

# GROWING NUMBERS, GROWING IMPACT:

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## BRIEFING PAPER ON ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICANS IN NEW YORK CITY



The briefing paper was produced with input from sponsoring organizations. For more information, please contact Vanessa Leung, Coalition for Asian American Children and Families, at [vleung@cacf.org](mailto:vleung@cacf.org).

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## THE ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN COMMUNITY

The Asian Pacific American community is the fastest growing group in New York City. Totalling 1.3 million people, Asian Pacific Americans make up 14% of the City's population. The community is diverse. The Asian Pacific American population represents more than 40 cultures and ethnic groups that trace their heritage to East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands. They speak more than 150 languages and dialects.

*Highly Immigrant Community.* The Asian Pacific Americans community is a highly immigrant community with 78.0% being foreign-born. Asian Pacific Americans also have high naturalization rates.

*Increasing Poverty.* According to the Mayor's Center for Economic Opportunity, the poverty rate for Asian Pacific Americans is 26.5% live in poverty, the highest percentage of all racial groups and statistically the same as Latinos. The Census reports that Asian Pacific Americans have a poverty rate of 18.0%, but individual groups range from 6.1% for Japanese to 33.0% for Bangladeshi communities. More than half of Asian Pacific American children in New York City are born to mothers who are on Medicaid. The poverty rate for Asian Pacific American seniors is increasing. At 25.3%, they have the second highest poverty rate of any racial group.

*High Rates of Limited English Proficiency.* Asian Pacific Americans of working age had limited English proficiency rate of 49.0%. The Chinese, Bangladeshi, Korean, and Vietnamese communities have even higher rates than Asian Pacific Americans as a whole.

**Despite the many challenges, the Asian Pacific American community continues to grow in influence as an economic driver and political force.**

*Economic Driver.* New York City has the largest number of Asian-owned businesses in the nation. In New York City, Asian-owned businesses, three-quarters of which are in New York City, had revenue of \$50.5 billion. Tourists from Asia conducting business, vacationing, and visiting family and friends in New York City spent over \$2.2 billion in 2011.

*Growing Electorate.* Asian Pacific Americans are a growing portion of New York City's electorate. The number of Asian Pacific American reaching citizen voting-age grew by 53.0%, by far the highest of all racial groups. In the 2012 elections, almost 30% of Asian Pacific Americans were first time voters.

**Unfortunately, as the Asian Pacific American population in New York City has rapidly increased and has helped to bring vitality to New York City's economy and neighborhoods, the needs in the community have been met with inadequate financial resources and services. These needs are substantial barriers to education, healthcare, employment, civic participation, and other factors critical to becoming contributing members of this City.**

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Below are a set of recommendations that addresses some of the major concerns facing the Asian Pacific American community.

### **Asian Pacific American Leadership**

**Establish the New York City Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs within the first year in office and ensure qualified Asian Pacific Americans are appointed to senior positions in the new administration.**

New York City is diverse, and the mayoral administration should reflect that diversity. Asian Pacific Americans are by percentage the fastest growing group in New York City, nearly doubling every decade since 1970 and making up nearly 14% of the population. In fact, New York City has the largest Asian Pacific American population of any U.S. city. However, very few Asian Pacific Americans have been in leadership positions in New York City's past mayoral administration that could help shape policies and programs to address the diverse needs of the Asian Pacific American community. The federal government, states like Connecticut, Maryland, and Washington, and cities like Philadelphia, have offices or commissions that work closely with government leaders to address concerns of the Asian Pacific American community.

**Impact:** The Commission and individuals assuming leadership positions in the administration would be able to strengthen the administration's ability to understand and meet the needs of the diverse Asian Pacific American community. Establishing a Commission to address the concerns of the fastest growing group in New York City would demonstrate the administration's proactive stance and ability to respond to changing circumstances.

**Recommendation:** The next Mayor should proactively address the concerns of the fastest growing group in New York City by 1.) establishing the New York City Commission Asian Pacific American Affairs as a fully funded Commission, and 2.) appointing qualified Asian Pacific Americans for key leadership positions in the next administration.

The New York City Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs would be charged with elevating the political, economic, and social issues of Asian Pacific Americans by partnering with City government to address the needs and improve the quality of life of the diverse Asian Pacific American community. The Commission would be responsible for:

- Advising the Mayor and City Council on how to respond most effectively to the needs and concerns of the Asian Pacific American community in New York City.
- Assisting City agencies and policymakers in identifying needs and issues facing the Asian Pacific American community in New York City, and developing appropriate responses and programs.
- Reviewing and commenting on any proposed legislation, regulations, policies, or programs that affect the Asian Pacific American community in New York City.
- Conducting outreach to Asian Pacific American organizations and communities in New York City to disseminate information about public and private programs.

The Commission should be a fully funded and staffed Commission and should consist of individuals of Asian Pacific American descent who have a demonstrated commitment to the community, and would be diverse in respect to ethnicity, gender, sector (health and human services, education, research, small business, finance, etc.), and borough representation. These individuals would be appointed by the Mayor and Borough Presidents. A Deputy Mayor

should be assigned to work The Commission should submit an annual report documenting positions and activities for the year.

The Mayor should work with Asian Pacific American community leaders and organizations to identify qualified Asian Pacific Americans who have demonstrated commitment to the community for the transition team and for appointments to senior positions.

## **Data Disaggregation**

### **Support policies that would mandate City agencies to utilize a standard approach to data collection, disaggregation, and reporting on Asian Pacific Americans.**

There is a historical legacy of institutionalized practices to exclude Asian Pacific Americans from national, regional, and local data efforts and reports. The inability to properly capture the unique challenges facing the diverse Asian Pacific American community has led to the invisibility and misunderstanding of the full scope of Asian Pacific American community needs. Often, when City agencies issue reports, Asian Pacific Americans are not mentioned, data on Asian Pacific Americans is suppressed, Asian Pacific Americans are categorized simply as “Asian” or “other”, or Asian Pacific Americans are grouped with “Whites” for purposes of comparison with other communities of color. Although Asian Pacific Americans share geographic and cultural commonalities, there are unique social, educational, and economic differences associated with different Asian ethnicities. Aggregated data and/or data that only focus on the performance of a few subgroups mask the diversity of experiences and the real challenges facing many Asian Pacific American children and families.

**Impact:** 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 New York City’s population and help agencies develop vital programs in a timely and efficient manner. Furthermore, the lack of a uniform data collection method makes obtaining an accurate and specific description of race discrimination in health care, education, housing, and social service delivery difficult. The existing data collection does not allow for regularly collecting race data on agency, provider, and institutional behavior. Data collection, analysis, and disaggregation are integral components in properly identifying, monitoring, and addressing social service needs for the growing and diverse New York State Asian communities.

**Recommendation:** City agencies need to utilize a standard approach to data collection, disaggregation, and reporting on Asian Pacific Americans. Any policy should mandate a standard approach to the collection, disaggregation, and reporting out of demographic data on New York’s diverse Asian Pacific American community. This includes disaggregation of Asian Pacific American ethnic categories to at least 22 categories, information on country of origin and years in the United States, and information on top 20 most frequently spoken Asian languages. The policy must also ensure data is made publicly available at regular intervals.

## **Language Access**

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**Expand Executive Order 120 that mandates City agencies to offer translation and interpretation to cover additional Asian languages and ensure City agencies are fully funded to offer language accessible services.**

Thirty-eight percent of Asian Pacific Americans in the New York metropolitan area have limited English proficiency (LEP), compared to 16% of the overall population. Rates among subgroups in NYC range widely, with the highest rates among Chinese (60.0%), Korean (54.0%), and Bangladeshi (54.0%) communities, and lower rates among Pakistani (42.0%), Indian (30.0%), and Filipino (22.0%) communities. Executive Order 120 mandates City agencies to provide language assistance to limited English proficient individuals in six languages. Two of the six languages are Asian languages (Chinese and Korean). Currently, Executive Order 120 leaves out the Bengali speaking community, one of the fastest growing ethnic groups with high limited English proficiency rates. Implementation by City agencies have varied, and individuals across the City are still reporting unavailability of interpreters and translated documents.

**Impact:** Individuals who are able to access needed services in a language they understand ensures these individuals receive services in a timely manner, avoiding possible costlier interventions.

**Recommendation:** Expand the number of languages City agencies are mandated to translate from six to nine. This change would then mirror the Department of Education's policy that mandates nine covered languages. These nine languages plus English addresses the language needs of nearly 96% of individuals served. Four of these languages are Asian languages (Chinese, Bengali, Urdu, and Korean).

## **Social Service Contracts**

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**Reform social service contracting by designating 10% of points in proposal evaluation towards criteria to evaluate cultural competency and language accessibility of services.**

The Asian Pacific American community does not receive a fair share of public and private resources. Asian Pacific American organizations receive less than 1% of the City's social service contract dollars and City's foundation grant dollars. The 6,000 social service contracts in New York City are held by 1,000 organizations. However, only 100 organizations hold 85% of the contracts. This means that the increase in the Asian Pacific American population of New York has been met with a decrease in financial resources and, hence, a decrease in much needed services that are culturally competent and linguistically accessible.

For example, Asian Pacific American seniors face the highest rate of poverty and limited English proficiency of any racial group. Culturally specific community-based organizations are more likely to understand the complex multi-layered challenges and obstacles and appropriately address the needs of racial, ethnic and linguistic populations groups that experience unequal access to services. Without culturally competent and language accessible services, community members may experience delayed access to services in the short term, which can result in costlier interventions in the long term. Culturally specific community-based organizations are also better equipped to form essential relationships and engage their communities in the creation and implementation of services relevant to the diverse and unique needs of community members. With the growing racially diverse population, it is necessary for services to go beyond

cultural awareness and knowledge but also ensure providers have appropriate skills and are able to use them effectively in cross-cultural situations.

**Impact:** Awarding 10% of points in the proposal evaluation towards criteria that evaluates culturally competent and language accessible services will ensure that diverse New Yorkers receive effective, quality services from both mainstream organizations and people of color and immigrant led organizations. Mainstream organizations will be incentivized to hire bicultural/bilingual staff and to serve communities of color and immigrant communities. People of color led organizations and immigrant led organizations will have a better opportunity to compete for social service contracts.

**Recommendation:** It is important for New York City agencies to increase access to vital services that are culturally and linguistically appropriate. All proposals for social service contracts should demonstrate the ability of the organization to provide such services. 10% of points in proposal evaluation should be designated for criteria that evaluate cultural competence and language accessibility of services. The Department of Youth and Community Development in past RFPs have included language outlining the importance of culturally competent, language accessible services. In a recent Administration for Children's Services RFP for child welfare services, there were points given for agencies that could provide language appropriate services. These RFPs have led directly to more contracted CBOs being able to serve emerging populations in their neighborhoods. More importantly, these RFPs could become examples of how to award points for culturally competent and language accessible services across all of New York City's social services RFPs.

## **Public Health**

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### **Asian Pacific Americans need targeted and tailored health education campaigns and initiatives that are provided in Asian languages.**

Asian Pacific American communities suffer disproportionately from many diseases. Community-based research in NYC have found rates of diabetes to be as high as 26.0% among Bangladeshi New Yorkers, compared to an overall citywide rate in of 10.5%. In addition, 53.0% of Filipinos in the NYC metropolitan area experience hypertension, compared to a citywide rate of 28.9%. Furthermore, statistics available from the city are usually reported out grouping all Asian Americans together as one group, masking the health disparities that different Asian communities experience. While the DOHMH does collect information on country of birth, this does not capture the ethnicity of American-born Asian Americans, or those Asian Americans who were born in countries other than their home country.

**Impact:** Asian Pacific American communities, like other communities of color, experience many striking health disparities and should benefit from similar additional resources, programs, and services that are provided to other groups. The benefits of investing in prevention and intervention programs are healthier and productive individuals in schools and workplaces and the avoidance of costlier treatments.

**Recommendation:** Asian Pacific American communities need to be identified as priority communities when developing targeted and tailored health education campaigns and initiatives. Public health campaigns should address the health risks such as diabetes and hypertension. For a successful campaign, materials and outreach must be both language accessible and culturally competent. Initiatives such as District Public Health Offices (DPHOs) that provide

additional resources, programs, and services for the community should need to be expanded to ensure access to all communities. A DPHO must be opened in Queens.

## **Immigrant Services**

### **Expand the availability of immigrant services through a greater investment of City funding.**

Nearly 40.0% of New York City's population is foreign-born. In the State of New York, nearly 1 million individuals are legal permanent residents eligible to be naturalized. New York has the third largest number of DACA applications, nearly 25,000. Asian Pacific Americans had the highest proportion of immigrants of any other racial group. Programs offering free or low cost immigrant services have long wait lists.

**Impact:** Greater availability of free or low cost immigrant services will help to meet the already huge demand for these services. More immigrant New Yorkers will improve their English skills, and successfully complete applications for citizenship, adjust their legal status, and obtain DACA status. This results in healthier and more vibrant immigrant families.

**Recommendation:** Expand the availability of immigrant services through a greater investment of City funding. This will leverage the state and federal funds that the City already uses to support these services. Immigrant services include ESOL classes, citizenship application assistance and legal services.

## **PK – 12 Public Education**

### **Develop education initiatives that acknowledge and address the educational inequities within the Asian Pacific American community.**

Asian Pacific American students make up 14.0% of the public school student population. 1 out of 5 English Language Learners are Asian Pacific American. Due to stereotypes, Asian Pacific American students remain largely invisible and their needs are not considered in education reform initiatives. Often conversations regarding the achievement gap in education focuses upon the needs of Black and Latino students as compared to Whites and Asians. While the model minority myth continues to exemplify the notion of successful Asian Pacific Americans, this preconception masks the achievement gap that exists within the Asian Pacific American community itself. More specifically, while only 5.0% of Asian Pacific American students attend one of the top three specialized high schools, there are many more Asian Pacific American students who fail to meet education standards, and struggle throughout their academic career. These students find themselves isolated and marginalized, and often lack the necessary support to navigate the education system and access services critical to becoming competent, well-adjusted adults. In fact, 1 in 4 Asian Pacific American students does not graduate on time or at all, and according to the New York State Department of Education “only 50% of Asian Pacific American students are considered prepared for college and career, and for Asian Pacific American students in high needs urban-suburban areas, the rate drops to 35.2%.”

**Impact:** Addressing the educational inequities within the Asian Pacific American community will help ensure that our public school system prepares our young people to become responsible, well-adjusted, and civically engaged.

**Recommendation:** Asian Pacific American students, like all students, benefit from teaching that starts in early childhood, focuses on learning rather than merely test preparation, and addresses both academic and non-academic growth. The Department of Education must develop targeted approaches on its own or within larger initiatives to address the needs of Asian Pacific American students.

- a. **Increase Parent Engagement:** While overall parent engagement in our public schools must be improved, the Department of Education must outreach to Asian Pacific American parents in a culturally competent and linguistically appropriate way to better educate parents on how they can get involved, support their students, and access resources.
- b. **Improve Counseling:** Counseling staff need to be trained to properly assess and work with Asian Pacific American students and move to integrate counseling with college and career guidance.
- c. **Increase Access to College and Career Readiness Programs:** Develop college and career readiness programs that start in elementary school, target those students who would be their first in their family to attend college in this country, include financial literacy components, and incorporate parents.
- d. **Support Social-Emotional Development:** Develop standards to measure social and emotional development of our youth.
- e. **Incorporate an Inclusive Curriculum:** The curriculum and materials used should reflect the diversity of New York City.
- f. **Expand Early Childhood:** Ensure access to full-day universal Pre-K for all four-year-olds, and quality and age appropriate options for those younger than four.
- g. **Improve ELL Support:** Develop a long term plan to recruit and retain Asian bilingual educators to ensure quality bilingual programs in Asian languages and expansion of Asian dual language programs.

## **School Safety**

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**Address school harassment through restorative justice practices and involve students in the formulation and evaluation of school safety policies.**

The U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics reports that the highest rate of bullying in schools was self-reported by Asian Pacific American youth. Specifically, the rates of bullying in classrooms were 20% higher for Asian Pacific Americans than any other racial or ethnic group, and the rates of bullying outside school grounds were 10% higher for Asian Pacific American than for other groups. Some Asian Pacific American students are bullied for other factors in addition to their race. These include those who are recent immigrants, who identify as or perceived to be LGBTQ, or who are of Muslim or perceived to be Muslim.

**Impact:** By engaging students and developing policies that do not result in more police presence, schools will be better equipped to address harassment and restore schools as safe environments for learning.

**Recommendation:** The Department of Education must provide the proper training and support for schools to implement restorative justice practices when addressing school harassment and regularly seek and incorporate the input from students, parents, and community members to formulate and evaluate school safety policies.

## **Civic Participation**

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### **Increase civic engagement of immigrant New Yorkers by expanding voting rights to legal residents of New York City to vote in local elections.**

Anyone living in New York City is paying taxes – sales taxes, property taxes in their rent, or income taxes to name a few. Despite paying such taxes, millions in our city have no voice in how they are governed. We have a system that allows for “taxation without representation.” This impacts the Asian Pacific American community profoundly. Over 70.0% of its population is immigrant, many of whom are green card holders or visa holders waiting for citizenship.

**Impact:** Expansion of voting rights to documented residents ensures that those taxpayers are represented in local government and increase the accountability of city officials to everyone living in their district.

**Recommendation:** Support the expansion of voting rights by supporting a current bill in the City Council (Intro 410) that would restore voting rights to legal residents of New York City, allowing them to vote in city-level elections.

## **Housing**

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### **New York City needs to implement a comprehensive plan that prioritizes an increase in the number of affordable housing units and preserves existing affordable housing units.**

Land has always been one of New York City's most valuable assets. While swaths of the city remain untapped for development, too many of our neighborhoods are overcrowded. Luxury housing development has far outpaced development of low and moderate income housing development. Government and tax payers have subsidized this through the use of public vacant land or converted land given to for profit developers.

It is estimated that over the next decade New York City could grow by another 500,000 residents and yet there is no long-term plan in place to provide affordable housing for existing families and these future New Yorkers. Furthermore, recent analysis of the American Housing Survey shows that nearly half of the lowest income New Yorkers are paying more than 50.0% of their gross income on housing costs, far exceeding the affordability benchmark at 30.0%. Although the population of Queens has grown 14.0% in the last two decades, there has been almost no new development of affordable housing in the borough of Queens – where 49.0% of Asian Pacific Americans reside. Because of this rapid growth during an ongoing housing crisis, Asian Pacific Americans are more than three times as likely than other new Yorkers to live in overcrowded conditions - the highest rate of overcrowding in the City.

**Impact:** Providing a long-term, comprehensive plan to diversify housing options for low and moderate income individuals and families will support economic and demographic growth, ensuring that residents of New York City can continue to live in their communities.

**Recommendation:** The long-term, comprehensive plan needs to prioritize affordable housing for low and moderate income individuals as well as larger families, particularly in Queens. This includes mandatory inclusionary zoning, improved code enforcement of rent regulated housing, and the creation of an Accessory Dwelling Unit code (building code) that would bring currently

informal basement rental units into code and maintain affordability so they are safe and regulated.

## **Economic Development**

### **Promote small business in immigrant communities with policies that help new businesses to start and existing ones to expand.**

For immigrant communities, and particular Asian Pacific Americans, small businesses are the stepping stone into economic security and asset development. These businesses provide local goods and services, are significant local job creators, and enhance the vitality/livability of our neighborhoods. However, there are many challenges for small businesses that range from start-up to sustaining profits. Because of the language barriers and a lack of in-language programs and outreach, many small business owners are unaware of opportunities and existing services that can help them start, sustain, or expand their services. These include training programs, small business counseling, and loan programs. In addition, immigrant small businesses are disproportionately identified for code violations and many are not aware of the reasons for the violations, nor understand the appeal process.

**Impact:** Immigrant-owned small businesses have become vital piece in revitalizing neighborhoods and important to overall economic growth of the City.

**Recommendation:** Small Business Services need to provide more in-language support and outreach to immigrant entrepreneurs. Small business centers should be established in large Asian Pacific American business districts including neighborhoods like Flushing, Jackson Heights, Richmond Hill, Chinatown, and Sunset Park. Ensure that the city's inspection of small businesses for health, safety, and other compliance violations is transparent so that business owners understand their violations and are offered assistance through the appeals process.

## SPONSORING ORGANIZATIONS



## SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS

A Place for Kids  
 AARP New York  
 Apex for Youth  
 Arab American Family Support Center  
 Asian American Action Fund  
 Asian American Bar Association of New York  
 Center for the Integration and Advancement of  
 New Americans  
 Chinatown Partnership  
 Commission on the Public's Health System  
 Filipino American National Historical Society –  
 Metro New York  
 Henry Street Settlement  
 Japanese American Association of New York  
 Korean American Family Service Center  
 Korean Community Services of Metropolitan  
 New York

New Land Community Center, Asian-American  
 Consulting Service  
 NYU Center for the Study of Asian American  
 Health  
 NYU Health Promotion and Prevention Research  
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 Pilipino American Unity for Progress (UniPro) New  
 York Chapter  
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