

# HEALTH through ACTION



## ATLANTA—The Georgia Asian American Pacific Islander Community Coalition

Georgia has the second fastest-growing Asian American and Pacific Islander population in the United States. The Atlanta area is home to large and vibrant communities with a diverse population of refugees and immigrants from many countries, including Bhutan, Burma, Cambodia, China, India, Korea, Laos, and Vietnam.

Some of these residents face challenges in accessing health services, including language barriers, lack of health insurance, and difficulty understanding the complex U.S. health care system. Many do not receive preventive services and seek care only when a medical condition such as cancer, diabetes, or hypertension becomes impossible to ignore. Or, if they are low-income, they can be intimidated or discouraged when applying for state health and social services programs such as Medicaid or PeachCare for Kids.

The Georgia Asian American Pacific Islander Community Coalition (GAAPICC) was founded in 2005 to bring together various community organizations and individuals to promote unity and improve the well-being of all Asians and Pacific Islanders in Georgia. The Center for Pan Asian Community Services, Inc (CPACS), lead agency for GAAPICC, received funds from a national program called Health Through Action to identify and address these communities' health and social service needs.\*

### SHORTCOMINGS IN HEALTH DISPARITIES DATA

Data on the health needs of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are often labeled "other." Lack of health data specific to this population is a barrier in addressing health disparities, because data play an essential role in persuading policymakers and health officials to support programs that target Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders' specific health needs.

GAAPICC successfully accomplished its first data priority—partnering with the state's Minority Health Advisory Council and Department of Human Resources—to ensure that "Asian" is a searchable category in the state-wide health data repository, OASIS. Now, the coalition is working with the Morehouse School of Medicine, Georgia Minority Health Advisory Council, and Georgia Department of Community Health to address additional data deficiencies.

Photos (l to r): Marianne Chung, HTA Project Director; after-school activities; xiangqi players; exercise class. Photographs © Paul Conlan

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

**“THERE IS POWER IN US ALL COMING TOGETHER AND ADVOCATING FOR THE BETTERMENT OF THE COMMUNITY.”—LINDSAY ROMASANTA**

Using information from a series of trainings on research methodology, the coalition designed a survey on health care access and collected data from more than 1,200 community members. The findings from this “Georgia Asian American Health Access Survey” (GA-HAS) will be published in fall 2010.

The focus on data has led CPACS to increase its own research capacity, and it has trained coalition partners in research and data collection. These trained coalition partners served as the data collectors for GA-HAS.

### **NAVIGATOR PROGRAM HELPS PATIENTS ACCESS SERVICES**

The Community Health Navigator Program was created in response to the access barriers that many community members face, especially people with limited English proficiency. Health navigators provide health education as well as support, assistance, and translation in clinical settings. So far, five health navigators have been trained as medical interpreters in five Asian languages (Mandarin, Cantonese, Thai, Korean, and Tagalog). These navigators also make presentations

**70% of Asian American seniors in the metropolitan Atlanta area have limited English proficiency.**

in the community about cancer screening and cancer prevention. The navigators have formed partnerships with hospital nurses and social

workers, as well as with cultural and faith-based organizations, to better reach out into the community.

“The navigator program fits with the national movement for community health work,” said Marianne Chung, Associate Director, CPACS. “It is cost effective, culturally competent, and linguistically appropriate.”

### **ADVOCACY AND ENGAGEMENT**

Coalition members are strong advocates for their communities. They work to increase awareness and raise consciousness about positive social change through various activities, such as community meetings and training workshops. For example, GAAPICC has hosted three annual Cancer Summits to raise awareness of the types of cancer that disproportionately affect Asian ethnic groups. GAAPICC also offers workshops to educate people about their health care rights and how to advocate for them.

“People are not just learning about various cancers but, through advocacy training, we are building a pipeline of health advocates in Georgia so that we can improve resources for our community over the long term,” said Chung.

Wendy Ho, a coalition founding member and current member of the coalition steering committee, attests to the power of working together. “There is no way that any of our smaller community groups alone could have achieved what GAAPICC has achieved,” she said.

She has experienced firsthand the impact of the Health Through Action project’s capacity-building work. “I’ve grown my own knowledge base and skill set. I now think of my community in such an expansive way and see how much more I can do.”

### **GAAPICC COALITION PARTNERS, 2010:**

- The Center for Pan Asian Community Services, Inc., *lead agency*
- Asian American Women’s Association of Georgia
- Asian Christian Counseling & Educational Seminar Services, Inc. (ACCESS)
- Asian Cultural Experience (ACE)
- Asians & Friends Atlanta, LYC
- Culture Connect, Inc.
- Filipino American Association of Greater Atlanta (Fil-Am Atlanta)
- Korean American Coalition—Atlanta Chapter (KAC)
- Laotian American Society (LAS)
- Malaysian Association of Georgia (MAG)
- OCA-Georgia
- Philippine American Women’s Association of Georgia
- Thai Association World Center USA
- United Way in Gwinnett County, A Division of United Way of Metro Atlanta

\*The project, directed by The Center for Pan Asian Community Services, Inc. (CPACS), 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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