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Building Hawai'i's First Income-Restricted Rental Community for Senior Veterans

With a median rent that is 44 percent higher than the national average, Hawai'i has some of the highest rental housing costs in the United States. These high costs impact the ability of housing voucher holders, including holders of HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) vouchers, to lease apartments with their vouchers. To address this issue, service organization Hawai'i Island Veterans Memorial (HIVM) partnered with the nonprofit developer EAH Housing to create Hale Nā Koa 'O Hanakahi, the state's first income-restricted rental community targeting senior veterans and their surviving spouses. Located in Hilo on Hawai'i's Big Island, Hale Nā Koa 'O Hanakahi opened in October 2025.

The project is helping HIVM realize its vision for a senior veteran campus that colocates income-restricted senior housing with a veterans' center and a community-based outpatient clinic. Hale Nā Koa 'O Hanakahi occupies 5.6 acres of the 7.5-acre campus. HIVM reached out to EAH in 2015, having identified the developer from EAH's previous work in Hawai'i. Together, the team designed an amenity-rich, independent living project serving senior veterans and their surviving spouses while assembling the funding package for the project. Construction began in 2022 and was completed in 2024.

Funding sources included \$32 million in low-income housing tax credit equity, a \$2.7 million Hula Mae Multi-Family Bond (a state tax-exempt bond program that supports the development or rehabilitation of rental housing projects), a \$16.9 million Rental Housing Revolving Fund loan (a state program providing gap financing for developers of income-restricted housing), a \$3.1 million Hawai'i County Housing Trust Fund loan; and a \$2.3 million county HOME Investment Partnerships loan. Development costs totaled approximately \$58 million.



Hale Nā Koa 'O Hanakahi, which roughly translates to "House of the Warrior," is Hawai'i's first income-restricted rental community targeting senior veterans and their surviving spouses. Photo credit: EAH Housing



Community spaces and programming at Hale Nā Koa 'O Hanakahi support seniors' social lives and well-being as they age. Photo credit: EAH Housing

Hale Nā Koa 'O Hanakahi roughly translates to "House of the Warrior," reflecting the preference given to veterans and their surviving spouses for the development's 91 one-bedroom, income-restricted units. There is also a unit for a live-in property manager. Hale Nā Koa 'O Hanakahi consists of 3 two-story buildings, each with 24 units, and a 2-story, 20-unit building. Each unit is approximately 546 square feet and features a spacious covered porch or patio. Hale Nā Koa 'O Hanakahi residents must be at least 62 years old and earn no more than 80 percent of the area median income (AMI). The units have a range of income limits, with 12 units renting to households earning up to 30 percent of AMI, 38 units renting to households earning up to 50 percent of AMI, 31 units renting to households earning up to 60 percent of AMI, and 10 units renting to households earning up to 80 percent of AMI. County funding incentives allowed the developers to increase the number of units limited to residents earning up to 30 percent of AMI, from 9 units to 12 units. The 50 total units that rent at or below 50 percent

of AMI have project-based vouchers issued through the Hawai'i County Housing Finance and Development Corporation; the project also was allocated 5 project-based HUD-VASH vouchers.

Robust Community for Senior Veterans

A vibrant social life can improve many seniors' ability to age well, and Hale Nā Koa 'O Hanakahi supports residents' socialization and well-being in several ways. Communal spaces at Hale Nā Koa 'O Hanakahi help foster social interaction and include a community center containing a lounge, coffee bar, fitness room, and multipurpose room with kitchen. The property also features four laundry rooms. The property's landscaping, with meandering walking paths connecting the buildings and the community center, also promotes connection. Garden beds scattered throughout the site allow residents to grow fruits, vegetables, and other plants. A dog park supports residents' four-legged family members while encouraging neighbors to socialize. Finally, a covered outdoor lanai connects the community building with the main lawn, providing flexible space for residents to gather for events and activities.

An onsite resident services coordinator works with individual households to tailor service plans to their needs. The coordinator also curates activities for the Hale Nā Koa 'O Hanakahi community at large. Regularly occurring activities include Zumba, bingo, karaoke, mahjong, and the gardening club. On occasion, residents will gather for organized potlucks or presentations from healthcare providers or county agencies.

With Hale Nā Koa 'O Hanakahi now open and operating successfully — lease-up took only 2 months, reflecting local housing needs — HIVM is planning the outstanding aspects of their campus vision. The next phases of development involve building the outpatient clinic and the veterans' center. Together with the Hale Nā Koa 'O Hanakahi housing component, Hawai'i's senior veterans are gaining a needed new option in navigating the state's housing cost challenges.

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