



Congratulations to Hawaii HIDTA’s Overdose to Action team members--Aashish Hemrajani and Richard “Rico” Witt, who were the recipients of the 2023 Top Cop Hawaii Awards on October 13, 2023. Hemrajani and Witt were recognized for being the top educators in fentanyl awareness and Narcan (reversing agent for Fentanyl and Opioid overdoses) training throughout the Hawaiian Islands.



AASHISH HEMRAJANI, MA
HAWAI’I PUBLIC HEALTH ANALYST
OVERDOSE RESPONSE STRATEGY



RICHARD “RICO” WITT
DRUG INTELLIGENCE OFFICER
HAWAI’I HIGH INTENSITY DRUG
TRAFFICKING AREAS (HIDTA)

Aashish Hemrajani
Public Health Analyst

Aashish Hemrajani is the Hawai’i Public Health Analyst for the Overdose Response Strategy (ORS), a public health – public safety partnership between the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) and the Foundation of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC Foundation). Originally trained in medical anthropology, Aashish received his master’s degree from the University of Hawai’i at Mānoa. His ethnographic research focused on homelessness and medical care in O’ahu. After graduating, Aashish spent five years working on the frontlines of harm reduction and social services. In this time, he conducted outreach to homeless encampments and connected clients with resources including shelter, permanent housing, and medical and behavioral health care. Through this work, he developed a passion and expertise for

working with people who use drugs, people struggling with mental health, people experiencing homelessness, and people living with HIV/AIDS. In addition to direct work with clients, he also gained systems-level experience engaging with the homeless services Continuum of Care, working on drug policy in Hawai‘i, and publishing scholarly work at the intersection of homelessness and substance use. Aashish joined CDC Foundation’s Overdose Response Strategy as the Hawai‘i Public Health Analyst in early 2022, and sits between the State Department of Health and the Hawai‘i HIDTA. Together with his ORS partner, Drug Intelligence Officer Richard Witt, he provides support and data for innovative interventions, conducts trainings on naloxone use and drug morbidity data trends, and builds bridges between diverse sectors all working to address overdose and behavioral health in Hawai‘i.

Richard (Rico) Witt
Drug Intelligence Officer

Mr. Witt was born in New York City and studied and practiced Dentistry in Mexico. He returned to the U.S. and became a U.S. Postal Inspector in 1989. During his 24 years of U.S. Postal Inspector experience, he conducted drug and weapons of mass destruction (anthrax) investigations, and performed surveillance and covert investigative operations. He also taught postal law enforcement skills at the U.S. Postal Academy, and worked closely with Hawaii law enforcement agencies across the state, including parcel interdiction and narcotics investigations. Since retiring from the U.S. Postal Services in 2012, Mr. Witt serves as a Spanish interpreter for the U.S. Court in Hawaii, and voluntarily assists Hawaii Law Enforcement with Spanish interrogations and interpretations.

Mr. Witt joined Hawaii HIDTA in 2018, and manages the HIDTA performance database. He also conducts statistical research projects involving drug threats and drug related deaths in Hawaii. In 2020, he was appointed as the Hawaii HIDTA Drug Intelligence Officer—a key component of the newly created Overdose Response Strategy (ORS), a product of the HIDTA program and the Office of National Drug Control Policy. As the Drug Intelligence Officer, Mr. Witt serves as a liaison for law enforcement, public health sectors, and social service agencies in Hawaii.

The ORS Public Health Analyst (Aashish Hemrajani), Hawaii Health and Harm Reduction Center (HHHRC), and Mr. Witt provide Fentanyl Awareness/Safety, Drug Recognition and Naloxone (Narcan) Deployment training to FBI, DEA, HSI, U.S. Military, NCIS, State and Federal Probation, municipal liquor control agencies, Honolulu Police Department, Maui Police Department, Kauai Police Department, municipal fire departments, EMS, State Attorney General Investigators, Honolulu Prosecutor Investigators, hotel and industry security personnel, Hawaii public and private high schools, etc. To date, Mr. Witt and Mr. Hemrajani issued over 2600 Naloxone kits, and trained over 700 students in Narcan application and opioid abuse awareness.

What They Do

Overdose Education and Naloxone Distribution (OEND)

Naloxone is a very powerful tool to combat the overdose epidemic. Naloxone works by binding to the brain's opioid receptors and reversing an opioid overdose. In Hawai'i, naloxone has primarily been distributed to the public through the State Department of Health – Alcohol and Drug Abuse Division, and the Hawai'i Health and Harm Reduction Center. The ORS team provides support to these partners by delivering training and naloxone to Public Safety partners and other interested organizations. The ORS team's OEND training includes information on identifying potential opioid overdoses, administering naloxone, and connecting the overdose survivor to follow up care through EMS and First Responders. Additionally, these training courses often include data on drug trends and education on the psychological and environmental causes of substance use disorders (SUD).