

News

Hawai'i nonprofit buys condominium building in Hilo, growing its rent-to-own program

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A statewide nonprofit has purchased a 28-unit condominium building in Hilo, growing its rent-with-option-to-purchase program to Hawai'i Island residents.

Hawaiian Community Assets, a nonprofit housing counseling agency, partnered with Hawai'i County's Office of Housing and Community Development to purchase Ali'i Kai apartments in Keaukaha. This purchase doubles the number of units available through the nonprofit's Ua Hale A'ela program, which is meant to turn Hawai'i renters into homeowners in two years or less.

All current residents at the condominium building will be offered the opportunity to enroll in Ua Hale A'ela and may choose to stay in their residence. Each unit in the program is renovated within 3-6 months of purchase by the nonprofit.



Ali'i Kai apartments in Keaukaha

Along with the Big Island, there are units across Maui and Kaua'i that are part of this program, which is the first of its kind in the state. The program launched in 2024.

"Hawaiian Community Assets came into my life at a time when we had nothing saved and no safety net. Alongside my faith, HCA walked with us through a process that felt impossible to face on our own," said Kawie Kumda, who closed on a unit in Hilo last year under the Ua Hale A'ela program. "Owning our own home was something I never thought was possible. The relief of knowing that you own your place and rent not going up every year or two – that's a sense of peace that can't be bought."

Ua Hale A'ela was designed to break the cycle of housing insecurity by acquiring and repurposing existing homes, providing immediate rentals, and creating a structured pathway for families to become homeowners, according to a news release from the nonprofit.

"The program is a beacon of hope for those who may not qualify for traditional mortgages, transforming the lives of vulnerable populations," the release stated.

Three families closed on units in Hilo under the program in late 2025. All clients also received assistance through the County of Hawai'i Deferred Payment Loan program, which provided a 0% interest second mortgage to qualifying buyers.

"Homeownership is a key pathway to building generational wealth, community stability, and financial empowerment," said Chelsie Evans, CEO at Hawaiian Community Assets. "Deeply rooted in community, culture, and healing, Ua Hale A'ela provides lasting stability for our underserved families, and we are excited to expand access to this program."

Hawaiian Community Assets works with subsidiary Hawai'i Community Lending to lead families through the homebuying process — from budgeting and savings to grants and loans — to ensure a solid financial foundation.

"We are privileged to be part of this innovative program and to be there for these families," said Jeff Gilbreath, chief executive officer of Hawai'i Community Lending. "When they are ready to purchase, we are ready to connect them to affordable mortgage financing. Our team at HCL is skilled at using all our resources to reduce costs on families to make homeownership possible."

Anyone interested in applying to the program can visit hawaiiancommunity.net/ua-hale-aela.

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