

UAMS News Bureau

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**UAMS Researchers Find High Rates
of Diabetes, Heart Disease among Marshallese**

FAYETTEVILLE — Residents of the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) face strikingly high rates of diabetes and heart disease, according to researchers at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) Office of Community Health & Research.

The RMI has one of the highest rates of Type 2 diabetes in the world. Diabetes and related health problems in the Marshall Islands have been linked to nuclear testing conducted there by the United States between 1946 and 1958. According to the International Diabetes Foundation, nuclear waste contaminated the soil and forced the Marshallese population to begin relying on imported, processed foods rather than the fresh, homegrown foods to which they were accustomed.

Today, an estimated 15,000 Marshallese people live in Arkansas, most of whom reside in Northwest Arkansas. The Compact of Free Association (COFA), signed into law in 1986, permits Marshallese and other Pacific Islander communities to live and work in the United States without official citizenship status.

“It is important to address the health issues [that] Marshallese people living in the RMI face today,” said Jennifer Andersen, an assistant professor in the Office of Community Health & Research. “By continuing the work with our community partners, we can provide effective and culturally appropriate health education and programs to address and resolve these health issues among Marshallese communities both in the Republic of the Marshall Islands and here in Northwest Arkansas.”

UAMS researchers and Marshallese community partners conducted more than 500 health screenings at churches in the RMI, which revealed high rates of diabetes, hypertension and obesity. More than half of the participants were considered pre-diabetic or diabetic, and more than a third of participants had a blood pressure indicating pre-hypertension or

hypertension. One out of every three participants needed further care and was referred to a medical clinic to follow up with a health care provider.

“These efforts are one example of UAMS’ continued commitment to serving the Marshallese communities in Arkansas, the nation and the world,” said Pearl McElfish, Ph.D., MBA, division director of the UAMS Office of Community Health & Research. “This work is made possible only through the support of the Marshallese community and incredible partners such as the RMI Ministry of Health and Human Services as we work together toward a better state of health for all.”

According to the American Diabetes Association, about 15% of Arkansans have diabetes, while nearly 40% of Marshallese adults living in Northwest Arkansas have the disease. Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows that hypertension affects about two out of every five Arkansans.

The study, *Faith-Based Health Screenings for Marshallese Adults Living in the Republic of the Marshall Islands: Study Design and Results* was published by *Frontiers in Public Health* and can be found at frontiersin.org.

The UAMS Northwest Regional Campus includes 307 medical, pharmacy, nursing and health professions students, 66 medical and pharmacy residents, two sports medicine fellows, and 1,000 community-based faculty. The campus has nine clinics including a student-led clinic, orthopaedics and sports medicine, and physical, occupational and speech therapy. Faculty conduct research to reduce health disparities.

UAMS is the state's only health sciences university, with colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Health Professions and Public Health; a graduate school; a hospital; a main campus in Little Rock; a Northwest Arkansas regional campus in Fayetteville; a statewide network of regional campuses; and seven institutes: the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute, Jackson T. Stephens Spine & Neurosciences Institute, Harvey & Bernice Jones Eye Institute, Psychiatric Research Institute, Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging, Translational Research Institute and Institute for Digital Health & Innovation. UAMS includes UAMS Health, a statewide health system that encompasses all of UAMS' clinical enterprise. UAMS is the only adult Level 1 trauma center in the state. UAMS has 3,240 students, 913 medical residents and fellows, and five dental residents. It is the state's largest public employer with more than 11,000 employees, including 1,200 physicians who provide care to patients at UAMS, its regional campuses, Arkansas Children's, the VA Medical Center and Baptist Health. Visit www.uams.edu or www.uamshealth.com. Find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).

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