

Health Equity through Enhanced Data

COALITION FOR ASIAN AMERICAN CHILDREN & FAMILIES

BACKGROUND

Today, there are over 1.6 million New Yorkers of Asian descent. New York State is home to the second largest Asian American population in the United States. The vast majority (over 80 percent) of AAs in New York State reside in NYC (14 percent of NYC). However, there are growing numbers of AAs living in Nassau (101,755), Westchester (51,341), Suffolk (50,570), Monroe (24,205), Erie (23,786), Rockland (19,142), Albany (14,588), and Onondaga counties (14,490). New York should be leading the charge and be a model for other states with growing Asian American (AA) communities.

The momentum for disaggregated data has been building in recent years. Coupled with the recognition of fast growth rates of the AA community in New York and national efforts to create standards for the collection of demographic data, the Coalition for Asian American Children & Families (CACF) worked with former Assembly Member Grace Meng and Senator Diane Savino to introduce a historic bill A9792/S7503 in 2012. Assembly Member Grace Meng, the only Asian American state legislator in New York State at that time, was inspired by the data equity campaigns that led to the passage of AB 1088 in California. She contacted CACF to be the lead community partner as part of this initiative given the extensive network and partnerships that CACF has both in the AA community and with other social justice organizations. CACF worked closely with Assembly Member Meng to identify a potential state senate sponsor. Senator Diane Savino's leadership position in the Independent Democratic Caucus and the growing AA community in her district in Staten Island and Brooklyn made her an ideal bill sponsor.

When state or city agencies issue reports, often AAs are not mentioned, data on AAs are suppressed, or AAs are categorized in aggregate simply as "Asian" or "other". The omission of the different AA ethnic communities in statewide and citywide reports leads to the invisibility of the AA community and masks the unique social, educational, and economic differences associated with diverse Asian ethnicities. Aggregated data and data that only focus on the performance of a few subgroups mask the varied experiences and the real challenges facing many AA children and families. For example, Korean children were the least likely to have insurance (17.4 percent) compared to Filipino (5.8 percent) and Chinese (6.2 percent) children.

The bill A9792/S7503 calls for more increased improvements on how state and city agencies collect and report out on demographic data of Asian American communities. While there have been local and community efforts to increase available disaggregated data among AAs, there has not been a far-reaching, systemic move to standardize the collection and reporting of this information. It was especially imperative that state and city agencies took on this charge as priorities in government funding and programs are greatly data driven processes. Specifically, the bill:

- 3 Mandates a standard approach to the collection, disaggregation and reporting out of demographic data on New York's diverse Asian American community
 - Specifies disaggregation of 16 Asian American ethnic categories: Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Korean, Vietnamese, Asian Indian, Laotian, Cambodian, Bangladeshi, Hmong, Indonesian, Malaysian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Taiwanese, and Thai and 4 Pacific Islander ethnic categories: Guamanian, Native Hawaiian, Samoan, and other Pacific Islander.

- Ensures data is made publicly available at regular intervals

This bill was significant as it recognized that New York's current data collection policies are insufficient and too inconsistent in representing the diverse and growing Asian American community. This bill also launched CACF's Invisible No More campaign on data equity in 2012.

COALITIONS

CACF held extensive conversations on data equity with its members and partners as well as engaged key allies who are concerned about the lack of consistent, accurate and appropriate demographic data. Together, they believe data improvements are needed to properly identify, monitor, and address social services needs for the growing and diverse New York Asian Pacific American communities. They also embraced the importance of sound data as a matter of inclusion and equity.

CACF convened a series of meetings with their organizational members. The majority of CACF's members are social service providers working with the full spectrum of the Asian American and Pacific Islander community – East Asian, South Asian, Southeast Asian and Pacific Islanders. CACF also engaged many partners who work at academic research centers with a specific interest in addressing AA health disparities. These partners lent their expertise on best practices and recommendations for data disaggregation and how to reach smaller emerging AA communities. Proposals were presented at CACF's Annual Membership Meeting and subsequent planning meetings with partners. CACF received feedback about the importance of including the ethnic categories for small, emerging Asian communities such as the Nepalese, Bangladeshi, and Cambodian communities among others. Partners working in these communities voiced their frustration on having scant data available. Many engaged in their own community research efforts to document the growing and changing issues impacting their communities because of the lack of available data by the state and city agencies. A primary concern for small, emerging communities is that the dearth of data made it difficult to justify challenges to funders and elected officials about resources needed for their communities.

CACF also analyzed similar legislation namely California's law AB1088, Oregon's Partner of Quality Care Community Stakeholder Process, the Office of Management and Budget Statistical Policy Directive NO. 15, the Affordable Care Act's Section 4302, the United States Department of Health's Implementation Guidance on Data Collection Standards for Race, Ethnicity, Sex, Primary Language, and Disability Status, the Institute of Medicine's Race, Ethnicity and Language Data: Standardization for Health Care Quality Improvement, and the White House Initiative of Asian American and Pacific Islanders' Federal Agency Plans. In addition to this analysis, CACF staff spoke with advocates and legislative staff from elected officials' offices that were instrumental in data equity efforts for AAs in California, Washington, and Oregon. CACF learned about their key messaging, cost-benefit analysis, stakeholder engagement process, and other factors to consider while gearing up for their own data equity campaign.

Other integral partnerships that CACF established were with advocates working with other communities of color, non-Asian immigrants, LGBT community, and the disability community. Data equity is not an issue only facing the AA community, and CACF learned that many allies were also pushing for similar improvements for the respective communities they represent and work with. Getting their support and buy-in for the campaign proved to be beneficial as it helped elevate concerns for data improvements to be a cross-cutting issue impacting many communities.

Lastly, CACF worked to garner support from elected officials with high or growing AA districts. CACF built the case for how better data can help their offices more effectively serve their constituents.

These meetings, conversations, and analysis of existing laws and recommendations helped CACF

establish the key components that should be included in New York's version of a data improvement bill for AAs. CACF's partners were also instrumental in moving the Invisible No More campaign through their participation in the various campaign strategies and activities.

STRATEGIES

CACF incorporated multi-prong strategies to advance the Invisible No More Campaign and garner support for data improvements for the AA community.

It was essential for CACF and their partners to develop tailored messaging for particular decisionmakers. For some decisionmakers, the framing of the Invisible No More Campaign could fall under a racial equity or social equity framework. The message that sound data is a matter of inclusion resonated particularly for elected officials from or representing high AA districts and among those whom identified with the AA or other underrepresented communities.

Other decisionmakers were more concerned with how better data would impact funding allocations and accountability of government resources. CACF thus framed data improvements within these terms related to efficiency, performance measures, and transparency. Data collection, analysis, and disaggregation are integral components in properly identifying, monitoring, and addressing social service needs for New York AA communities. Disaggregation and public reporting will help to ensure that agencies that deliver vital services to New York's residents base service delivery on information that accurately captures the diversity of demographics and service needs in the State's population and help agencies develop vital programs in a timely and efficient manner. Disaggregation may help also the State and City to better utilize funding streams dedicated to supporting particular populations (e.g., refugees and new immigrants).

The use of tailored messaging helped to build a cadre of diverse supporters from elected officials to other community advocates. It was important for CACF to have a base of supporters that represented the needs of the AA community but also champions that were outside the AA community to show broad reaching buy-in.

CACF organized training opportunities with supporters before each advocacy activity, such as press conferences and legislative visits. A set of standard talking points were developed that included statistics of the AA community, the current state of data collection in government agencies, examples of similar legislation and proposals from other jurisdictions, as well as key framing messages. CACF also encouraged partners to develop stories they can share on how data improvements would help either their specific ethnic community or programs and services offered at their organizations. In order to keep supporters updated to the progress of the bill and ways they can get involved, CACF developed a communication plan that utilized CACF's listserv to over 5,000 contacts, wrote articles in their electronic and print newsletters, and posted updates on their social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter.

CACF also launched a letter-writing campaign and had over 90 organizations sign on to the letter that was sent to the Governor, State legislature leadership, and City Council Speaker. Many of these organizations were not from the New York or exclusively worked with the AA community. This was significant as it demonstrated CACF's allies supported the bill and were in solidarity with the work.

OUTCOMES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

CACF and their partners were successful in raising awareness for data improvements at State and City agencies. They were able to mobilize their 50 member organizations in several advocacy strategies,

secure support from allies outside of the AA community, and get sign-ons to the bills from elected officials.

Although A9792/S7503 did not get voted out of committees in state legislative session 2012, the interest to address data gaps continued. In September 2012, Councilmember Daniel Dromm inspired by the work at the state level introduced Intro 937 to the NYC City Council. Intro 937 refined components of the state bill to be more representative of the AA subgroups in NYC and expanded the categories to 22. Namely, the city bill added categories for Bhutanese and Tibetan communities.

Intro 937 also mandated city agencies that are required to collect demographic data should make data publicly available as well as required the collection of primary languages spoken and country of origin/place of birth. The latter was missing from the State version of the bill. Traction for Intro 937 has been swift with 34 sponsors that signed on since September 2012. CACF worked closely with Councilmember Dromm's staff to advocate that the Office of Operations to do an analysis of city agencies impacted by legislation. This report was presented to us in the fall of 2013. With 34 sponsors, it made the bill veto proof in the NYC City Council. Despite these efforts, the bill was not taken for a formal vote by the City Council in the fall of 2013. In April 2014, the bill was reintroduced as Intro 251.

In January 2013, Assembly Member Ron Kim and Senator Toby Ann Stavisky, elected officials representing Flushing, Queens, introduced a revised version of the state bill (A1186a/S2348a) to mirror the city bill. The bills currently have 34 sponsors and are housed in the Assembly Ways and Means Committee and Senate Finance. The Assembly version of the bill A1186a passed out of the Assembly 136-3 on June 2013. It was not taken for a vote on the Senate side that legislative year. The state bills (A1186b/S2348b) were reintroduced in January 2014. On March 2014, the assembly passed A1186b 128-8. The bill was then sent to the State Senate Finance Committee for deliberations and voting.

LESSONS LEARNED

There were tremendous lessons learned from the Invisible No More Campaign in its initial years. CACF leveraged prior accomplishments in their coalition-building work such as the 13 percent and Growing Budget Advocacy Coalition as well as their annual State Advocacy Days. CACF also tapped into their existing network of over 50 member organizations and nearly 30 partners working on social justice and racial equity issues. The importance of these bills was especially relevant for CACF's partners from smaller, emerging communities. Many felt data equity legislation would ensure that their community's needs were documented and counted. They were among the most vocal proponents. Key lessons from the data equity campaign included the following:

First and foremost, it was essential for CACF and partners to grasp a better understanding of the political landscape and feasibility of moving data equity legislation. In a time with shrinking government budgets and accountability concerns, it was critical to frame how the data bills would help local and state government use funds more efficiently and ultimately save money. Additionally, CACF also faced the reality that most of the AA community resides in the NYC metropolitan area. CACF learned the importance of shaping the message to appeal to elected officials with a small number of constituents from the AA community such as those living in Upstate New York. One strategy was to target elected officials with a small but growing population of AAs. CACF discussed how these bills would help their offices better serve these new communities and about the potential of linking their staff with culturally competent and language-accessible resources from their network.

Second, it was important for CACF and partners to have a strong understanding of similar legislation, models, and best practices from other jurisdictions doing data equity work. The ability to provide examples to decisionmakers of how other cities and states implemented data legislation, particularly places with high concentration of AAs, was helpful in advancing the campaign.

Third, one area that CACF continues to struggle with is building strong relationships and gaining buy-in from State and City agencies. An ongoing discussion with these stakeholders is needed to determine the likelihood of full implementation of the components of the bills should it become law. In speaking with many of their colleagues who launched data equity campaign in other jurisdictions, this was a critical piece in ensuring that these data bills are enforced and monitored.

Fourth, CACF and partners also needed to determine what components of the bills are negotiable and which ones must be retained. CACF learned that in the processes of pushing for legislation, a fair amount of compromises are made. One of the challenges faced in the passage of the State bill in 2013 was the recommendation from Senate leadership to change the wording from “shall” to “may”. This change would severely limit the bill and make key components optional for State agencies and thus defeating the purpose of data reform. CACF and partners believed that they should not compromise on this and would explore other ways to move the campaign forward.

Lastly, CACF learned that it is vital to get buy-in from diverse stakeholders from the beginning. Ownership of the bill and understanding of the clear impact it has on an individual, organization, and a community is needed to sustain interest among our supporters. Ultimately, strategies to keep them apprised and engaged ensure CACF can keep the momentum for the long haul. While the understanding of the need for data disaggregation is growing, CACF is still a long way in seeing data equity for AAs. CACF will continue to advocate for more inclusive practices and mechanisms to capture comprehensive, accurate data on AAs at the city and state levels.