

American Samoa Community Cancer Coalition Receives \$6.1 Million from National Institutes of Health for Alzheimer’s Disease and Related Dementias Research.

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PAGO PAGO, American Samoa - The American Samoa Community Cancer Coalition (ASCCC) has been awarded an R01 research grant from the National Institutes of Health’s (NIH) National Institute on Aging (NIA) for \$6.1 million to study Alzheimer’s Disease and Related Dementia (ADRD) for three years. The study titled *Puipui Malu Manatu*, or “protecting memories,” tests novel approaches to increase literacy and research readiness, improve detection, and build upon a potentially robust research infrastructure to conduct genetic testing of ADRD in American Samoa. ADRD affects over 5.7 million Americans and over 35 million people worldwide, but little is known about its risk and prevalence in indigenous populations, particularly in American Samoa.

One of the two Co-Principal Investigators Mr. Va’atausili Tofaeono said, “It is an exciting time for our community in population health research.” The NIH has various research grants, but an R01 is considered the “gold standard” and given to only hypothesis-driven projects with vital preliminary data. “Since I have been in the public health field in 2004, the only R01’s that conducted research in our community were being awarded to large academic institutions, but this is the first given to and managed by an organization in American Samoa. This award is a testament to the many years of work we have done in the community and partnerships with federal agencies such as the National Institutes of Health.”

The study is a result of the ASCCC’s Indigenous Samoan Partnership to Initiate Research Excellence (INSPIRE) program funded by the NIH’s National Institute of Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD). INSPIRE helped build research capacity to determine if health literacy contributed to low colorectal cancer screening. The project was awarded two administrative supplements to include ADRD in 2019. From a sample of over 700 adults aged 50 and above, unpublished results showed a high prevalence of possible dementia or mild neurocognitive disorders but more testing needed to be conducted. Mr. Tofaeono understood they needed an expert in the field to further their research. A colleague at the University of Hawaii introduced him to Dr. James Galvin, the Director of the University of Miami’s Comprehensive Center for Brain Health. Dr. Galvin is a world-renowned neurologist and researcher. He has pioneered dementia screening measures that are culturally sensitive, authored over 250 scientific manuscripts, directed 45 clinical trials for ADRD, and will serve as the second Co-Principal Investigator. “My wife’s parents suffered from ADRD as well as my grandfather with Lewy Body Dementia. It has been a personal battle to understand the root cause and improve health outcomes in a culturally sensitive and personalized fashion. When Va’a reached out, I thought it was a perfect opportunity to use our experiences to help the Samoan

people. *Puipui malu manatu* will allow us to build upon the initial work of INSPIRE and incorporate new approaches by recruiting participants to receive cognitive, neurological, and genetic tests that will be more comprehensive,” said Dr. Galvin. The study’s short-term goal is to determine prevalence and study resilience and vulnerability factors contributing to ADRD in American Samoa and share resources with other investigators. The long-term goal is to foster future research efforts to increase accurate and early diagnosis, expand access to care, and improve health outcomes in American Samoa.

The local research team will receive additional guidance from two Co-Investigators and their institutions with years of clinical and research experience in ADRD and Pacific Islanders. Co-Investigator Dr. Van My Ta Park is a professor at the University of California San Francisco School of Nursing. She is the Principal Investigator for the Collaborative Approach for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders Research and Education (CARE) in ADRD. Also, Dr. Ian Pagano will represent the University of Hawai’i’s Cancer Center. He has over 20 years of professional experience in biostatistics and will support the research design, data analysis, and mathematical modeling.

Mr. Tofaeono and Dr. Galvin would like to thank the following partners and individuals for their continued support and who are vital to the study’s success: Agency for Better Living Endeavors (ABLE), American Samoa Community Cancer Coalition Board of Directors, ASG Department of Human and Social Services, ASG Fono: House Health Committee, Dr. Jueta McCutchan-Tofaeono, Dr. Robin Faumuina-Vasai, Honorable Uifaa’tali Aumua Amata, Honorable Andra Tereise Samoa, Hope House, LBJ Tropical Medical Center, National Alzheimer’s Coordinating Center, Office of Samoan Affairs, Pago Samoa West Stake - Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, University of California San Francisco, University of Hawaii Cancer Center, the University of Indiana, and the University of Miami’s Leonard M. Miller School of Medicine.