

HEALTH through ACTION



OHIO—Asian American Health Coalition

One of the greatest health disparities facing Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders (AA and NHPIs) is their much higher rate of chronic Hepatitis B, a serious viral infection of the liver that can lead to cirrhosis, liver cancer, and liver failure. AA and NHPIs are only 4.5% of the U.S. population, but account for more than half of Americans with chronic Hepatitis B (HBV) infections. Most liver cancer (80%) is caused by HBV, and the death rate from HBV in the AA and NHPI population is seven times that of whites. HBV has many routes of transmission involving exposure to an infected person's blood or bodily fluids. Among Asian-Americans and Pacific Islanders, common infection routes are from mother-to-child at birth, sharing personal hygiene items (toothbrushes, razors), and, for some groups, tattooing practices of past decades in their home countries. Although a simple blood test can diagnose HBV, people often do not know they are infected, because they have no symptoms until serious liver damage has occurred.

EMPHASIZING HEPATITIS B

The Ohio Asian American Health Coalition is an alliance of communities and individuals focused on the health and well-being of the state's Asian American population. As a *Health Through Action* grantee,* this community partnership seeks

The largest AA and NHPI communities in Ohio are South Asian (33%), followed by Filipino, Korean, Chinese, and Vietnamese, predominantly living in metropolitan areas.

to prevent the spread of HBV through immunization and education, as well as to serve people with chronic HBV so they can slow its progression.

Additionally, the coalition is building its capacity and that of its member organizations to advocate for health policy

changes. For example, in 2008, it persuaded the Ohio Department of Health to classify Asian Americans as "high risk for HBV," which made them eligible for health department vaccination programs.

World Hepatitis Day, held every year in May, raises awareness of the worldwide importance of this disease. The Ohio coalition used this opportunity to develop a Web-based public service announcement to increase prevention education and encourage screening and treatment. The coalition received endorsements for this effort from mayors of every major Ohio city, raising the visibility of HBV as an important health issue, especially for Asian Americans.

Photos (l to r): Michael Byun, HTA Project Director; street scene; stretching class; young visitor to health clinic. Photographs © Christine Stephens

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

VIETNAMESE AMERICANS HAVE LIVER CANCER RATES NINE TIMES THOSE OF WHITE AMERICANS, AND KOREAN AND CHINESE AMERICANS' RATES ARE FOUR TIMES THOSE OF WHITES.

"Hepatitis B is a springboard for our efforts to strengthen community advocates and to achieve health equity for Asian American communities in Ohio," says Michael Byun, past-chair, Ohio Asian American Health Coalition, and executive director, Asian Services In Action (ASIA), the lead agency for the Health Through Action project. ASIA is the only comprehensive social service agency meeting the unique language and cultural needs of low-income AA and NHPI residents of Northeastern Ohio. Annually, ASIA serves more than 4,000 people.

OTHER HEALTH NEEDS

In addition to focusing on HBV as a major health concern, coalition leadership hopes to reach even wider to improve the health of the state's AA and NHPI communities.

In 2008 and 2009, the coalition held two-day, statewide "Community Conversations on Health," which brought together more than 80 people representing 15 different ethnic

"I would prefer going to a doctor who comes from the same culture as I do—who understands my beliefs, my customs, my language."

—Participant, Community Conversations on Health

communities. Participants identified a variety of health care needs—from resources, such as interpreters and translated health education materials, to specific health services, such as for diabetes, alcohol addiction, tuberculosis, asthma, and women's health—as well as HBV. They

also called for training programs for health care providers on cultural competency and health disparities affecting AA and NHPI communities.

"We look at health disparities in the larger context of economic development issues—employment, job security, and immigration policies that affect health outcomes," says Byun. "By providing more English Speakers of Other Languages programs, for example, we can help people be better positioned for employment and then to receive health insurance through their employers, giving them greater access to health care."

SHARED VISION, LOCAL ACTION

Each organization in the Ohio Asian American Health Coalition conducts key capacity-building projects that meet local needs. For example:

- **Akron/Cleveland ASIA** (Asian Services In Action) strengthened relationships with the Asian Pacific American

Medical Student Association, whose members conduct HBV and other health screenings, and it expanded other health promotion initiatives.

- The **Dayton** Asian-American Council conducted a community forum on health and partnered with Reachout Montgomery, a free clinic to offer free HBV screening for AA and NHPI residents.
- **Cincinnati's** Asian Community Alliance brought together physician providers from diverse Asian ethnic communities for an education dinner.
- Asian American Community Services engages other **Columbus** partners to conduct HBV "train the trainer" programs for specific local ethnic communities.

Finally, by sharing knowledge and resources, the Ohio Health Through Action project is building relationships with funders and policy-makers to eliminate health disparities and address other social justice issues in AA and NHPI communities across the state.

COALITION PARTNERS ARE:

- Asian-American Community Service Council (Columbus)
- Asian American Community Services (Columbus)
- Asian American Council (Dayton)
- Asian Community Alliance (Cincinnati)
- Asian Festival Corporation (Columbus)
- Asian Services In Action (Akron/Cleveland)—lead agency
- Chinese Association of Greater Toledo

* The project coalition, led by Asian Services In Action, 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 and Pacific Islander American Health Forum.

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