



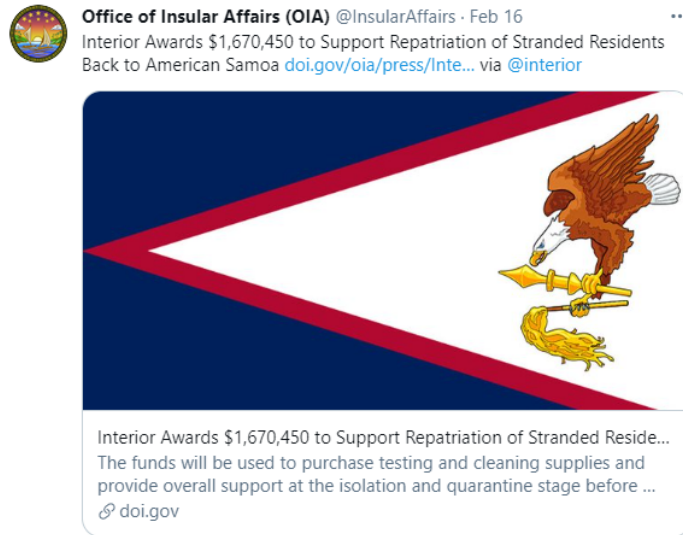
Returning Home to American Samoa after being Stranded by COVID-19 Travel Restrictions March 1, 2021

American Samoa remains the sole U.S. jurisdiction without any reported cases of the coronavirus (COVID-19). When the World Health Organization declared a global COVID-19 pandemic on March 11, 2020, the American Samoa Government moved to declare a state of emergency in the territory and since March 22, 2020, has restricted air travel in or out of the territory to protect its population. Nearly a year later, hundreds of American Samoans were stranded outside of the territory and remain overseas.



Governor Lemanu and other officials hold up welcome signs for the first 159 individuals to be repatriated back to American Samoa after being stranded outside the territory since March 22, 2020, due to COVID-19-imposed travel restrictions. Photo Courtesy of Samoa News.

The American Samoa Government (ASG) has begun repatriation operations to bring home residents who have been and remain stranded as a result of the travel restrictions. On February 12, 2021, the U.S. Department of the Interior's Office of Insular Affairs (OIA) provided \$1,670,450, in CARES Act funds to the ASG who, in coordination with partners such as Hawai'i State, FEMA, community and church organizations, the ASG will use the funds to support pre-quarantine requirements, purchase testing and cleaning supplies, and provide overall support of isolation and quarantine stages in the repatriation process prior to departing for the territory.



Office of Insular Affairs Twitter Feed announcing funds made available for repatriation.

An initial group of 159 American Samoans was repatriated to American Samoa on February 5 and as of February 15 concluded quarantine protocols, tested negative for COVID-19, and were reunited to their families in the territory.



An emotional reunification for families in American Samoa on February 15, 2021, after the successful completion of the first repatriation trip organized by the American Samoa Government. Picture courtesy of Radio New Zealand.



The Tradewinds Hotel in American Samoa where repatriated individuals were quarantined for 10 days prior to being released. Photo Courtesy: RadioNewZealand and Tradewinds Hotel.

The American Samoa Government maintains that its number one priority is to protect the territory from COVID-19 but hopes to be able to bring more residents home as soon as possible. A standing emergency declaration for the territory makes wearing a mask mandatory in public places, encourages the practice of social distancing, and encourages residents of the territory to take the COVID-19 vaccine.



Banner displayed in the territory celebrating repatriation of the first 159 individuals. Photo Courtesy: OIA Field Rep LNomura

The Office of Insular Affairs (OIA) carries out the Secretary of the Interior's responsibilities for the U.S. territories of American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Additionally, OIA administers and oversees federal assistance under the Compacts of Free Association to the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau. The Office of Insular Affairs is on the web at www.doi.gov/oia, on Twitter @insularaffairs, and on Facebook. Follow and "like" OIA on Facebook and subscribe to the OIA YouTube Channel.

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