

# 25TH MICRONESIAN ISLANDS FORUM

## FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA

### FEBRUARY 13 - 17, 2023

THEME: "TAKING ACTIONS TODAY FOR MICRONESIA'S PROSPERITY TOMORROW"

### Resolution 23-02

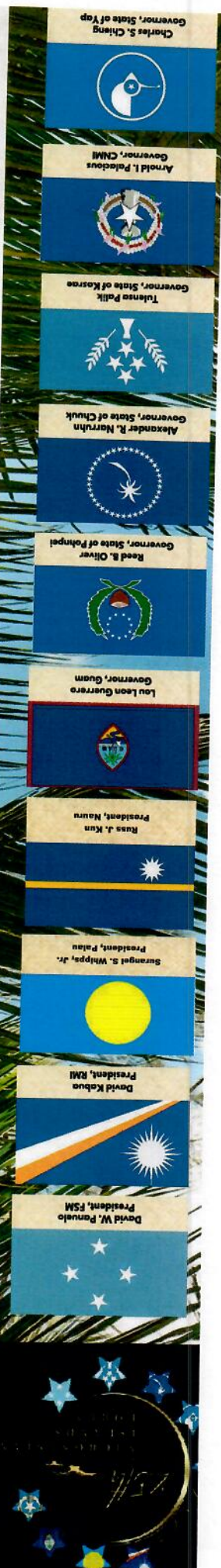
*Rethink workforce development, recruitment, and retention strategies for the USAPs*

WHEREAS, the Micronesian Islands Forum (formerly the MCES) endorsed *MCES Resolution 21-01 – Concerning Health Workforce Development as a Matter of Utmost Urgency to Effectively Address Chronic and Acute Healthcare Needs in the USAPs* and *MCES Resolution 21-02 – Concerning the Prioritization and Strengthening of Regional and Jurisdictional Health Surveillance Systems, and to Support Investments in Health Workforce Development as a Matter of Utmost Urgency* at its 21<sup>st</sup> MCES Meeting in Koror, Palau in February 2016; and

WHEREAS, Pacific Island countries and U.S. Pacific Island jurisdictions continue to experience acute and chronic shortages in qualified and experienced healthcare staff across a significant number of generalist and specialist disciplines impacting the delivery of quality, comprehensive, and culturally appropriate healthcare services spanning primary care and prevention, secondary and tertiary clinical services, healthcare administration and management, and ancillary and other medical services, including other disciplines needed to support healthcare services (biomedical engineering, facilities maintenance, waste management, IT, etc.); and

WHEREAS, there continues to be an insufficient critical mass of workforce pipelines into healthcare careers to fill long-standing vacancies and to supplement and replace the current workforce with preliminary regional data collection and analysis indicating that, on average, nearly a third or more of the current health workforce in a majority of island settings will be at retirement age within the next five to ten years, and it is unclear whether current educational and training pipelines existing in the northern Pacific region will graduate sufficient numbers of qualified young professionals across priority health disciplines to minimize the impact of this looming "retirement wave" on current and future health services; and

WHEREAS, critical gaps in quality and robust Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) curricula delivery in the K-12 primary and secondary education systems across the Pacific Islands remain, impacting pipelines



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into and student success/retention in rigorous STEM-based health sciences disciplines and career tracks; and

**WHEREAS**, the continuing acuity and chronic nature of health workforce shortages have only been compounded (worsened) during the COVID-19 pandemic as significant numbers of existing healthcare staff have exited the healthcare sector for a variety of reasons compounding further heavy reliance on expatriate and short-term contracted staff to fill critical COVID-19 surge response and other health sector vacancies; and, that these short-term contracts have already or will soon expire due to COVID-19 funding appropriations sunsetting within the current and next year; and

**WHEREAS**, in most of the Pacific Island countries and U.S. Pacific Island jurisdictions, government human resource (HR) recruitment policies and procedures are antiquated, cumbersome, overly lengthy/bureaucratic, and in some cases, final decision-making to fill vacancies are made outside of the purview of the departments/ministries of health and consequently, it is an all-too-common experience to identify healthcare position vacancies and contracts that have remained unfilled for six months or more, and in many cases, years; and

**WHEREAS**, some Pacific Island countries and US Pacific Island jurisdictions still maintain paper-based HR management systems, or only have rudimentary, open-source electronic HR management systems, and have minimal to no dedicated and qualified HR staff, creating challenges to accurately and timely assess current workforce profiles to inform both health workforce planning and development strategies and interventions; and

**WHEREAS**, some Pacific Island countries and US Pacific Island jurisdictions continue to have antiquated and obsolete health professional classification, licensure, and certification systems and processes, impacting accurate workforce planning and development, strategic planning and resource mobilization; and

**WHEREAS**, one of the many factors impacting recruitment and retention in the healthcare workforce is the competitive nature of salaries, benefits, and other incentives for staff compared to global market rates for equivalent positions. Significant past and current investments have been made to upskill and train new and existing healthcare workforce both locally and abroad. However, once many have successfully completed these opportunities, attained credentials, etc., a proportion will inevitably seek better paying and other job promotion opportunities elsewhere, especially off-island. Anecdotally, higher salaries, better benefits and work environments, family obligations, and better educational opportunities are the top reasons cited for exiting the healthcare system across the Pacific Islands,



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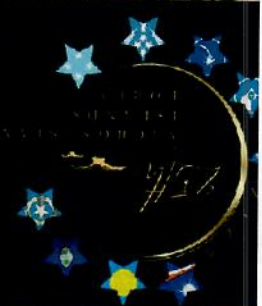
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**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, that the MIF leadership commits to supporting and sustainably financing a diverse array of health professional training (accredited and non-accredited, virtual and on-site) and continuing professional educational programming targeting both new/upcoming and current healthcare workforce, including but not limited to: 1) increasing targeted investments into local community colleges and universities to improve and expand accredited health professional training programs aligned to the priority and critical healthcare disciplines needed in each island and regionally; 2) contribute to bilateral negotiations with regional universities and teaching/training institutions to establish new and expand educational training bridging programs as pathways into advanced health science degree tracks, including articulation and bridging programs directly between local community colleges and regional universities and accredited training institutions; 3) scale-up scholarship program funding to support tuition and training expenses for young professionals entering health professional degree tracks; and 4) mobilize funding sources for health departments/ministries to deliver and sustain quality continuing education (CE) health professional training programming, including apprenticeships and internships for the existing health workforce; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the MIF leadership commits to plan and conduct rigorous reviews of local government pay scales and classifications for all publicly-supported healthcare positions, with the view to identifying immediate, mid-term, and long-term financing strategies to increase priority healthcare worker salaries and benefits, recognizing that this is an urgent intervention to improve health workforce recruitment and retention, and address current critical and chronic qualified workforce shortages; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the MIF leadership commits to conduct rigorous external reviews of their respective government-wide HR management, recruitment, contracting, and retention systems, processes, policies, and capacities with respect to health services to assess the acuity of health workforce recruitment and retention challenges and bottlenecks, and identify targeted actions, accountabilitys, and investments to reform and strengthen relevant government systems and processes to improve the recruitment and retention of priority health disciplines; and to commit the MIF Secretariat to report this back at the next appropriate MIF; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the MIF leadership commits to supporting and financing RHC member efforts to liaise with regional universities (e.g. Fiji National University College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences, or University of Hawaii John A. Burns School of Medicine) and accredited training institutions to conduct a feasibility assessment for the establishment and financing



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of a medical officer training program located in the US Pacific Island jurisdictions; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the MIF leadership take note of the urgent and critical needs put forward in this resolution, and further commit to consulting with and supporting RHC members to mobilize the relevant financial and other resources required to achieve these urgent actions in a timely and sustainable manner; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the MIF leadership tasks its Secretariat to disseminate this resolution to the relevant MIF regional committees, government agencies, and partners that have the technical knowledge, financial, and other resources required to support health departments/ministries to plan and implement these critically needed actions and interventions, including facilitating intersectoral engagements and collaboration with non-health sector partners and stakeholders, both domestically and regionally, to seek a more holistic and integrated approach to improving access to and quality of health services across the islands.



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MINISTER GUSTAV AITARO for  
**SURANGEL S. WHIPPS JR.**  
 President  
 Republic of Palau



ARNOLD PALACIOS  
 Governor  
 Commonwealth of the  
 Northern Mariana Islands

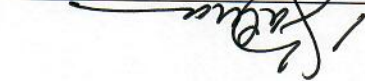
ALEXANDER R. NARRUHN  
 Governor  
 Chuuk State, FSM

REED B. OLIVER  
 Governor  
 Pohnpei State, FSM

DAVID W. PANUELO  
 President  
 Federated States of Micronesia



DAVID KABUA  
 President  
 Republic of the Marshall Islands



LOU LEON GUERRERO  
 Governor  
 U. S. Territory of Guam



TULENSA W. PALIK  
 Governor  
 Kosrae State, FSM



L.T. GOVERNOR FRANCIS ITIMAI for  
**CHARLES CHIENG**  
 Governor  
 Yap State, FSM