

Restore Medicaid for COFA Migrants

Accent Penney is a father and a grandfather. He lives with his wife in a small apartment in Kirkland, Washington.

Accent grew up on Utrik Atoll, in the Marshall Islands. He was raised by his grandmother and grandfather. Every day his grandfather took him out to get food and fish.

Accent is among a very small number of people who were exposed to the fallout of Castle Bravo who are still alive today. Castle Bravo remains the largest thermonuclear device ever detonated by the United States – 1,000 times more powerful than the bombs used in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It is one of 67 nuclear tests conducted in and around the Marshall Islands from 1946 to 1958.

Accent remembers the day of the bombing– and the suffering that followed. He was just five years old.

“We saw powder falling from sky – like snow. We didn’t know what was going on. My grandmother called to me and took her dress and she covered me. I don’t know how she knew to do that. After that blisters came up all over her body. They stayed on her body until she passed away a couple years later...After all that happened we saw that the land, and food, it was all contaminated. It was no good.”



Accent and his family were displaced from Island to Island, and then were returned to Utrik, despite ongoing high radiation levels. He and his wife Jermo they left their beloved homeland and came to the United States when they started their family. They didn’t want their children to live with the risks of radiation exposure. Since they came to the U.S. Accent has worked hard to give opportunity to his children and grandchildren.

Accent and his people are the subjects of decades of medical monitoring. Periodically Accent is directed by the Department of Energy to report to a local lab to provide a blood sample.

Accent lives every day with the consequences of the United States nuclear testing. He has faced multiple serious illnesses. He has suffered many losses –his grandmother, his home, and the health and well-being of his people. These losses cannot be restored. But one injustice can be remedied. Congress should immediately restore access to Medicaid for COFA migrants living in the United States from the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of Palau.

“As far as know, when they came to do the testing of the bombs, they did not think about the people that were there.”

This document produced by Children’s Alliance in Washington State. For more information about restoring Medicaid to U.S. residents from COFA nations contact the Asian Pacific Island American Health Forum. www.apiahf.org