



A Lasting Place to Call Home: Daniel Kahikina Akaka State Veterans Home in Hawai'i

Project Challenges

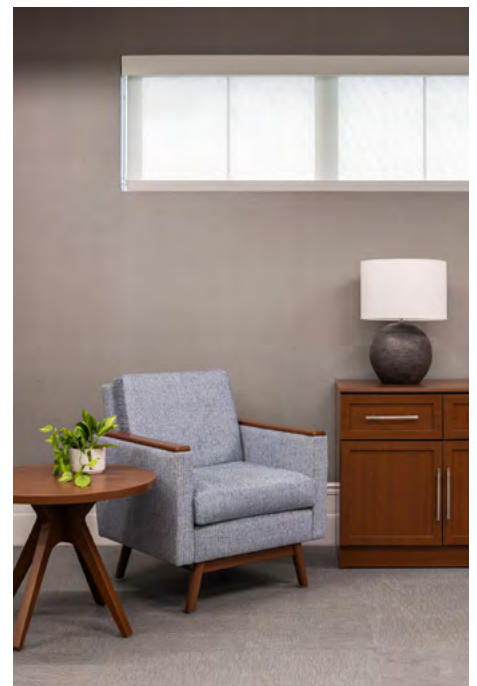
The Daniel Kahikina Akaka State Veterans Home presented a distinct set of design challenges that required thoughtful planning and long-term performance solutions.

- To create a residential, home-like environment within a skilled nursing facility serving veterans with complex medical needs.
- To balance durability and long-term performance requirements with a warm, welcoming aesthetic.
- To support a wide range of mobility and care needs while maintaining comfort, accessibility, and ease of use.
- To design spaces that allow for both social interaction and personal choice within a small-house living model.
- To select furnishings that minimize maintenance demands, allowing staff to focus on resident care rather than upkeep.

Kwalu Solutions

To balance durability, accessibility, and residential design, Kwalu delivered furniture solutions that:

- Are engineered to withstand intensive daily use in a skilled nursing environment.
- Feature a proprietary Protea™ finish that resists scratches, moisture, and impact while maintaining a warm, residential wood-look aesthetic.



- Support accessibility through design, including appropriate scale, supportive arms, and ease of use for residents with mobility needs.
- Provide a range of seating options to accommodate dining, lounge, and outdoor environments throughout the community.
- Balance residential comfort with long-term performance across applications.
- Offer warranty-backed construction that supports lifecycle value and reduces the need for premature replacement.



A New Standard for Veteran Care in Hawai'i

The Daniel Kahikina Akaka State Veterans Home represents a significant investment in long-term care for Hawai'i's aging veteran population. Located in Kapolei on the island of O'ahu, the 120-bed skilled nursing facility was designed to provide a dignified, residential environment for veterans requiring higher levels of care.

Set on a compact six-acre site with sweeping views of both the Pacific Ocean and surrounding mountains, the project balances scale, functionality, and a deep respect for place. The two-story building is organized into eight 15-resident households, creating smaller, community-oriented living environments that move away from the traditional institutional model.

Each household includes its own living room, dining space, and support areas, allowing residents to remain connected to a smaller group while still having access to shared amenities throughout the building. The result is a thoughtfully designed environment that prioritizes comfort, familiarity, and human connection.

Designing for Life at Its Most Vulnerable

From the outset, the design team at Grace Design Studios approached the project with a clear understanding of the resident population.

“This is skilled nursing,” said interior designer Daily Wright. “There is a medical need, and for many residents, this is the last home they will have.”

That reality shaped every design decision. Residents at the facility have varying levels of mobility and care requirements, with many relying on assistive devices or requiring support for daily activities. The design needed to accommodate these needs while still creating a space that felt personal and welcoming.

Private rooms were designed with accessibility at the forefront, offering ample space for caregivers and equipment while maintaining a residential feel. Each room includes a sleeping area, private bathroom, and dedicated storage, along with integrated furnishings that support both comfort and function.



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Daily Wright
Interior Designer

Equally important was the ability for residents to host visitors. Built-in bench seating and flexible layouts allow family members to spend time together comfortably, an experience often limited in more traditional nursing environments.

Balancing Residential Design with Institutional Performance

One of the most significant challenges in the project was achieving a balance between residential aesthetics and the rigorous performance requirements of a skilled nursing facility.

“We want our spaces to perform like an institutional project, but look like a residential project,” Wright explained.

This balance extends beyond visual design. Materials, finishes, and furnishings must withstand constant use while remaining easy for staff to clean and maintain.

“The goal is for staff to focus on caring for residents,” Wright said. “They shouldn’t have to overthink how to maintain the space.”

That philosophy guided product selection throughout the facility, with durability and long-term performance taking priority.

The Role of Kwalu in Long-Term Performance

Furniture played a critical role in supporting both the operational and experiential goals of the project.

With state-operated facilities required to demonstrate long-term viability, durability was a primary consideration. Frequent replacement cycles are not only costly, but also disruptive to residents and staff.



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Daily Wright
Interior Designer

“It’s a burden on the state to replace furniture every five to seven years,” Wright noted.

Kwalu’s high-performance furniture was selected to address these challenges, offering a solution that could withstand the demands of a skilled nursing environment without sacrificing comfort or aesthetic quality.

“I’ve been specifying Kwalu for years,” Wright said. “There’s nothing like it on the market. It’s a product that really fits the needs of skilled nursing.”

Kwalu’s proprietary construction and Protea finish provide the warmth and appearance of wood while delivering exceptional durability. Unlike alternative materials that may feel cold or clinical, the furniture contributes to a more residential atmosphere, which was an essential component of the overall design vision.

“The only thing that comes close in durability are some of the aluminums that are painted to look like wood but the problem with that is that they are cold,” Wright emphasized. “With Kwalu products, they have the same warmth of a wood product.”

Supporting Comfort, Choice, and Community

Throughout the facility, furnishings were selected to support a variety of resident needs and daily activities.

In shared living and dining areas, a mix of seating options allows residents to choose how they engage with the space. Larger tables accommodate group dining, while smaller arrangements provide more intimate settings. Outdoor lanais extend these experiences, offering additional opportunities for socialization and relaxation.



“It’s a home-like environment, people walk in and immediately recognize that.”

Libby Pyo
State Liaison

According to Libby Pyo, the state liaison overseeing operations, this flexibility has been well received.

“The furniture accommodates everything,” she said. “Residents can sit in groups, sit alone, or go outside. It gives them options throughout the day.”

Comfort was another key priority. In high-use environments, seating must not only perform but also support extended use.

“All the furniture in the living areas is excellent,” Pyo noted. “It’s comfortable, durable, and there have been no complaints.”

Even under demanding conditions, the furniture has reinforced the importance of selecting products designed for long-term performance.

A Place of Care, Connection, and Respect

Beyond functionality and durability, the success of the Daniel Kahikina Akaka State Veterans Home lies in its ability to create a true sense of home. The building’s layout, material palette, and furnishings work together to create an environment that feels warm, inviting, and respectful of the individuals it serves.

“It’s a home-like environment,” Pyo said. “People walk in and immediately recognize that.”

For residents, many of whom will spend the remainder of their lives in this setting, that sense of comfort and dignity is essential. Through thoughtful design, durable materials, and strong collaboration, the project reflects a shared commitment to honoring those who have served.



Honoring Service Through Design

At its dedication ceremony, state leaders, community members, and multiple generations of the Akaka family gathered to mark the opening.

Named in honor of the late U.S. Senator Daniel Kahikina Akaka, a World War II veteran, the facility reflects a legacy of service that continues through its mission today. For the families in attendance and the broader community, the opening represented more than a new building. It was a commitment to providing veterans with the care, dignity, and respect they deserve.

As the first residents began to move in, that mission became tangible. Designed to provide skilled nursing, rehabilitation, and long-term care, the home offers not only clinical support but a place of comfort and stability for those who call it home.

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