

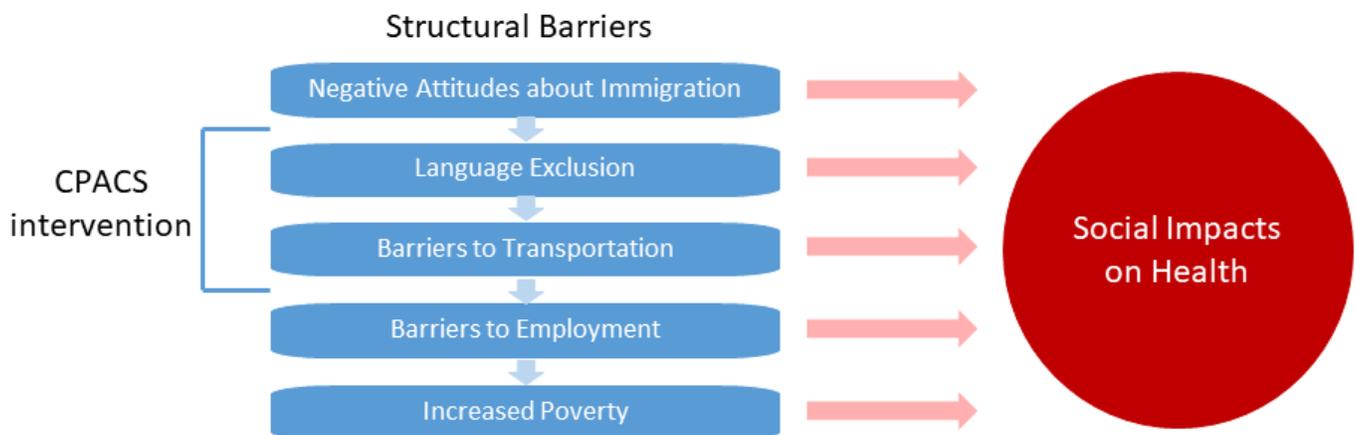
Improving Access to Transportation and Employment for Asian American Communities to Improve Health

Read how the Center for Pan Asian Community Services (CPACS) supports the health of immigrant communities by addressing language barriers to transportation and improving access to employment.

Employment, Transportation, and Health

Poverty, quality of housing, and access to health care are examples of social conditions that determine health outcomes. Many people experience economic, social, cultural, linguistic, and geographic barriers that limit their access to employment and transportation. Several aspects of employment and transportation affect health, such as employer-based health insurance, access to medical appointments, and poverty caused by unemployment. Variations in these social determinants and others, as described in Healthy People 2020, explain why there are health disparities and why many people are not as healthy as they could be. To learn how employment and poverty impact health, read these descriptive summaries: [employment](#) and [poverty](#). Read [this article](#) to learn how transportation impacts health when it is a barrier to employment.¹

ADDRESSING TRANSPORTATION AND ECONOMIC BARRIERS TO HEALTH FOR ASIAN AMERICAN IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES



In a 2018 survey, 34% of adults living in the United States expressed negative attitudes about immigrants² and recent data suggest these sentiments are increasing.³ Negative attitudes include frustration with people who speak little or no English⁴ and the assumption that immigrants who want to fit in will learn to speak it.⁵ Living in a culture that has negative attitudes about immigrants means that accommodations for immigrants are often not provided, including for services such as public transportation. Language exclusion on and around public

1 Brett Tingley. "The Transportation Barrier is Keeping Many Americans in Poverty," EducatedDriver.org (blog), May 2020, <https://educateddriver.org/transportation-barrier-keeping-americans-in-poverty/>.

2 Ana Gonzalez-Barrera and Phillip Connor. "Around the World, More Say Immigrants Are a Strength Than a Burden," Pew Research Center, March 14, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/03/14/around-the-world-more-say-immigrants-are-a-strength-than-a-burden/>.

3 Emily Nudlue. "The Language of Immigration Reporting: 2019 Normalizing vs. Watchdogging in a Nativist Age," MIT Center for Civic Media, 2019. https://download.defineamerican.com/2019/09/DA_MIT-report.pdf

4 Pew Research Center, "Shifting Public Views on Legal Immigration Into the U.S.," U.S. Politics & Policy, June 28, 2018, <https://www.people-press.org/2018/06/28/shifting-public-views-on-legal-immigration-into-the-u-s/>.

5 Loredana Polezzi, Jo Angouri and Rita Wilson. "Language has become a tool for social exclusion," The Conversation, February 21, 2019, <https://phys.org/news/2019-02-language-tool-social-exclusion.html>.

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transit prevents people who do not speak English fluently from navigating payment systems, understanding schedule changes, and easily using public transportation.⁶ Without public transportation, people face barriers to employment opportunities, which reduces economic mobility, increases poverty, and negatively affects their health.

The Local Asian American Context

There are approximately 418,000 Asian Americans in the state of Georgia and nearly 80% of that population is located in the Metro Atlanta area.⁷ About 54% of Asian Americans living in Georgia are limited English proficient 30% are categorized as “low-income,”⁸ and many are the first of their generation living in the U.S.

Community Based Organization Addressing Transportation and Employment

The [Center for Pan Asian Community Services](#) (CPACS) is a nonprofit organization in Atlanta, Georgia that promotes self-sufficiency and equity for immigrants, refugees, and the underprivileged through comprehensive health and social services, capacity building, and advocacy. The clients they serve experience language barriers to public transportation, which contribute to cultural and systemic barriers to attaining employment. Victoria Huynh, Vice President of the Center for Pan Asian Community Services, describes the transportation needs of the communities:

“We were seeing the transportation needs were all about language. Our communities have not been able to access public transit because of language.”

Innovative, Culturally-Informed Approach

CPACS offers a wide range of services that address multiple social determinants of health and reflect racial equity strategies. The CPACS transportation program represents a particularly strong example of racial equity strategies in action. From designing the program in partnership with community leaders to focusing the program’s purpose on increasing self-determination and building community, the transportation program demonstrates clear ways to incorporate [AANHPI Racial Equity Framework](#) strategies in program design and implementation.



Before they began designing the transportation program, CPACS clarified the need for in-language transportation services through interviews with community leaders and discussions with community service partners. Next, they identified high-traffic locations for their community and worked with the Atlanta Regional Commission to become a subgrantee for Federal Transit Administration funding. Partnering with community leaders to accurately identify needs indicates a **commitment to supporting community members’ self-determination** from the beginning.

From 2012 to 2019, CPACS acquired four green shuttle buses as well as several minivans and sedans to help members of the Atlanta refugee and immigrant community pick up groceries, attend religious services, and commute to work. In 2018 alone, CPACS provided over 16,000 one-way passenger trips. For many of these

6 Kery Murakami. “‘English, English, Everything English’: Why doesn’t Metro speak more languages?” Washington Post, November 28, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/express/2018/11/28/english-english-everything-english-why-doesnt-metro-speak-more-languages/>.

7 U.S. Census Bureau. “2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates,” U.S. Census Bureau, Table C17002

8 ibid.

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riders, in-language transportation supports their ability to live independently and **nurtures their sense of self-determination**. Seniors and disabled persons use the service to attend health care appointments, pick up prescriptions and groceries, and participate in senior wellness programs.

Building capacity to access employment is another important goal of the transportation program. Refugee and employment teams help community members identify employment opportunities, which they pursue with the help of transportation services. CPACS clients also use transportation services to attend job interviews, orientations, and ESL and education classes. The transportation services are more affordable than other available options, so the program also helps community members divert resources from transportation to other important needs like food and housing. The coordinated strategies of employment support and transportation build the capacity of community members to locate and access employment.

“We had one client experiencing domestic abuse. When she left her abuser, she did not have a car. With the help of CPACS, she was able to get in-language transportation services to and from her job. This meant she was able to keep her job, save money, get her own vehicle, and be on her way to self-sufficiency.”

To ensure that community members do not encounter transportation-related language barriers, CPACS staffs their vehicles with drivers and team members who speak the same languages as the passengers. All of CPACS's transportation services are bilingual, bicultural, or multilingual. **The diversity of the community members' cultures is fully incorporated in the program.** Drivers are hired from the community and volunteers who speak Bhutanese, Burmese, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, and other languages receive stipends to educate their communities about the services. Whenever possible, riders are paired with a driver who speaks their language. When that is not possible, a team member who speaks the same language as the riders accompanies them to their destination. All riders receive in-language satisfaction surveys to make sure the community is satisfied and able to access what they need.



Lessons Learned

Affordable and accessible in-language transportation services empower immigrant communities to access new employment opportunities, reduce poverty, and increase self-sufficiency. These social determinants contribute to better opportunities for health and wellness. Based upon their experience designing in-language transportation services, CPACS has the following recommendations:

- **Partner with local agencies.** Help local service providers understand your community's needs and experiences. Consider hosting local agencies at your site so they can learn about your community and your services. Building relationships with local agencies may provide an opportunity to think creatively and identify new funding or partnership opportunities together.
- **Identify who you're serving.** What ethnic groups do the immigrants and refugees in your communities represent? What languages do they speak? What neighborhoods do they live in? How might their needs be unique? Always consider the unique characteristics and needs of the diverse communities you serve when making decisions and designing your programs.

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- *Address Language Barriers.* Hire staff who can represent and meet the needs of your diverse clients whenever possible. When this is not possible, pay community members to serve in language access roles. Confirm you're meeting language access needs for clients by checking in with them regularly.
- Support the *self-determination* of your communities. Consider how your communities can shape resources and opportunities through participating in your initiatives, and how your agency can help them support their capacity to employment, economic stability, education, and other daily needs.

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