



COVID-19 RECOVERY: RE-ENERGIZING HAWAII WITH REGIONAL INSIGHTS

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As part of our long-standing [Honolulu International Forum](#), the Pacific Forum launched a special virtual series, “Covid-19 Recovery: Re-energizing Hawaii with Regional Insights,” to provide Hawaii's policy leaders with insights from the region to inform both its public health and economic responses to Covid-19.

Below is a summary of Covid-19 Recovery highlights with a link to key insights from each talk, which we hope will be valuable to our readers well beyond Hawaii.

1. [Taiwan](#) (April 24, 2020)

Taiwan has been able to avoid wide-spread public shutdowns, containing the spread to relatively low numbers. Much of Taiwan’s success has been due to lessons learned during the SARS and MERS outbreaks, which impressed upon the Taiwanese public the importance of following guidelines from relevant authorities. The talk by **Michael Y.K. Tseng, Director General of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Honolulu, Hawaii**, focused on three main themes: technology and big data, community measures, and organizational structure.

Technology and Big Data: Taiwan officials integrated the national health insurance database with the immigration database to track the 14-day travel

histories and symptoms of citizens returning from high-risk countries. Taiwan’s “digital fence” monitoring system allowed it to monitor quarantined individuals in real time.

Community measures: Taiwan has not enacted widespread public shutdowns, adopting effective community measures instead. These included wearing masks in confined areas, granting healthcare access to foreign workers, and adopting social distancing measures in schools.

Organizational structure: Taiwan CDC allocated the key tasks of identification and treatment of new cases to two separate groups. This approach sought to eliminate a potential conflict of interest, giving the “hunting” group a free hand to identify infected individuals without having the responsibility to also treat them.

2. [South Korea](#) (May 6, 2020)

South Korea has been widely praised as a Covid-19 success story, avoiding wide-spread public shutdowns and counting a low number of deaths. **Dr. Victor Cha, Professor and Vice-dean at Georgetown University and Korea Chair at the Center for Strategic and International Studies** described South Korea’s response as centered on four main themes: the importance of early, decisive action; the ability to quickly deploy innovative measures; and resources for contact tracing. He also provided insight into North Korea’s handling of the crisis.

Early action: Despite a slow start and some initial mistakes, within a month of detecting the first imported case of Covid-19, the government rolled out a robust response and testing regime, elevating the infectious disease alert level to the highest category.

Innovative healthcare facilities and reorganization of existing ones: South Korea developed drive-through testing facilities to meet the high testing demand and avoid widespread infections in hospitals. It also designated some hospitals for Covid-19 patients only.

Contact tracing: Two main mobile apps have been developed to track patients and help the public avoid outbreak areas. They provide information regarding Covid-19 patients’ recent locations and other details without revealing names or identities.

North Korea: North Korea's response to Covid-19 is consistent with its past behavior during Ebola and MERS: closing its borders and shutting down domestic and international travel, then asking for international assistance a few months later.

3. [Singapore](#) (May 14, 2020)

Despite early virus chains of transmission, Singapore has experienced no exponential rise in new cases for about three months until a recent surge took place, forcing the country to enter a "circuit breaker" period in early April. **Benjamin Ang, Senior Fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)**, discussed the "ecosystem" of Covid-19 services and how various tools can assist human tracers and the public at large.

Contact tracing: The Government Technology Agency of Singapore developed the mobile app "[TraceTogether](#)" to aid the efforts of the contact tracing teams, thereby reducing the spread of Covid-19. TraceTogether does not track the user's location but instead uses Bluetooth to determine if the user has been in close proximity with another user of the app.

Technological innovations: New technologies have facilitated business operations in different areas such as e-commerce, delivery services, wet market live streaming, and home-based learning. Robots are being used to encourage social distancing and monitor crowd density in parks.

Travel quarantine: Singapore has striven to simplify its 14-day mandatory quarantine system for travelers by presenting new arrivals with a pre-designated quarantine itinerary and utilizing existing infrastructure like empty hotels.

4. [INDO-PACOM](#) (May 21, 2020)

Dr. John Wood, Director of United States Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) J9 Pacific Outreach discussed the Department of Defense's perspectives on responding to the pandemic. His talk focused on INDOPACOM's readiness to support the State of Hawaii, regional partners, and allies, and how the military will continue to contribute to the state's economy.

Support for the State of Hawaii: INDOPACOM's primary focus is to protect the health and safety of

servicemembers while maintaining the force's readiness to respond to challenges in the region and carry out its mission. It is also standing by to help Hawaii as well as Guam, American Samoa, the Compact of Free Association (COFA) states, and the Northern Mariana Islands.

Maintaining friends, allies, partners, and readiness during the pandemic: The US Navy will host a modified version of the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) exercises this year. USAID, the Department of the Interior and the Department of Defense are providing financial aid and equipment to countries in INDOPACOM's area of responsibility.

Building up Hawaii's non-tourism economy: While Washington has the lion's share of resources, Hawaii's strength is that it is home to the region's leading authorities on Asia-Pacific affairs. Hawaii-based institutions excel in environmental stewardship, sustainable and renewable energy, and Pacific Islands relations.

5. [Japan](#) (May 28, 2020)

Dr. Kazuto Suzuki, Vice Dean and Professor of International Politics at Public Policy School of Hokkaido University discussed Japan's approach to managing Covid-19. Japan has successfully contained the number of deaths without introducing strict lockdowns and pervasive testing policies. Dr. Suzuki's talk focused on three main themes: Japan's overall strategy, testing and contact tracing, and cultural norms.

"Hammer and Dance" strategy: Japan's strategy does not aim to eliminate the virus but to distribute its spread over a longer period, creating a sustainable balance between public health and the economy. The "hammer" refers to the imposition of draconian measures when there is an exponential increase in new cases, whereas the "dance" refers to the use of containment measures to mitigate the spread of Covid-19.

Limited resources guiding testing and tracing regimes: The role of testing has been limited due to low supplies of testing kits and concerns over the accuracy of results. Local health centers in each community have conducted contact tracing by phone.

Role of culture and social stigma: Certain social norms in Japan support compliance with public health

measures, such as good hygiene and high scientific literacy. In addition to low-contact gestures such as bowing, face coverings are widely used in Japan.

6. [New Zealand](#) (June 1, 2020)

New Zealand has been able to contain the spread of Covid-19 imposing strict measures since the very outset of the outbreak. Its strategy has been successful, and Prime Minister Jacinta Arden declared the country “virus-free” in early June. **Dr. Jane Rovins, Senior Lecturer and International Coordinator at the Joint Centre for Disaster Research (JCDR) at Massey University** described New Zealand’s “go hard, go early” approach to managing the Covid-19 public health crisis and the nation’s emerging path to economic recovery.

Travel: New Zealand suspended domestic travel during its highest level of alert, then gradually eased restrictions on movement as the emergency deescalated. International travel remains limited to specific class visas, and all incoming travelers are placed in managed isolation facilities for 14 days.

Economy: New Zealand has elaborated financial support schemes to help businesses and their employees recover from the effects of Covid-19.

Community & social distancing measures: The measures adopted varied depending on the alert level. Measures included movement restrictions, school closures, and limited-to-no public gatherings. The government has left the choice of using masks up to citizens.

Public messaging, enforcement, and protecting vulnerable communities: Covid-19 multimedia messaging translated into numerous languages allowed the government to be open and transparent and connect with all community groups about the public health crisis.

7. [Australia](#) (June 25, 2020)

Australia has been able to successfully suppress Covid-19, flattening the curve and significantly reducing the rate of transmission. **Ambassador Jane Hardy, Australia’s Consul-General in Honolulu**, discussed Australia’s strategy for managing the Covid-19 pandemic. Her talk emphasized the country’s highly internationalized nature and its

holistic approach to recovery on both the national and regional levels.

Public health measures: Australia adopted a strategy of “suppression” as opposed to one of elimination, which included a complete lockdown followed by a phased opening of society divided in three steps. Contact tracing was supported by the adoption of a mobile app, and testing was expanded to include asymptomatic cases.

Travel and tourism: Domestic travel has increased as many Australians are traveling within the country’s borders. Australia and New Zealand have been discussing the possibility of implementing a “Trans-Tasman Bubble,” i.e., opening travel between Australia and New Zealand without requiring travelers to undergo 14-day quarantines.

Economic assistance measures: Australia’s government passed a suite of economic packages supporting the workforce and healthcare, including aid for aboriginal communities. Australia has also reframed aid and the capabilities of its programs supporting its Pacific Island neighbors and Southeast Asia as Covid-19 resilience and response efforts.

In summary, while there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to managing the virus, these countries took the challenge seriously with timely steps to mitigate the impact. Various factors have contributed to certain Asia-Pacific countries’ success, including definitive government action, experience with epidemics like SARS and MERS, and cultural norms, resulting in better timeliness, preparedness, and ability to adapt as circumstances changed. Asia-Pacific countries deployed efficient testing and contact tracing systems, tailored technological solutions, and community measures. The United States has contributed to the regional pandemic response by providing financial aid and equipment to countries in INDOPACOM’s area of responsibility. Visit our website for other Covid-19 related [research and perspectives](#), such as a [living document](#) analyzing successful response measures of regional economies.

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