

PLANTING SEEDS OF CHANGE



May 2012

Strategies for Engaging Asian Pacific Americans in Healthy Eating and Active Living Initiatives

By APA HEALIN' (Asian Pacific Americans – Healthy Eating & Active Living in our Neighborhoods)



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

APA HEALIN' would like to thank the Asian Pacific Partners for Empowerment, Advocacy, and Leadership (APPEAL) for funding this initiative. Special recognition goes out to Peter Cheng, Narbada Chhetri, Caleb Gao, Peter Gee, Tshering Gurung, Wayne Ho, John Klukas, Douglas Nam Le, Vanessa Leung, Rod Lew, Kevin Nadal, Ryan Natividad, Luna Ranjit, Matthew Ryder, Emily Schunk, Nadeena Seodarsan, Nima Sherpa, Kim To, and Rhodora Ursua, for their support.

Special thanks to all our collaborative partners and community photographers:

- Adhikaar
- Asian Americans for Equality
- Indochina Sino-American Community Center
- Kalusugan Coalition
- Coalition for Asian American Children and Families (Coordinating Agency)

Photovoice Photographers:

Mayven Cajucom
 Karie Chen
 Joan Cheng
 Kirklyn Escondo
 Xue Yun Gao
 Shankar Ghimire
 Shanti Gurung
 Shu Ling Kan
 Ping Lam
 Alyssa Lau
 Chi Fai Leung
 Duan Yi Liao Li
 Alanna Liang
 Min Chao Liu

Hao Chuan Luo
 Potri Ranka Manis
 Kwai Fong Ng
 Sahil Pradhan
 Sandhya G. Pradhan
 Myrna Santos
 Nadeena Seodarsan
 Lamu Sherpa
 Tshering C. Sherpa
 Ying Yu Situ
 Monica Velasquez
 Cindy Xie
 Jian Qiang Zeng
 Jin Ye Zhang

“Planting Seeds of Change: Strategies for Engaging Asian Pacific Americans in Healthy Eating and Active Living Initiatives” was written by Noilyn Abesamis-Mendoza.

This publication was supported by the Asian Pacific Partners for Empowerment, Advocacy, and Leadership (APPEAL) as part of the National Asian American and Pacific Islander Network to Eliminate Health Disparities (NAPNEHD). NAPNEHD is funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention through the Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health Across the U.S. (REACH U.S.). The contents of the publication are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of APPEAL, NAPNEHD, or CDC.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	.....	1
Executive Summary	.....	3
Background	.....	4
Results	.....	7
Photovoice	.....	7
Urban Gardening Survey & Key Informant Interviews	.....	13
Recommendations	.....	20
Policy Recommendations	.....	20
Practice Recommendations	.....	22
Closing	.....	23
References	.....	23

PLANTING SEEDS OF CHANGE

STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGING ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICANS IN HEALTHY EATING AND ACTIVE LIVING INITIATIVES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While a person's family history is one indicator of his or her likelihood to develop a health condition, there are many other factors (such as poor diet, lack of physical activity, tobacco use, and exposure to certain environmental factors) that taken together greatly impact that individual's health and quality of life. In recent years, there has been a growing movement and recognition of this intersection. There has also been an increasing understanding of the impact of the built environment on either facilitating or impeding a healthy lifestyle.

What does all this mean for the Asian Pacific American community?

Through Photovoice, surveys, and key informant interviews, this report begins to explore the confluence of these issues and their impact on community health. The purpose of this report is to present key findings from a community needs assessment about healthy food access and physical activity for Asian Pacific Americans (APA) living in New York City. It also offers policy and practice recommendations to increase participation of Asian Pacific Americans in healthy food and active living initiatives like community gardens. Key recommendations include:

Policy Recommendations

Development of initiatives, funding opportunities, and training opportunities that:

- Support and integrate **cultural competency** into community gardens' outreach, planning, and growing.
- Utilize **stewardship** programs to increase creation of community gardens.
- Promote community gardens as a model for **leadership development** programs.

Practice Recommendations

Incorporation of best practices that community garden initiatives can use to increase participation of Asian Pacific Americans in healthy food and active living initiatives.

- **Site Assessment:** Consider spaces that are accessible to APA community members and are close to neighborhood establishments that they frequent, near public transportation, or on sites where they feel safe and welcomed.
- **Design and Aesthetics:** Participation of APA community members in charettes, an intensive planning session where community members, designers and others collaborate on a vision for development.
- **Traditional Methods/Knowledge:** Include discussions and workshops on the agricultural and food histories of APAs as community gardeners, farmers, food producers and food distributors.

- **Multisectoral:** Identify and outreach to key potential partners, including APA local businesses and community based organizations as well as garden and horticultural societies, architects, landscape designers, schools, and churches among others, to participate in community gardening efforts.
- **Sustainability:** Develop innovative strategies to fundraise and sustain community gardens that leverage unique strengths and assets of APA communities.
- **Local Landscape:** Provide training opportunities to learn about the urban ecosystem of New York City, gardening/farming basics, as well agricultural practices used by APAs in their home countries that might be transferable to growing food in urban settings.

The needs assessment was developed, conducted, and analyzed by APA HEALIN' (Asian Pacific Americans – Healthy Eating and Active Living in our Neighborhoods), a collaborative of 5 organizations addressing access to healthy foods and safe places to play, exercise, and gather for the Asian American community in New York City.

BACKGROUND

Building a Case for Food Access & Active Living in Asian Pacific American communities

The current generation of children in America may have shorter life expectancies than their parents for the first time in two centuries. According to a 2005 report, it contends that the rapid rise in childhood obesity, if left unchecked, could shorten life spans by as much as five years (Olshansky, 2005). With all these technological advances in health, how as a country have we come to this point?

Research studies have shown that poor diet, lack of physical activity, tobacco, and being exposed to certain environmental factors are the leading causes of chronic conditions. This has in turn created an increase in the rates of hypertension, high cholesterol, diabetes, and different types of cancers across all communities, including Asian Pacific Americans. Cancer, heart disease, and stroke are the top three leading causes of death for Asian Pacific Americans in the United States (National Center for Health Statistics, 2011).

Migration patterns and acculturation have greatly impacted the health of Asian Pacific Americans, particularly as it relates to their access to healthy foods and participation in physical activities. Later generations are experiencing increasing rates of chronic disease at higher rates than their 1st generation counterparts. A study on low-income Asian Pacific American children found that the rate of being overweight doubled between the years 1994 to 2003, 7% to 15% (Unger, 2004). Coronary heart disease and stroke are the first and third leading causes of death among Asian Pacific Americans. The disease burden in certain APA communities is tremendous. For instance, Indian men showed that 50% of all heart attacks occur under the age of 50 and 25% of those occur under the age of 40 (South Asian Heart Center, 2011). Filipinos have demonstrated a high prevalence of hypertension and controlling their high blood pressure continues to be a challenge (Grandetti et al., 2005; Stavig et al., 1988; Smith et al., 2005; Taira et al., 2007). Ten percent of Asian Pacific Americans have diabetes and among them between 90-95% having type 2 diabetes (Joslin Diabetes Center, Asian American Diabetes Initiative, 2011).

The growing toll of chronic health conditions such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, and diabetes has on families, neighborhoods, and the country is tremendous. First, there are the economic costs. The largest cost of health in the U.S. is a result of treating chronic conditions like cancer, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes. The cost of treating cardiovascular disease alone was \$475.3 billion in 2009 (American Diabetes Association, 2008). As the country, state, and local governments continue to struggle with budget cuts, support for health promotion and disease prevention initiatives and policies is even more pressing.

Second, there are also the costs associated with diminished quality of life and years. Complications as a result of cancers, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes lead to functional impairment, pain, emotional burden, and diminished quality of life. Taken together, as an individual, community, and society, we lose out on the potential to accomplish our hopes and dreams, and the ability to contribute to our schools, families, neighborhoods and to the larger community.

The time to act is NOW. When addressing solutions to prevent and reduce the development of chronic conditions, we must look to tackling the leading risk factors. The creation of healthy food access and active living policies and initiatives is one approach. This report highlights the complexities facing public health advocates in developing sound initiatives, programs, and policies that will meet Asian Pacific Americans' specific needs in a culturally competent manner.

Complexities of Food Access and Active Living in Asian Pacific American Communities

Significance of Food in Asian Pacific American Communities



Food is sustenance first and foremost. However while everyone needs to eat, who gets to eat and what they get to eat is as much a reflection on class, economics, and access as it is about one's tastes and preferences. The availability and affordability of certain types of food products plays a great role on the dietary habits

PLANTING SEEDS OF CHANGE

of Asian Pacific Americans. Certain foods (healthy or unhealthy) in the Asian Pacific American community have profound cultural and symbolic meanings.

Food is a tie to one's heritage and identity. Many Asian Pacific Americans trace their roots to agrarian and fishing communities. From the early Chinese and Japanese farm workers of the sugar plantations of Hawai'i, Filipino Alaskan cannery workers to modern day communities such as the Hmong farmers in Central California and the Midwest, the Vietnamese fisherfolk along the South's Gulf Coast, and the Korean green grocers in the Northeast. At every level of the "food chain" – Asian Pacific Americans are involved in the cultivating, harvesting, distributing, preparing, enjoying and disposing of food and its by-products. This is further complicated when issues of exposure to chemical pesticides, farm policies, and trade agreements come into play.

As Asian Pacific Americans continue to acculturate in the U.S., their diets may evolve to a large degree. Some experts argue two schools of thoughts. The healthy migrant effect posits that the longer an immigrant lives in the U.S., they are more likely to adopt unhealthy behaviors and the sicker they become. On the other end is the idea that immigrants will be more likely to engage in a healthier lifestyle such as participating in physical activities and eating nutritious diets.

The latter may be true for Asian Pacific Americans who have access to healthy foods and safe places to exercise and gather. However, in many neighborhoods where Asian Pacific Americans reside or work, it is not uncommon to see billboards for tobacco, alcohol, and the least healthy of foods. For many Asian Pacific Americans, fresh fruits and vegetables, organic foods, and whole grains are often difficult (if not impossible) to find or are unaffordable. Instead there are convenience stores, fast food chains, and restaurants with their greasy "bargains". While some Asian ethnic neighborhoods in New York City are abundant with fresh vegetable and fruit stands, not all Asian Pacific Americans live in these places or have access to these products due to costs and availability.

Significance of the Built Environment in Asian Pacific American Communities



The ability to live a healthy lifestyle is also impacted by the built or physical environment where a person lives, works, learns, plays, and worships.

Affordable housing and access to open public spaces also has implications for health. In NYC, the average family spends approximately 30% of their income on rent (NYU Furman Center for Real Estate & Urban Policy, 2009). It is also not uncommon for many Asian Pacific American families to double or triple up in a housing situation. According to the NYU Furman Center for Real Estate & Urban Policy, Asian Pacific Americans have the highest rate of overcrowding housing among all racial/ethnic groups in the city. 6.1% for APAs versus 4.7% for the citywide median.

Access to open public spaces plays an even more critical role for individuals and families to create opportunities for active living and community building. Unfortunately, overcrowded neighborhoods are also neighborhoods that have fewer resources for health promotion such as the creation, rehabilitation, and maintenance of parks, bike paths, and recreation centers. Children and youth living in communities with parks, playgrounds, trails and recreation programs tend to be more physically active than those living in neighborhoods with fewer recreation facilities. Recent studies also showed that teens were more active when parks were lighted and had walking paths.

Sidewalks, lighting, bike trails, street trees, and compact development are all elements of the built environment that can increase the chance that people will be more active. Despite improvements in recent years of the built environment in NYC, challenges may still face the Asian Pacific American community in accessing these open public spaces. Many APAs are often not engaged in the community development planning process because of lack of outreach, language barriers, time and availability, among other things.

RESULTS

This report begins to explore the confluence of these issues and their impact on community health. The purpose of this report is to present key findings from a community needs assessment about healthy food access and physical activity for Asian Pacific Americans living in New York City.

The needs assessment was developed, conducted, and analyzed by APA HEALIN' (Asian Pacific Americans – Healthy Eating and Active Living in our Neighborhoods), a collaborative of 5 organizations addressing access to healthy foods and safe places to play, exercise, and gather for the Asian Pacific American community in New York City. The assessment was done in two phases: (1) Photovoice and (2) Surveys and Key Informant Interviews.

Photovoice

Photovoice is a process that uses photography as a strategy for social change. During the summer and fall of 2010, APA HEALIN' coordinated a photovoice project in which 28 community members were asked to explore how access to food, recreational spaces, and health care looks like in their community. Many of the participants were young people and seniors. This project took a peek into how community members' health is impacted by where they reside, go to school, work, and engage in recreational activities.

The themes that arose from the photovoice project include:

- Unhealthy Foods in Our Communities
- Cost, Convenience, Time
- Growing, Preparing, Sharing Foods
- Living in Urban Spaces
- Exercise & Places to Gather

The project revealed both the positive factors as well as the key challenges facing Asian Pacific American communities when it comes to addressing their access to healthy food and safe places to exercise and gather. Most notably, the photographs depict a community who has a long history and tie to the food industry and the challenges that come with living as an immigrant and resident in a large Metropolitan area.

Unhealthy Food in Our Communities

Asian Pacific American cuisine can range from very traditional foods from the homeland, to very Americanized reiterations of those dishes. Unfortunately, with more acculturation in the U.S. comes the adoption of unhealthy eating habits among Asian immigrant communities. The photographs taken by the participants depict the intersection between traditional Asian culture and mainstream America in the way that fatty foods, sugary beverages, and salty condiments are marketed, displayed, and consumed.



“This was a typical Chinese store found in Chinatown, with rows and rows of candy at the front counter. All of these candies are extremely high in sugar and preservatives which are really unhealthy. They can cause diabetes and high blood glucose. It is best to eat very little of this and would be better if they are not eaten at all.”

“I took this picture in the grocery store. Everybody loves sodas. All soda is bad. It has lots of chemicals, synthetic sweetness and it has no nutritional value, and it harms your body, kidney, obesity, heart disease, diabetes and you get cavities. Soda is (an) unhealthy drink.”

“What you see here are roasted pork strips which are very popular with Chinese families. This dish is a traditional Chinese cuisine but we never think about how unhealthy they are with all the honey, spices and salt in it. This dish is also very oily and this picture shows us how bad it is for our health. All the oil can cause heart disease and blockage of the arteries. If we don’t eat too much of this dish we can improve our health little by little along with a healthy lifestyle.”

Cost, Convenience, Time

Meal choices are often influenced by what is affordable, accessible, and how much time one has to prepare a meal. Poor economy or not, low-income Asian Pacific Americans like many other Americans must rely on frugal choices such as fast food establishments, street vendors, and restaurants which serve generous portions of inexpensive traditional foods. Unfortunately, such sources have limited or no healthy options, resulting in the intake of foods high in sodium and fat content.



“This is a long line of people waiting outside a Chinese fast food place- even when it’s way after lunchtime, around 3 PM. It’s not a surprise though. For \$3.75, you can get a ricebox with two toppings and a couple of vegetables if you can disregard the great amount of oil and fat in both meat and vegetables.”

“People who are busy nowadays, don’t bother cooking themselves food, but instead turns towards more unhealthy alternatives: instant noodles. Instant noodles contain massive amount(s) of sodium and are deep fried, containing large amounts of bad cholesterol. As this truck was parking in a local Chinatown street, I was surprised to see a brand new approach to instant noodles. This instant noodle truck said the following words: “Health is important.” in Chinese and English. I assume this brand of instant noodles is healthier than regular kinds of instant noodles. This healthy noodle truck delivers all kinds of goods throughout Chinatown daily, so it is part of our community. Here’s to our health!”

Growing, Preparing, Sharing Foods

The meaning of growing, preparing, and sharing of food in Asian Pacific American communities is multifaceted and varied. Several Asian Pacific American groups trace their roots as farmers and fisher folk and to this day these sectors continue to be the main livelihood for certain communities. Many also continue agrarian traditions through home and community gardens in their local neighborhoods.

PLANTING SEEDS OF CHANGE

Asian Pacific Americans are also food distributors and sellers of food such as green grocers, bodega owners, and fruit stand vendors. Community members captured images of various healthy foods available in their neighborhoods such as fish, vegetables, and fruits.

Additionally, the coming together around food is symbolic in many Asian Pacific American communities. Food is often associated with family, community spirit, and camaraderie. These gatherings were depicted with a great sense of pride, celebration, inclusion, and giving.



“Even in gatherings like this, we can witness how strong the Filipino spirit is among those who attended. Like other cultures, gatherings mean a lot to Filipinos. Not only is it a place to eat, but it is also a place to bond as one family after a long day's work.”

“A Nepalese family works in their backyard garden to plant these vegetables. They grow potatoes, tomatoes, pepper, spinach, cucumber, cauliflower and different other green vegetables every year. They believe that these fresh vegetables play great role in their healthy life.”

“The market is a fabulous place. There are all sorts of goods being sold here. This one in particular sells all kinds of fruits and you can see people are picking the ripest one.”

“This was a fish market in Chinatown with many customers buying fish. Fishes are very nutritional for us when cooked properly and without unhealthy ingredients like a lot of salt or oil. Fishes has omega-3s which helps our eyesight and brain function.”

Living in Urban Spaces

Within the urban landscape of New York City, access to public transit, safe parks, and pedestrian-friendly streets plays a crucial role in the health and well-being of not only the Asian Pacific American community, but all New Yorkers.



“The Manhattan Bridge is a suspension bridge connecting Chinatown to Brooklyn. During daytime people love to go biking, jogging, and walking across the bridge to save money on train fare and it also helps them to stay active. This way not only do people get to exercise but also keep track on their (travel) spending. Also at night it is beautiful to walk on the bridge and enjoy the scenery. The city should build more recreation like this one because every year there are accidents that occurred near the bridge due to too many cars.”

“As the NYC community becomes more aware of the necessity of transportation alternatives, bike racks and bike parking lots needs to be installed. This would not only ensure the safety of bikes, but would also encourage more people to use bikes as a transportation alternative. My friend recently had the tire of her bike deflated by someone in the street. This sparked me to want a green business revolving (around) bike parking lots. Where there are car parking lots, why not install a bike parking lot for profit and security of bikes?”

Exercise + Places to Gather

Recent improvements to city parks and recreational centers have enabled many Asian Pacific Americans to become more physically active. These spaces also provide them a venue to congregate with others in their neighborhoods. Activities are widespread from tai chi in the mornings, basketball and swimming in the afternoon, to strolls after a long day in order to unwind.

PLANTING SEEDS OF CHANGE

Community members also captured images of people at their work or places of worship that have integrated exercise as part of their daily or weekly routine. Despite strides both on a systems-wide approach and changes in individual behaviors, a number of challenges to living more active lives were also depicted such as a lack of free and low-cost recreational opportunities, safety issues, and access to more open spaces such as the waterfronts.



"This is the swimming pool at the Chinatown Y. I have been a member there for about 4 years. I go twice a week with my son to exercise. He is 16 years old and is on the swim team at his school. I taught him how to swim when he was 9 years old. Going to the gym keeps my body and mind healthy."

"The park at Briarwood is an expanse of usable space, with three full basketball courts, handball courts, and a giant empty blacktop where one could run. It would be an excellent place to exercise and play, if it weren't for its reputation for being dangerous in the later hours of the night."

"The weekly line dance of some of the Filipino parishioners of HCJ is an excellent way of making them fit and on-the-go. I felt what the group initiated this year could be an important milestone in helping the parishioners achieve the needed body exercise and at the same time raise funds for a cause. Dancing is a best form of exercise especially for all people from all walks of life. It involves various bodily movements, thus releasing unwanted pounds, unnecessary fats and bad cholesterols from the bodily systems."

"In Chinatown, there aren't much places for teenagers to hang out. The backyard of Middle School 131 is one of the common places where most teens hang out other than parks."

“Most of the Chinatown youth get their exercise in parks where they can run, swing, slide, and play ball...when the Hester Street playground opened up with their rope net, climbing wall, and tire swings, it’s not a surprise the Chinatown kids flocked to the new park. Meanwhile, older, more standard playgrounds and parks like the Eleanor Roosevelt Park remain desolate. I think that opening up more playgrounds, along with remodeling older parks that use the Hester Street Playground as a model will give Chinatown youth incentive to head out and try out a more active lifestyle.”

“This activity by the South Street Seaport sparked me to want a more open waterfront. I have been aware of current and past waterfront campaigns pushing for more open space. What I want is for the area located by the photo to be used as a canoe/boating place, a swim lesson place, or just any activity that would bring the Lower East Side community closer to the waterfront. There are so much potential for positive and profitable developments there that the city must take into consideration.”

Urban Gardening Survey & Key Informant Interviews

With this information, APA HEALIN’ partners began a series of discussions to take a closer look at the results of the photovoice and to find cross cutting ideas that impacted all the partner organizations and the community members they serve. Our discussions revealed the following cross cutting issues:

- There are strengths within the Chinese, Filipino, and Nepalese communities including agrarian histories that continue in the U.S. and culturally competent exercises such as traditional dance and tai chi.
- There is a sense of family togetherness and community cohesion that is inherent in social gatherings centered on food.
- There is a need for more open, public, community gathering spaces.
- There is a strong influence from the built and physical environment on a person’s ability to engage in healthy lifestyles.

Taken all of this, we prioritized the development of community gardens for Asian Pacific Americans as a strategy for (1) increasing access to healthy food, physical activity, and public open space, (2) providing opportunities for multigenerational collaboration and leadership development, (3) and using it as a tool for building upon the strengths and experiences of our communities.

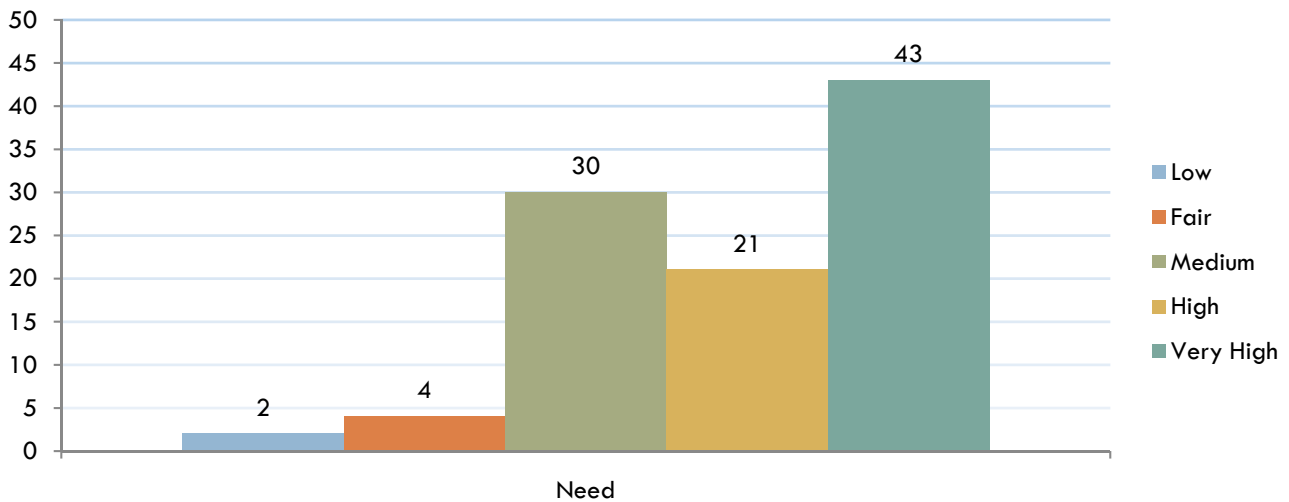
In the summer of 2011, APA HEALIN’ developed and administered 308 surveys and 6 key informant interviews to gain a better understanding about community members’ perspectives, attitudes, and beliefs about community gardens in their neighborhoods. The data collected from these surveys provides a rich base of resources that the Asian Pacific American community can use to build healthier lives through changing and planning community spaces to include urban gardening. The informational interviews with key stakeholders, such as parents, youth, seniors, faith-based and community-based organizations, supplemented the results of the survey and gave us a deeper understanding about the interest, feasibility, and challenges of urban community gardening.

What is the Need?

New York City has deep roots in the community garden movement. Since the 1970s, these gardens have served varied purposes for neighborhoods. For some, community gardens provide healthy food and educational opportunities to residents. For others, these gardens also offer residents a much needed refuge in a densely built neighborhood.

Sixty-four percent (64%) of survey respondents say that there is a high or very high need for urban community gardens in their neighborhoods.

Table 1. Need for Community Gardens in Their Neighborhood



Responses from our key informant interviews revealed that community gardens can serve multiple purposes and be a catalyst for change in their neighborhoods.

“(Because of a) lack of spaces in urban living quarters, a community space like an urban garden will fill that void.”

“I don’t find many green spaces in my neighborhood and I would like to see more”.

“Community gardens foster community bonding through the use of common shared plots”.

“Green initiatives are encouraged through community gardens. We gain a better sense of environmental consciousness”.

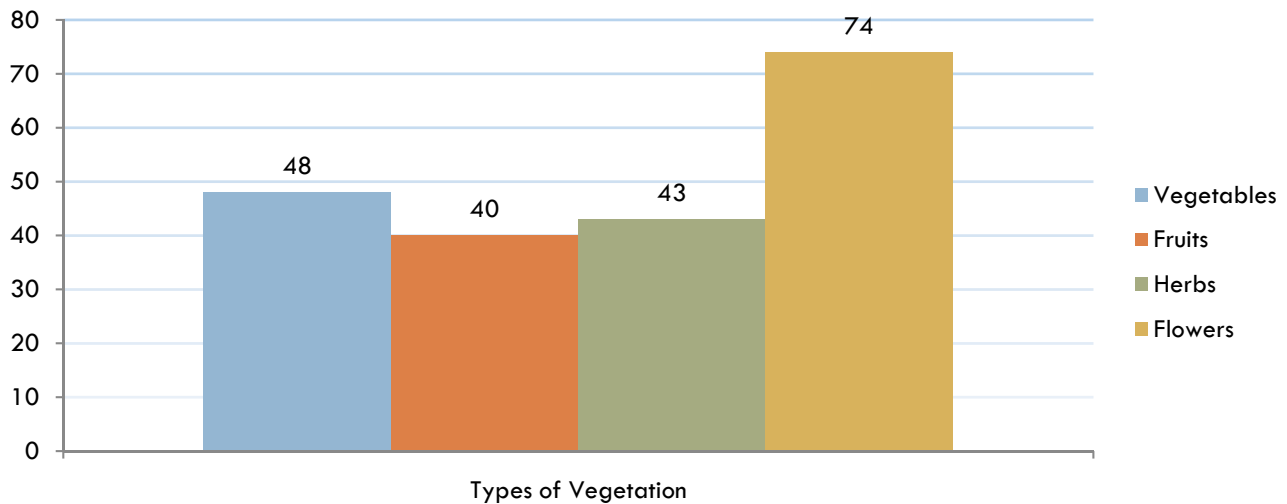
“Urban gardens allow us to creatively use space that might otherwise be laying waste or used for other less greener purposes”.

What should be grown?

The decision of what to grow in a garden is driven to a large degree on what the purpose will be of the community garden. Some view the garden as a source of food, while others believe a garden serves a more aesthetic purpose by helping to beautify their neighborhood.

The overwhelmingly majority of survey respondents (74%) believed that flowers should be grown in the garden. This was followed by 48% of respondents indicating vegetables, 43% herbs, and 40% fruits as other types of vegetation to grow.

Table 2. Types of Vegetation to be Grown in Community Gardens



The key informants shared the strong belief that flowers should be grown in community gardens. Many talked about the aesthetic appeal and how flowers will help beautify their neighborhoods.

“Colorful flowers give a mood of happiness to people”.

“I would grow flowers because they give a warm feeling for the neighborhood. Flowers welcome newcomers and shows that the environment is being cared for”.

“When the community garden is beautiful, it makes us proud of our neighborhood. It shows to others that we care and we are invested in our community”.

Others also spoke about the benefit of growing one’s own vegetables and fruits.

“I believe it is important for community gardens to grow vegetables and fruits because if grown organically these will benefit our health”.

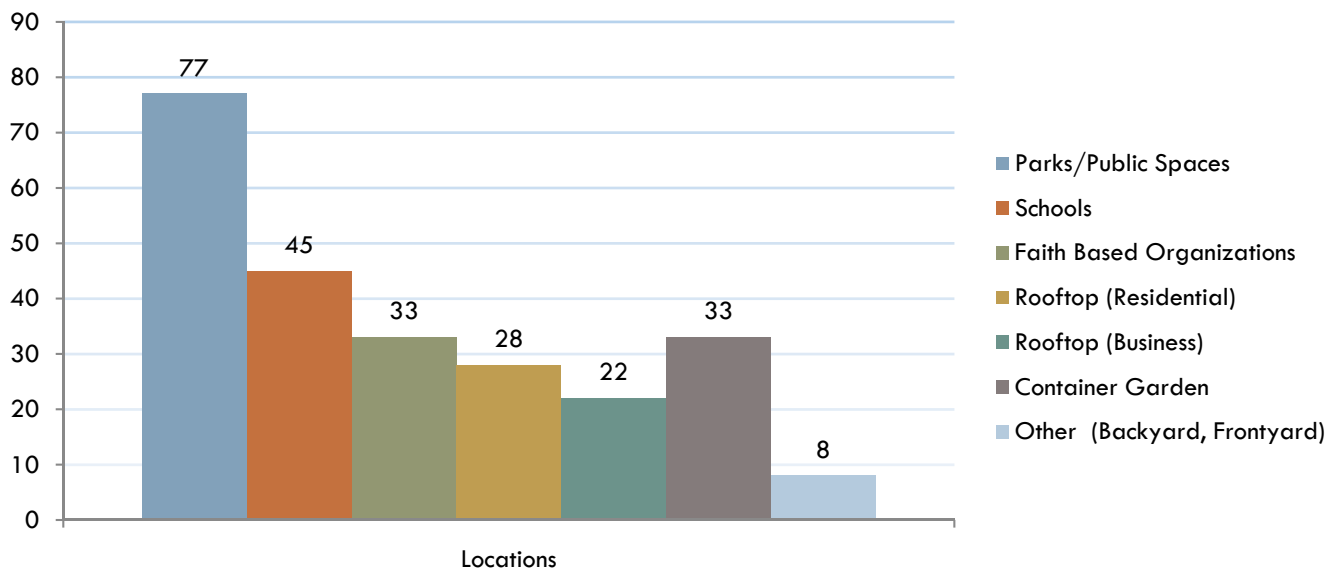
“Growing organic produce will be an incentive for members to take care of the garden”.

Where should it be located?

Like many metropolitan areas, New York City faces a tremendous challenge with the lack of available space to support community gardening efforts. However, many urban gardeners are developing innovative strategies to create gardens through the use of rooftops, vacant land, raised beds, hydroponics, and vertical gardens.

Seventy-seven (77%) percent of the survey respondents believe that urban community gardens should be based in parks and public spaces.

Table 3. Locations of Community Gardens



In addition, key informants indicated that another key issue for many residents interested in community gardens is having easy access to these spaces. They discussed how community gardens should be located in places where community members frequent and have ready access to.

“Community gardens should be located in public spaces like parks or libraries. A place where everyone in the community can easily access and where residents feel a connection to.”

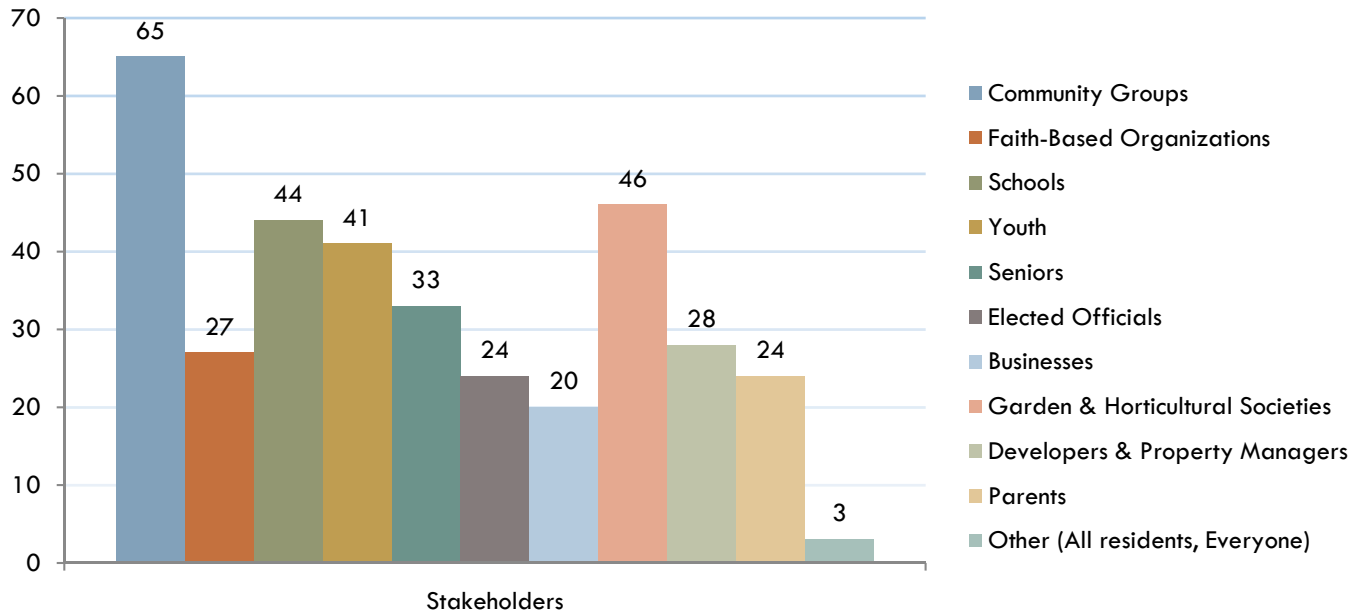
“I think they should be near parks, public spaces, and schools because they can be admired by people of the neighborhood.”

Who should get involved?

The viability and sustainability of community gardens requires multilevel engagement from a variety of stakeholders. These individuals can contribute their expertise on gardening, provide manpower, garner needed support and resources, and provide a physical space for the garden.

Sixty-five percent of the survey respondents believe that community groups are key stakeholders to involve in urban community gardening efforts. This was followed by 46% garden and horticultural societies, 44% schools, 41% youth, and 33% seniors.

Table 4. Stakeholders to Involve in Community Garden Efforts



Key informants’ responses were also in line with the survey respondents. They indicated community groups as the primary stakeholder group to involve in community gardening efforts.

“Community groups (can) come together in order to help and serve the community. I think that they would be the most important because it shows how united our community is as we work together to make the environment a much better place.”

“Community groups and churches are important. They can easily organize and mobilize people for an effort like this.”

“Community groups, schools, and garden and horticultural societies should be involved. I really believe they are needed to do this program and create a healthy community. If we can do this program, than it can definitely help our community.”

“Community groups will provide a good bridge and already have working relationships with the communities they work in. With the right expertise, implementing a program can be most effective. Block associations have also proven to be good to launch a similar program. Community based organizations that work with seniors also provides good support for this.”

“Developers and property managers (have) eliminated too much green space. They should give back these spaces to us - our community and residents.”

What are some potential challenges to community gardens?

We asked the key informants to identify potential challenges that they believe may impact the sustainability of a community garden. Interviewees discussed time, lack of space and accessibility of the space, need for clear roles and guidelines for community gardeners, training and education, as well as funding as critical issues to address.

“People are very busy these days and it may be hard to show them the value of participating in community garden efforts”.

“Lack of space may pose to be the biggest challenge. Hosting it in public spaces may not give a sense of ownership to some community members. Tending to the plot and the responsibilities and accountability may become challenges if terms are not clear from the start. Having time and the location of the community garden are also other important factors determining the success of a community garden”.

“I think that one major challenge would be money. We need money in order to organize a project as a community garden”.

“Education is needed for how to grow vegetables”.

What resources are needed to make community gardens successful?

Key informants discussed a range of resources to make community gardens successful. These included materials resources like seeds and tools, land and space, monetary resources, as well as training. One key informant also mentioned the need to engender a sense of ownership and the importance of stewardship in order to sustain community gardening efforts for the long haul.

“Resources that are needed are flower and plant seeds”.

“Funding and space are two most of the important aspects to launch the program. There also needs to be volunteers to maintain and keep the garden running”.

“Training is needed for community members. Many folks feel like they cannot be gardeners and have no sense of the importance of environmental issues. We need to teach others that nature is not a luxury, it’s necessary for our well-being. We need plants, vegetables, and trees.”

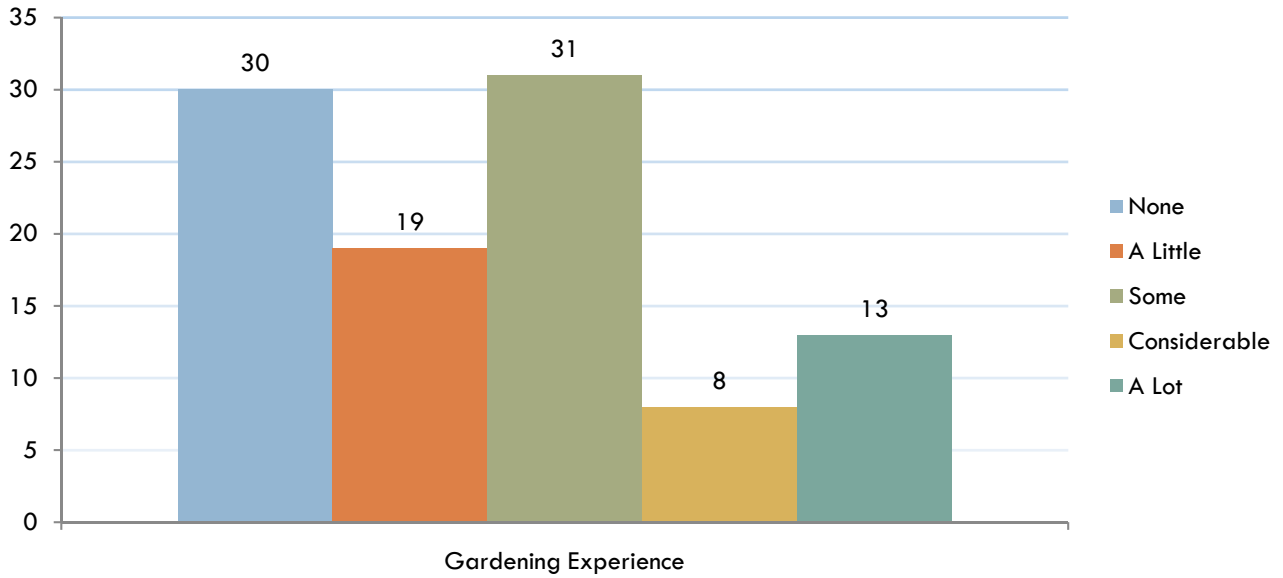
“Residents must feel a sense of ownership and value becoming stewards. If they feel invested and see the rewards, they will more likely want to take care of the garden, maintain it, and ensure its sustainability”.

What is your experience and interest?

The survey respondents and key informants had varying experience with gardening. Some indicated having experience growing vegetables and fruits in their backyards while others indicated having container gardens of herbs or flowers in their apartments. There were also several individuals that indicated having extensive experience growing food in their home countries.

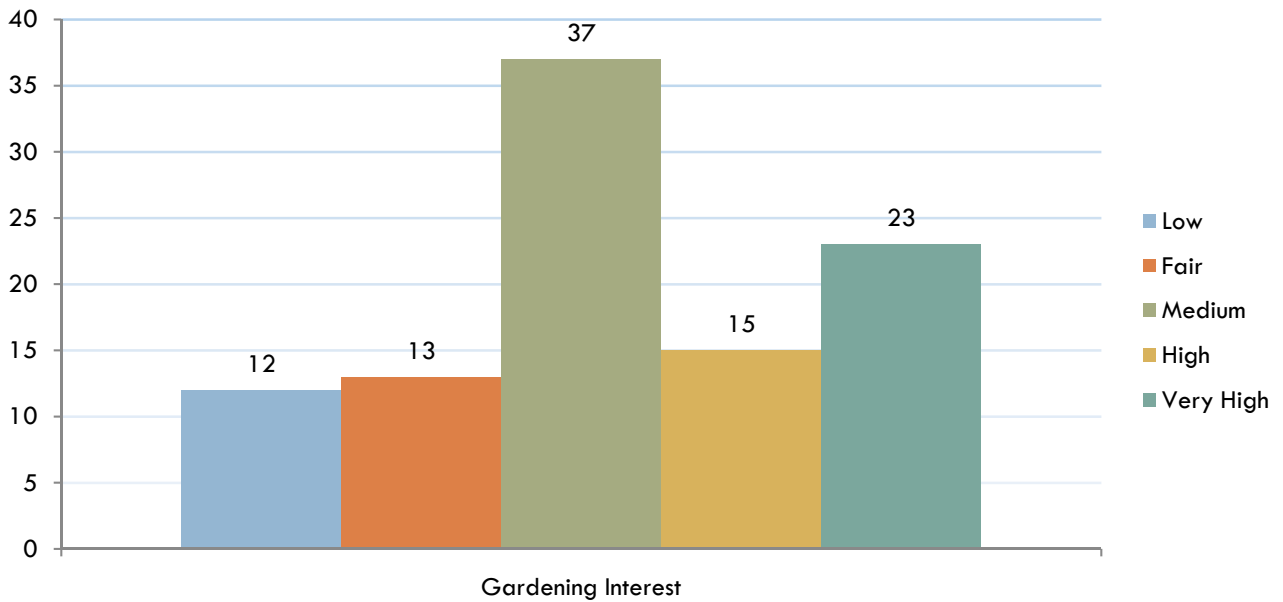
Fifty-four percent (54%) of the survey respondents have some to significant experience in gardening.

Table 5. Level of Gardening Experience



Despite having 49% of survey respondents indicating that they have none to little experience in gardening, 38% of them said they have a high or very high interest in getting involved in urban community gardening efforts.

Table 6. Level of Interest to Participate in Community Gardens



Key informants discussed their interests further and spoke about how community gardens can serve as a means of getting more physically active, creating a greater sense of community, or as a tool for getting Asian Pacific Americans more connected and participating in their neighborhoods.

“Community gardens are one way to organize the community. It enables residents to pay more attention to their neighborhoods. We have to recognize that while many of us are immigrants, our neighborhoods aren’t our temporary home. Many of us have lived here 10-15 years and have never felt a sense of belonging to our neighborhoods. I see community gardens as a way for immigrants to become more engaged in the places we live in. We can contribute and show we are part of the larger community and claim ownership of that”.

“Gardening is a great hobby. Gardening especially in a community space provides a cost effective recreation(al activity) and a shared community bond. It will also be wonderful to see the fruits of (our) labor every time the flower blooms or the trees and shrubs bear fruit”.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This report begins to explore the confluence of these issues and their impact on community health. The following policy and practice recommendations are offered to increase healthy food access and physical activity for Asian Pacific Americans living in New York City.

Policy Recommendations

Cultural Competency: Develop initiatives, funding opportunities, and training opportunities that support and integrate cultural competency into community gardening programs.

In order to fully engage diverse communities in community gardening efforts, special attention and steps should be taken to integrate agricultural practices and food preferences that are relevant to those participating in the program. Employing a cultural competent model to community gardening will also engender opportunities for cross cultural learning and introduction of plants and vegetables not typically found at a local grocery store or community gardens.

Example: Danny Woo International District Community Garden

In the late 1970s, activists and organizations led by Interlm CDA in Seattle, Washington negotiated with a local landowner and community leader Danny Woo to take his property on a sloping open space in the north side of Chinatown/International District. It was converted into a community garden (later named Danny Woo International District Community Garden) for the growing Asian Pacific Americans elders residing nearby. This enabled them to reconnect with the land and to plant foods they missed from their native countries like bok choy, bittermelon, daikon, and watercress. It also provided social connections, recreation and exercise for the aging immigrant community. The tradition continues today as hundreds of volunteers – from various races, ethnicities, economic situations, and across all ages – build the garden, till the soil, terrace the slope, plant seeds, and harvest the produce.

Stewardship: Develop initiatives, funding opportunities, and training opportunities through city agencies and departments for stewardship programs.

Stewardship programs have been used as a means to engage residents to care for and maintain trees and other vegetation in the communities they live in. These programs are often run by city-agencies that provide training, tools, permits, and other resources such as seeds, mulch, and plants. In a time of shrinking budgets and the desire for many municipalities to green their spaces, stewardship programs have been touted as a cost-effective way to care for and beautify the urban landscape. At the same time, these programs enable residents to become more civically invested in their communities, supports and enhances public land use, community control of and engagement in local green open spaces, as well as beautifies neighborhoods and enhances the value of neighborhood properties.

Example: San Francisco Public Works Department's Street Parks

Street Parks is a partnership between the San Francisco Department of Public Works, the San Francisco Parks Trust and the residents of San Francisco to develop and create community managed gardens on streets, sidewalks, medians, stairways, circles and triangles that are public space owned by the Department of Public Works. The program transforms vacant lots into gardens, trash and illegal dumping spots into greenery, and hillsides into parks.

Stewards locate a site that they are interested in planting/developing and maintaining for at-least 3 years. These stewards must identify a site that is within 1-3 blocks from their home. They are required to receive community input and garner support from their neighborhoods for the project. Since 2004, San Francisco has developed over 100 community gardens through the Street Parks program. One notable site is the Vistacion Valley Greenway located in the cities of Brisbane and Daly City, California. Both cities boast a large Asian Pacific American community residing in those areas. The Vistacion Valley Greenway's Green Rangers and Green Steward programs provide workshops, after-school and summer programs for children ages pre-school to high school. Many of whom come from newcomer communities.

Leadership Development: Develop initiatives, funding opportunities, and training opportunities for the promotion of community gardens as a model for leadership development programs.

Leadership Development programs provide a mechanism to engage individuals such as youth, seniors, parents, or immigrants to develop the knowledge and skills to help them become effective leaders. Many leadership development programs have used garden-based education as their model. Some of these programs have a direct vision to use gardening to educate and mobilize communities in issues pertaining to horticulture, nutrition, and active lifestyles. There are also other programs that use gardening as a means to teach its participants about civic engagement, reconnect them with their culture and agrarian histories, promote intergenerational and multicultural connections and community building, as well as empower its participants to take on leadership positions in their schools, jobs, places of worship, and larger community.

Example: The Roots Project at Kokua Kalihi Valley Community Health Center

The Roots Project is a community garden to table initiative that aims to strengthen its local community in Kalihi Valley, Hawai'i through growing, preparing and sharing of food. It is grounded on the Hawaiian tradition and practices of land stewardship and collective work. The Roots Project also includes community production, cooking workshops, and shared meals with community members. The

Roots Project goals are guided by a commitment to food solutions that not only enhance long-term food security, but also contribute to strengthening the economic, cultural, and social fabric of the Kalihi community.

The project engages multiple age groups such as youth, students, elders, and the larger community living in the Kalihi Valley. It also engages multiple partners from government, education, and community organizations to strengthen interconnectedness and shared responsibility in food system development.

Practice Recommendations

In addition to the policy recommendations, we highlight best practices that community garden initiatives can consider incorporating in order to increase participation of Asian Pacific Americans in healthy food and active living initiatives.

Site Assessment: Implement site assessments and other tools to determine potential spaces for community gardens. Special consideration should be given to spaces that are accessible to community members such as those that are close to neighborhood establishments that they frequent, near public transportation, or on sites where they feel safe and welcomed.

Design and Aesthetics: Integrate designers and landscape architects to help with space planning and design. In order to increase the APA voice in community gardening initiatives, community members can also participate in charettes, an intensive planning session where community members, designers and others collaborate on a vision for development.

Traditional Methods/Knowledge: Incorporate discussions and workshops on the agricultural and food history of Asian Pacific Americans as community gardeners, farmers, food producers and food distributors. By doing so, it honors the rich history and experience that APAs have in food and engenders trust among community members.

Multisectoral: Identify and outreach to key potential partners, including Asian Pacific American local businesses and community based organizations as well as garden and horticultural societies, architects, landscape designers, schools, and churches among others, to participate in community gardening efforts.

Sustainability: Develop strategies to fundraise and sustain community gardens.

Local Landscape: Provide training opportunities to learn about the urban ecosystem of New York City, the history of agriculture in New York State, and the history of community gardens in New York City. Additionally, workshops can also include gardening/farming basics such as irrigation, crops management, pest/disease identification and management, carpentry and building. Workshops on various urban farming techniques for growing and sustaining community gardens can include green houses, container gardens, vertical gardens, and hydroponics. Additionally, workshops can also explore other agricultural practices used by Asian Pacific Americans in their home countries that might be transferable to the ecosystem in New York City.

CLOSING

When addressing solutions to prevent and reduce the development of chronic conditions, we must look to tackling the leading risk factors. The creation of healthy food access and active living policies and initiatives is one approach. While there remains complexities facing public health advocates in developing sound initiatives, programs, and policies to meet Asian Pacific Americans' specific needs and challenges in a culturally competent manner, community gardens provide a tremendous opportunity to engage Asian Pacific Americans in living healthier lifestyles. These gardens can (1) increase access to healthy food, physical activity, and public open space, (2) provide opportunities for multigenerational collaboration and leadership development, (3) and serve as a tool for building upon the strengths and experiences of our communities.

REFERENCES

- American Diabetes Association. Economic costs of diabetes in the U.S. in 2007. *Diabetes Care*. 2008. 31(3): 1-20.
- Grandetti, A., et al., Metabolic Syndrome in a Multiethnic Population in Rural Hawaii. *Ethnicity and Disease*, 2005. 15(2): 233-237.
- Joslin Diabetes Center, Asian American Diabetes Initiative. Diabetes in Asians & Asian Americans. Available at: <http://aadi.joslin.org/content/asian/why-are-asians-higher-risk-diabetes>. Accessed November 1, 2011.
- National Center for Health Statistics. *Health, United States, 2010: With Special Feature on Death and Dying*. Hyattsville, MD. 2011
- NYU Furman Center for Real Estate & Urban Policy. 2009. State of the city's housing & neighborhoods (<http://furmancenter.org/research/sonychan/2009-report>).
- Olshansky, S.J. et al. A Potential Decline in Life Expectancy in the United States in the 21st Century. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 2005. 352: 1138-1145.
- Smith, S.C., Jr., et al., Discovering the Full Spectrum of Cardiovascular Disease: Minority Health Summit 2003: Report of the Obesity, Metabolic Syndrome, and Hypertension Writing Group. *Circulation*, 2005. 111 (10): 34-39.
- South Asian Heart Center. *CAD Statistics*. Available at: <http://www.southasianheartcenter.org/faqs/faqs.html>. Accessed November 1, 2011.
- Stavig, G.R., A. Igra, and A.R. Leonard, Hypertension among Asians and Pacific Islanders in California. *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 1984. 119(5): 677-691.
- Taira, D.A., et al., Antihypertensive Adherence and Drug Class among Asian Pacific Americans. *Ethnicity and Health*, 2007. 12(3): 265-281.