

# HEALTH through ACTION



## ARIZONA—Asian American Health Coalition

The Asian American and Pacific Islander community in the Phoenix metropolitan area is diverse and largely foreign-born, representing many nationalities, cultures, and languages. It is widely dispersed across the 9,213 square miles of Maricopa County.

Local community assessments commissioned by Asian Pacific Community in Action (APCA) in Phoenix, lead agency for the Health Through Action Arizona (HTAA) coalition, \* indicate that cultural and language barriers interfere with access to

**70% of Maricopa County's Asian American and Pacific Islander residents are foreign-born, with Chinese, Asian Indian, Filipino, and Vietnamese the most prevalent nationalities.**

care and the quality of care for these groups. Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, and Filipino focus group and survey participants knew little about risk factors associated with a variety of health conditions, including heart attack, stroke, and women's health. In addition,

focus groups of health care professionals found they were not knowledgeable about specific health risks faced by Asian American and Pacific Islander communities or about the difficulty they have in accessing preventive services, such as mammograms, screening and vaccinations for Hepatitis B, and diabetes testing.

### DIGITAL STORYTELLING ILLUSTRATES ASIAN AMERICAN HEALTH ISSUES

Yen Nguyen, a lay health outreach worker for APCA, talks to women about their health and the importance of cervical cancer screenings. Like many Asian women, Yen was brought up to avoid discussing women's health issues and she herself delayed obtaining her first screening. Now, as part of the digital storytelling project that APCA conducted to give voice of the experiences of Asians with health care, Yen shares how she overcame her anxiety and concerns.

Yen is one of eight women who narrate their very personal experiences of health and health care in short, three- to five-minute web-based digital stories with still pictures, voiceovers, and music. A Taiwanese woman says, "I thought I had good genes." Her mother is 97; her father lived to 89. She then describes how she found a lump in her breast but ignored it for weeks until a friend made a doctor's appointment for her. She went through surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation, and she attributes the successful outcome of this episode to early

Photos (l to r): Zeenat Hassan, HTA Project Director; community forum attendees; traditional doll; health fair participants. Photographs © Nick Oza, except far left © Adam Stoltman/APIAHF.

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TO CLOSE HEALTH GAPS FOR ASIAN AMERICANS, NATIVE HAWAIIANS AND PACIFIC ISLANDERS**

## “EVERYONE HAD STORIES TO TELL ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH HEALTH AND WELL-BEING,” SAID ZEENAT HASAN, PROJECT DIRECTOR.

detection and treatment. Another story describes how a young Vietnamese American woman speaks to her father and urges him to obtain treatment for his Hepatitis B so he can walk her down the aisle at her wedding.

The digital storytelling project grew out of workshops with community members who helped HTAA project staff members envision how they could engage the community more effectively. “Everyone had stories to tell about their experiences with health and well-being,” said Zeenat Hasan, project director. Another eight stories are being produced “that will help create a fuller picture of the health issues in our community.”

### FOCUS ON CANCER PREVENTION

The HTAA project focuses on cancer prevention—breast, cervical, and liver cancer (for which Hepatitis B infection is a major risk factor). While rates for breast and cervical cancer are generally decreasing in Arizona, rates for Asian American and Pacific Islander women are increasing. Women say that modesty is a prime reason they do not schedule appointments for annual check-ups that include breast checks, mammograms, and pap smears.

Women who attend HTAA’s breast cancer awareness presentations regularly seek information about other health-related concerns, too, such as food assistance, child care, or domestic violence. “Our health workers are vital links to information about the health issues and resources in the community. When they can address the full range of problems people face, inevitably, cancer rates also will improve,” said Hasan.

### LANGUAGE AS A BARRIER TO HEALTH CARE

Language access is the most pressing advocacy issue for the Asian American and Pacific Islander community in Phoenix, according to Hasan. “It comes up in every aspect of the work we do. Non-English speakers—especially new immigrants and refugees—are highly fearful of the medical establishment. And fear keeps people from getting the cancer screenings and the care they need.”

To better understand the extent to which language is a barrier to accessing health care in Phoenix, APCA has partnered with Midwestern University Pharmacy Program

students (Glendale, Ariz., campus) to survey area pharmacists about the extent to which they use interpretation services.

The student researchers have found that pharmacists rely on clients’ ability to speak some English or to have family members help them communicate. This practice means that many patients will not understand how to take their medications correctly, which could be greatly damaging to their health. Pharmacists say they don’t avail themselves of telephone interpretation services because of time constraints and concerns about the quality of translation.

When complete, the pharmacy survey will be a real-life example of language barriers, and will be used in an advocacy toolkit HTAA is developing for the coalition’s member organizations.

### COALITION PARTNERS INCLUDE COMMUNITY LEADERS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF:

- Arizona State University
- Alzheimer’s Association of Arizona
- Arizona Department of Health Services
- Arizona State University
- Asian Chamber of Commerce
- Chinese American Citizens Alliance
- Chinese Senior Center
- Health Choice
- Hospice of the Valley
- Leukemia & Lymphoma Society
- Maricopa County Tobacco Use Prevention Program
- Maricopa Integrated Health System
- National Alliance on Mental Illness
- Pfizer—Oncology
- Philippine-American Chamber of Commerce of Arizona
- St. Luke’s Health Initiatives
- Sunrise Bank of Arizona
- Thai Temple of Arizona

\* The project coalition, led by Asian Pacific Community 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.

### ASIAN PACIFIC COMMUNITY IN ACTION

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