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Hawaiian Community Assets awarded \$6.34 million to expand housing program for wildfire survivors

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The Hawaii Community Foundation announced Thursday a \$6.34 million award to expand an initiative that provides safe, affordable housing and clear pathways to homeownership for families affected by the 2023 Maui wildfires.

The funding is going to Hawaiian Community Assets for the Ua Hale A‘ela program. The money is coming from two of the foundation’s programs — the Maui Strong Fund and House Maui.

According to the foundation, the Maui Strong Fund is contributing \$6.3 million while House Maui is providing a \$40,000 grant to cover remaining operational expenses, enabling Hawaiian Community Assets to acquire and lease housing units on Maui with pathways to ownership.

“This investment represents our commitment to creating sustainable pathways to homeownership and long-term community stability for our wildfire survivors,” Terry George, CEO and president of Hawaii Community Foundation, said in a statement.

He added that the Ua Hale A‘ela program has already demonstrated great success, and the new funding will allow them to expand on that.

“By combining resources from both the Maui Strong Fund and House Maui, we are able to provide comprehensive support that addresses both immediate housing needs and long-term financial stability,” he said.

The Ua Hale A‘ela program is anticipated to make 17 units available on Maui by April 2028, while also serving 45 wildfire-affected clients with personalized financial planning following settlement payouts and delivering 12 financial education workshops focused on settlement planning and homeownership.

Since its inception, Hawaiian Community Assets has acquired 23 units with 90% of them occupied by program participants and three households transitioning to ownership. The organization has also provided HUD-certified housing counseling and financial support to more than 300 wildfire-affected families, and facilitated five homeownership transitions through the Ua Hale A‘ela program.

“Many programs are helping survivors recover, but renters still face the greatest risk of displacement,” said Chelsie Evans Enos, CEO of Hawaiian Community Assets. “This partnership creates a true path to ownership so families can rebuild and remain in Hawaii, not be forced to leave.”

According to the Hawaii Community Foundation, key features of the Ua Hale A‘ela program include:

- Staff realtors work on salary rather than commission to prioritize client needs.
- Developer fees reinvested into HCA’s affordable housing programs.
- Properties selected for affordability, safety, and immediate useability.
- Anti-displacement approach that protects existing tenants and prioritizes wildfire survivors.
- Rent-to-own pathways with comprehensive HUD-certified housing counseling, budget assistance, and avoidance of high-risk insurance zones.
- Revolving fund model that supports Lahaina fire survivor acquisitions, then cycling continues to expand affordable housing for Maui families.