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TOP NEWS

Kaiser's mental health clinicians strike

By [Sophie Cocke](#) • Today • Updated 9:34 am

Kaiser Permanente's Hawaii mental health clinicians launched a three-day strike today amid stalled contract negotiations. The approximately 50 psychologists, clinical social workers, psychiatric nurses and addiction counselors are pressing for better compensation packages and say that Kaiser's current proposal would result in a wage freeze for more than 60 percent of its mental health workforce, as well as cuts to retirement and health benefits.

The proposed compensation package would make it hard for Kaiser to attract and retain mental health professionals, according to the employees who are represented by the National Union of Healthcare Workers. The union says that Kaiser has a [shortage of mental health therapists](#), which has led to overwhelming case loads and poor access to care.

"This strike is about patient care," said Daniel Meier, a psychologist at Kaiser's Ala Moana Clinic in Honolulu, in a press release. "We've hit a crisis point where we're being forced to tell people with serious mental health conditions that they'll have to wait months for their next appointment. Kaiser has gotten away for years with underfunding mental healthcare and we're taking action to put an end to that."

Kaiser has conceded that it has a shortage of mental health professionals, but says that the shortage exists nationwide and is particularly acute in Hawaii.

Kaiser, in a statement, said that it's unfortunate that the union chose to strike and said it's a bargaining tactic routinely employed by the union when it's negotiating contracts.

“It is especially disappointing that the union is asking our dedicated and compassionate employees to walk away from their patients,” Kaiser said in a statement. “The need for mental health care among our members and patients has never been greater, and the stress and disruption caused by the ongoing pandemic has made it even more important. We have the greatest respect and gratitude for our mental health professionals and are committed to supporting them in their vitally important work. We urge our employees to reject the union’s call for a strike, continue to focus on providing high-quality care and work with us through the bargaining process to finalize a new mutually beneficial agreement.”

Kaiser said that it has been contacting all patients with appointments scheduled for the rest of the week to alert them of the situation and that it has psychiatrists and licensed behavioral health managers available to respond to urgent needs.

The strike is planned for locations on Oahu, Hawaii island and Maui through Friday. Employees are picketing today in front of Kaiser Moanalua Medical Center on Oahu and Kaiser Kona Medical Office on Hawaii island, with rallies scheduled for 11:30 a.m.

Employees plan to picket in front of Kaiser Maui Lani Medical Office and Kaiser Honolulu Medical Office on Thursday and Kaiser Waipio Medical Office on Friday.



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