

HEALTH through ACTION



OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA—Community LEAD

Asian Americans now represent a quarter of Alameda County, California's 1.5 million residents and are the second-largest ethnic/racial group in the county. Asian Americans bring with them a rich and diverse array of cultural beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and languages. As this population grows—having increased by one-third in the past decade—so do demands for linguistically and culturally competent health services.

Many health statistics for Asian Americans continue to be worse than for the general population. Preventable conditions—hepatitis B and liver disease, tuberculosis, heart disease, and cancers—predominate, access to care is poorer, and uninsurance rates are high. Additional research and programming are needed, in order to address these growing health inequities. These studies and service programs should be geared to protecting health, through increased family support, improved nutrition, encouraging healthy traditional diets, and building on other cultural and community-based factors that can improve health.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Community LEAD program engages diverse partner organizations committed to improving health care access for Alameda County's Asian American communities. Oakland-based Asian Health Services (AHS) is the project's lead organization.* Since it began in 1974, AHS has become a national model for new approaches to providing high-quality, culturally competent health services and strong advocacy programs. Its innovations include the establishment of Patient

Leadership Councils, Community Health Advocates, and Patient Navigator programs. AHS has demonstrated that investing in leadership development and advocacy training improves access to health care and the overall health and well-being of the Asian American community.

"Our partnership is focused on building community, infrastructure, capacity, and support for the groups represented by our members and community-based organizations," says Jen Lee, Community LEAD project director. "We see that we have much to learn from one another, that we have common goals, and that we can benefit from working together to advocate more strategically to improve the health of our community."

STRENGTHENING PATIENT ADVOCACY

In the Oakland area, Patient Leadership Councils serve the Cambodian, Korean, Vietnamese, Mandarin-speaking, and

Photos (l to r): Jen Lee, HTA Project Director; AHS advocated for crosswalks to reduce pedestrian injuries among Oakland's elderly residents; participants at a Cambodian Patient Leadership Council meeting; AHS entrance. Photographs © Lars Howlett; except far left, © Adam Stoltman.

**A PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM FUNDED BY WK KELLOGG FOUNDATION
TO CLOSE HEALTH GAPS FOR ASIAN AMERICANS, NATIVE HAWAIIANS AND PACIFIC ISLANDERS**

ASIAN AMERICANS IN ALAMEDA COUNTY REPRESENT 30 NATIONALITIES AND SPEAK MORE THAN 50 LANGUAGES AND DIALECTS.

Cantonese-speaking communities. Through these Patient Leadership Councils, Community LEAD helps area volunteers develop leadership skills in community and civic engagement that they use to take more active roles in reducing health disparities. The volunteers promote health education and advocate for resources to be focused on health issues in their communities; they have conducted surveys to assess local health care needs, then presented their results to service providers and local government in support of needed services; and they learn about health-related topics that they can share with community members.

For example, the Korean Patient Leadership Council learned to reach out to isolated seniors—an effective strategy to prevent depression. Also, same-language volunteers help patients navigate the complex and confusing health care system, enroll in insurance programs, or understand medication instructions.

“I came to the United States not long ago and did not know much about the health care system here. I did not have health insurance, but thanks to one of the Patient Leadership Council members at church, I was introduced to Asian Health Services,” says Seon Nam Kim, member of the Korean Patient Leadership Council. “I became a patient there and received medical services. Now I try to help people around me who do not have health insurance.”

A VOICE FOR THE COMMUNITY

California’s budget cuts have eroded vital health care services for low-income residents, making advocacy essential to the Asian American community. Organizations involved in Community LEAD have been the community voice on issues such as proposed cuts to Medi-Cal (California’s Medicaid program) for new legal immigrants and the elimination of dental services (Denti-Cal) for low-income residents.

Patient Leadership Council members have participated in legislative breakfasts, visits with lawmakers, and immigration-related forums to share their stories and tell policymakers about the personal impact that service cuts would have in their communities. AHS also has produced “Giving Voice” videos, posted on its Web site, in which patients share their experiences with health care and describe its importance to their families.

“We hope to build a lasting legacy where people who once suffered without regular care are now active in their

own health, are able to lead healthier lives, and are helping to build a healthier community,” says Lee. To that end, AHS has developed training tools that other organizations can use for adopting the Patient Leadership Council model in their communities.

“Too often, the voices of Asian American and Pacific Islander immigrants are left out of health policy decisions,” says AHS CEO Sherry Hirota. “We want to create a network of advocates who make sure our community gets access to health care without the barriers of income, immigration status, language, or culture.”

HEALTH THROUGH ACTION COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVE MEMBERS, 2010

- **Cambodian Community Development**—Helps Cambodian refugees overcome social, cultural, and economic barriers
- **Lao Lu Mein Cultural Association**—Preserves the cultural heritage of the Lu Mein community and develops programs that help community members integrate into U.S. society
- **Korean Community Center of the East Bay**—Provides advocacy and education on topics such as domestic violence, breast and cervical cancer screening, and mental health
- **Vietnamese Community Development**—Serves refugees and immigrants through a variety of social services
- **Health Advocacy Partnerships**: The following organizations work to provide information, education, and coordination of advocacy activities at the city, county, and state levels
 - **Access to Care Collaborative**—Focuses on issues related to health care coverage, access to high-quality care, and racial and ethnic disparities. Members include the Alameda Alliance for Health, Alameda County Health Care Services Agency, Alameda County Medical Center, Alameda County Social Services Agency, Alameda Health Consortium, and the W.K. Kellogg Community Voices Project
 - **Alameda County Public Health Department**—Works with AHS to conduct community needs assessments, provide tuberculosis control, flu vaccinations, and confidential HIV testing and patient management
 - **Alameda Health Consortium**—Coordinates community-based clinics, including AHS, on promoting policies that increase access to health care, provide people with health insurance, and reduce health disparities
 - **California Immigrant Policy Collaborative**—Advocates for low-income immigrants in California and provides training, research, and education on immigrant issues

* The project, directed by Oakland’s Asian Health Services, is one of eight coalitions in the four-year, \$16.5-million Health Through Action national program funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and developed in partnership with the Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum.

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