenerational households.
 - Families who were living in multigenerational households that were separated due to FEMA and Red Cross regulations are now struggling with the declining physical health of elders. This separation has also affected childcare with families having to make additional accommodations such as traveling across the island to drop off child/ren and elderly relatives, or they have had to stop working to take on caregiving duties.
 - Despite only approximately 6% of respondents of the 1-year surveys expressing the specific need for mental health services, 33% of responses mentioned stress and trauma-related symptoms (anxiety, nightmares, insomnia, hypervigilance and intrusive memories) raising concerns for Filipino mental health with particular concern for children's mental health.
 - Youth Filipino mental health distress is a serious issue. 50% of responses indicated that school changes left Filipino children feeling isolated and emotionally distressed with some children experiencing bullying in their new schools.
 - Gender-based violence is often underreported, gender-based violence data requires unique methodology to capture, and this phase of the research did not specifically focus on this sensitive data, however some respondents of the Tagnawa needs assessment survey did report unsafe housing and experiences of sexual or physical violence. These findings, while limited in scope, are deeply concerning and have prompted Tagnawa to launch a gender-focused comprehensive study as the next phase of our work.
 - English language proficiency and U.S. citizenship are disaster recovery tools that many Lahaina residents did not possess. To survive, Filipino immigrants activated their indigenous values and practices of interdependency, mutual aid, generosity, expanded definitions of family and kinship, and subsistence agriculture via backyard farming.
 - Filipinos and Filipino immigrants care about environmental issues and Native Hawaiian priorities, not just jobs. Job creation and Lahaina lands remaining in Lahaina hands (as opposed to outside developers and owners) were tied as the top mid- to long-term issues named by Filipino respondents. A significant number of respondents also support water as a public trust and wetlands restoration.
 - In direct contradiction to Governor Green's divisive statement on Filipinos pushing for the October 2023 reopening of West Maui tourism,
- 47% of Filipino fire survivors opposed the reopening of West Maui to tourism and 22% had mixed or torn feelings, expressing conditional support or reservations. Only 31% indicated support for the reopening outright, however often citing economic need.**

