

## Health Equity through Enhanced Data

# REACHING ASIAN AMERICANS THROUGH INNOVATIVE AND SUPPORTIVE ENGAGEMENT

### BACKGROUND

In 2012, the U.S. Census Bureau indicated that Asian Americans (AA) are the fastest-growing racial group in the United States and Ohio. From 2011 to 2012, the AA population in Ohio increased 3.1 percent, compared to 2.9 percent in the U.S. While the total population in Cleveland, Ohio is steadily decreasing, AAs were the area's fastest growing racial group, increasing 42 percent over the past decade. With current rates of immigration, Ohio's AA population is likely to continue to be among Ohio's fastest-growing demographic groups.

Despite its dramatic growth, the population of Ohio's AAs remains relatively small compared to other minority groups. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2013 American Community Survey, the AA population in Ohio comprised about 1.9 percent of the total population. Consequently, aggregated data are often reported, thereby masking the socioeconomic characteristics of particular AA subgroups.

Through years of community partnerships and data collection, Asian Services In Action, Inc. (ASIA, Inc.) has found how powerful data can be when it comes to achieving health equity for the AA population. To address this issue of health equity, ASIA, Inc. brought together a multi-sector coalition called Reaching Asian Americans through Innovative and Supportive Engagement (RAISE) in 2013 to focus on healthy eating/active living initiatives through policy, systems, and environmental change. At the time that RAISE was formed, the Cuyahoga County Board of Health – Health Improvement Partnership Cuyahoga (HIP-C) had recently completed a Community Health Status Assessment (CHSA) to seek answers to “How healthy are residents in Cuyahoga County?” The assessment targeted minorities in hard to reach communities; however, the results to the HIP-C assessment were staggering due to the low participation rate of AAs. More specifically, the assessment did not show an accurate representation of the health needs of AAs due to limited access in ethnic communities. In addition, the language barrier and lack of translated materials made it very difficult for AA community members to participate in the assessment. RAISE saw this collaborative as an opportunity to highlight the health disparities and inequity within the AA population by paving the way for HIP-C to have access to AA communities to collect data in a linguistically and culturally appropriate way while educating HIP-C about the need for disaggregated data.

### COALITIONS

The RAISE coalition, headed by ASIA, Inc., includes thirteen organizations throughout Cuyahoga County from four different sectors in the AA community. The coalition includes five ethnic voluntary social groups (Federation of India Culture Association, Korean American Association of Greater Cleveland, Organization of Chinese Americans (OCA) Cleveland, Salaam Cleveland, and Philippine American Society of Ohio); four cultural language schools (Cleveland Chinese Contemporary Cultural Association, Hindu Heritage School of Solon, Korean School of Cleveland, and Westlake Chinese Culture Association); three refugee resettlement organizations (U.S. Together, International Service Center, and Cleveland Catholic Charities); and a local community development corporation, St. Clair Superior Development Corporation, who heads the AsiaTown Master Plan Committee. The collaboration between RAISE and HIP-C quickly became an automatic partnership by the Cuyahoga County Board of Health, becoming an essential role in data collection through the coalition. Additional

key partners include national organizations such as AIM for Equity network and the Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum.

## STRATEGIES

RAISE invited the Cuyahoga County Board of Health to participate in the coalition to provide technical assistance with evidence-based practices. To fully assess the needs of the AA community, RAISE utilized the CHANGE (Community Health Assessment and Group Evaluation) tool created by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The CHANGE tool is specifically designed to evaluate a community's level of readiness for policy, systems, and environmental change in order to achieve health equity. In addition to the CHANGE tool, the HIP-C survey was added during the assessment to evaluate health equity gaps from a local county perspective. ASIA was the lead organization to bring together the coalition and included leaders from multi-sectors within the AA community. ASIA worked with the coalition and Cuyahoga County Board of Health to ensure that culturally and linguistically appropriate measures were implemented in the assessment by adding items such as ethnic foods and ethnic physical activity. ASIA then created and distributed the assessment to RAISE partners to disseminate among the community. The Cuyahoga County Board of Health played an essential role in collecting and tabulating the data to be included in the HIP-C community assessment database. One activity worthy of noting was the data collection among AsiaTown, which was conducted by the St. Clair Superior Development Corporation. Through RAISE, a detailed community survey highlighting walkability, safety, and access to food was collected through door to door paper surveys to the residents of AsiaTown. The survey was translated to Chinese and conducted in Cantonese and English, allowing residents to feel safer about opening their doors to a stranger and having a conversation about healthy lifestyle choices. The results of the survey were incorporated into the AsiaTown Master Plan. It showed that the AsiaTown community wants an environment with access to physical activity, including plans for bike lanes, improved sidewalks for walking, outdoor ping pong tables and green space in the park that can be used for outdoor tai-chi and other outdoor exercises, and improved safety measures. These recommendations for environmental changes and the process that was enacted to identify those recommendations began a community conversation about active living and clearly communicated active living standards that respect the culture and needs of the Asian community to local officials. This has the potential to impact the 69,108 residents who live within 3 miles of AsiaTown.

## OUTCOMES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The key outcomes include the Cuyahoga County Board of Health learning about the need for disaggregated data within the AA community, along with the importance of going to a trusted resource to be the messenger for county initiatives. Prior to the collaboration, the Cuyahoga Board of Health was unaware of the need for disaggregated data within the AA population due to AAs making up only 2 percent of the Cuyahoga County. ASIA wanted to be intentional about the partnership to reveal the inequity in data collection due to aggregated data being used to represent the community. The partnership revealed that there was a lack of understanding how different ethnic AA groups, coming from diverse ethnic backgrounds, value health and food differently due to cultural history. For example, a first-generation refugee family values food as survival rather than for its nutritional value. Another key outcome was demonstrating the needs of the community to elected officials using the data collected from the AsiaTown community. With the data to support the community needs and health disparities of the AsiaTown neighborhood, RAISE was able to frame the need for environmental development as an economic development tool to elected officials. Specifically, the data collected revealed that AsiaTown residents wanted complete streets and safety in order to have access to physical activity within the neighborhood. The data was used to support the impact complete streets can have on businesses wanting to invest in the community due to its unique cultural atmosphere.

These combined efforts helped greatly raise the awareness of the need for data improvements. Through this effort, the discussion of disaggregated data has circulated among the Cuyahoga County Board of Health in populations within and outside of AAs. In 2014, ASIA, Inc. was asked to sit as a member of the healthy eating/active living sub-committee for the HIP-C collaborative for health equity.

## CHALLENGES

RAISE faced a number of challenges upon collecting data in collaboration with HIP-C. The primary challenge was educating the Cuyahoga County Board of Health about data disaggregation and exposing them to the unique needs of the AA communities. RAISE made sure that the Cuyahoga County Board of Health was actively involved in the data collection and coalition initiatives by providing resources for them to give technical assistance to the coalition. The Cuyahoga County Board of Health was able to allocate time and resources to attend cultural community events and coalition meetings. In addition, RAISE ensured that the Cuyahoga County Board of Health was a key resource for evidence-based practices while ASIA worked to culturally tailor the interventions. This close working relationship allowed the Cuyahoga County Board of Health to see the value of ASIA and the RAISE partnership as being a trusted resource and key messenger for the AA communities of Cuyahoga County. Another key challenge was how to sustain the coalition to continue data collection and expand the coalition's capacity to disseminate and collect the surveys. This included elevating RAISE's involvement in larger collaborative data work for the county. The RAISE coalition members come from various backgrounds and infrastructures which do not always allow for sustained partnerships due to limited resources. This made sustaining membership and partnerships difficult when resources specific to data collection were not available for communities who make up a small percentage in large counties like Cuyahoga County. Most often, communities like AAs and Latinos are ignored due to their small population and limited impact compared to larger ethnic minorities like African Americans.

## LESSONS LEARNED

There were a number of lessons learned in the process of RAISE and HIP-C coming together. The first lesson was getting the Cuyahoga County Board of Health actively involved and engaged in the health disparities and inequity of the AA community by inviting them to join the RAISE coalition. By doing so, it raised awareness to find the best practices and similar models from cities with larger AA population to demonstrate how the local health department can be a bridge for health equity in all communities. For example, from the RAISE coalition, the importance of having in-language surveys became a key lesson learned for both the coalition and the Cuyahoga County Board of Health. By having in-language assessments that were conducted by trusted entities, the quality and value of the data collected was a clearer representation of the needs of the overall community. A second lesson learned was gaining the trust of the AA community and coalition partners. ASIA has a strong existing relationship with many ethnic communities and has been able to link the AA community to many mainstream opportunities for health equity. By being a trust resource to the RAISE coalition members, community leaders were able to feel safe about including their residents and community members in the assessment. In fact, it allowed the RAISE coalition members and leaders to take ownership of their communities and realizing that health equity is about social equity as well. Lastly, the partnership created the opportunity to learn how to frame the needs of the community in order to demonstrate how it can impact the community economically and how the growing AA population plays a role in economic growth. AAs are the fastest growing ethnic community in Northeast Ohio, demonstrating the importance to prioritize culturally and linguistically appropriate practices in order to meet the needs of the growing community through data collection.