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**Honolulu** — A University of Hawaii study has identified significant respiratory health issues among individuals affected by last year's wildfires on Maui. Conducted with participants from the Lahaina and Kula areas, the research suggests that up to 74% of those surveyed are experiencing difficulty breathing and poor respiratory health, with nearly half showing signs of compromised lung function.

The study, which gathered data from 679 people in January and February, aims to track the long-term health impacts of the wildfires over at least a decade. Researchers plan to eventually include 2,000 participants to represent the estimated 10,000 people affected by the fires.

Dr. Alika Maunakea, a professor at the John A. Burns School of Medicine and a lead researcher, noted that individuals with higher exposure to the wildfires reported more severe symptoms. A significant number of participants had not consulted a doctor, either due to the destruction of local clinics or other immediate needs following the disaster, such as securing housing and food.

The August 8 blaze, which killed at least 101 people and displaced 12,000 residents, is recorded as the deadliest wildfire in the U.S. in over a century. It caused extensive damage, including the destruction of the historic town of Lahaina.

The study highlights a shortage of pulmonary health specialists on Maui and underscores the need for additional resources. Discussions are underway with Hawaii’s congressional delegation to address this gap. The researchers also emphasize the importance of monitoring for potential long-term health effects, similar to those experienced by survivors of 9/11.

Dr. Gopal Allada, a pulmonary and critical care specialist at the Oregon Health & Science University, recognized the value of the study despite the absence of pre-fire lung function tests. He commended the initiative for its potential to inform policymakers and funding bodies.

The research team hopes their findings will drive efforts to prevent future health complications among wildfire survivors.