



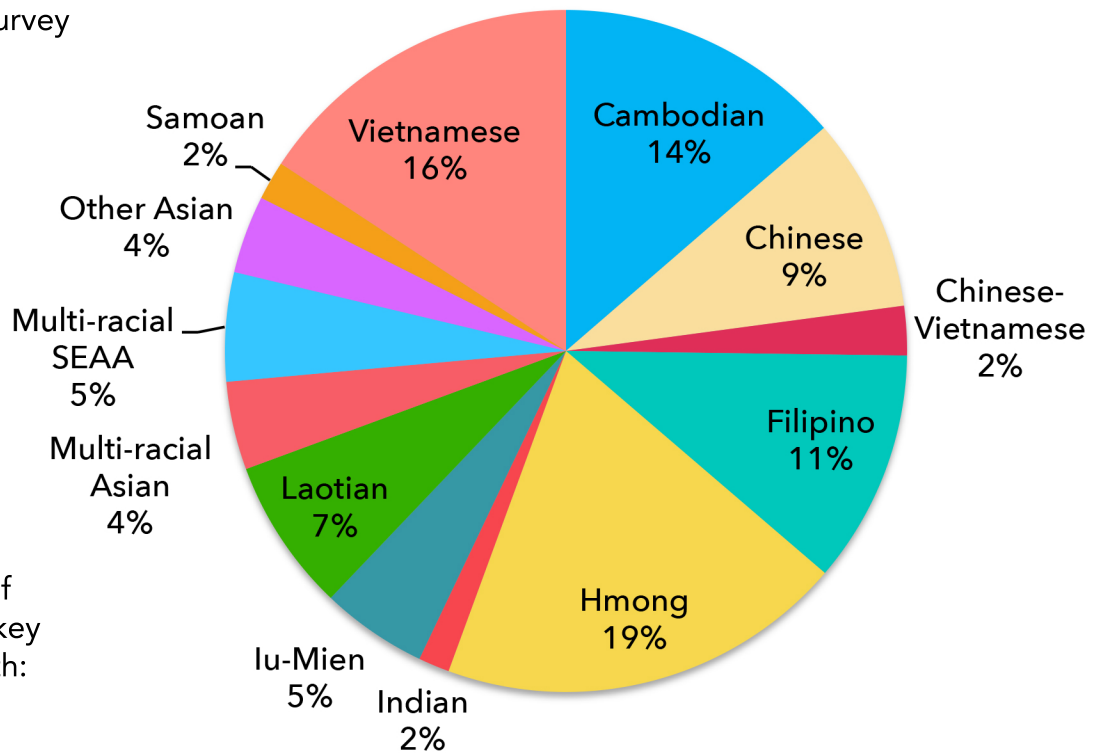
# CALIFORNIA ASIAN AMERICAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER YOUTH REPORT

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities are characterized by incredible diversity, with over 50 different ethnicities and more than 100 different spoken languages. When all the distinct communities within this category are lumped together under broad categories like “Asian/Pacific Islander,” the aggregated data masks the vast disparities that exist among different communities. Pacific Islander groups like Tongans and Southeast Asian American (SEAA) communities like Hmong and Iu-Mien face particularly severe challenges, including low education attainment rates, and high rates of poverty and incarceration. Yet, these disparities are not visible when data is aggregated and reported as one monolithic category.

The Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC) and the Asian American and Pacific Islander Boys and Men of Color Coalition Helping Achieve Racial and Gender Equity (CHARGE) launched the California Asian American and Pacific Islander (CA AAPI) Youth Assessment to illuminate the stark disparities that diverse AAPI communities face. Building on the success of a 2014 AAPI youth data disaggregation survey in Oakland, California, SEARAC and CHARGE collected 813 survey responses from AAPI youth and young adults, ages 12-30, throughout California and conducted five focus groups with AAPI youth and young adults in Fresno, Long Beach, San Jose, Santa Ana, and Stockton.

The report disaggregates survey responses into 13 ethnic subcategories, reflected in the following chart:



The report elevates the successes, challenges, and disparities faced by youth of these ethnic groups in five key social determinants of health:

- Economic Security
- School Culture and Climate
- Mental Health
- Neighborhood Culture and Climate
- Interaction with the Criminal Justice System

*Percentage breakdown based on 813 survey responses.*

## KEY FINDINGS

The survey data and focus groups revealed distinct disparities and some striking similarities among AAPI youth respondents. Five major findings emerged:

### **1. Economic Security - Socioeconomic challenges are significant for SEAA and Pacific Islander communities.**

Over 90% of Samoan, Cambodian, Hmong, and Laotian respondents reported their family is worried about having enough money to pay their bills. In addition, over 40% of Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, and Lu-Mien youth indicated that their parents have no to low English fluency. SEAA youth explained that limited English fluency is a prime factor in preventing their parents from obtaining higher paying jobs.

### **2. School Culture and Climate - Across the board, AAPI youth experience similarly high rates of bullying.**

One in two AAPI respondents reported having been bullied in school. Focus group participants attributed high rates of verbal and physical bullying to stereotypes about their ethnic identities, including that Asian Americans are passive, introverted, and smart. Asian American men feel particularly targeted due to stereotypes about their masculinity.

### **3. Mental Health - Historical and intergenerational trauma have a direct impact on SEAA youth.**

More than one in three Chinese-Vietnamese, Laotian, Vietnamese, and Cambodian respondents said they did not have positive adult allies at home to support or mentor them when they are having problems. SEAA youth described how the unaddressed traumas their parents experienced during war and refugee resettlement continue to haunt them, and directly complicate their parent-child relationships. This intergenerational trauma places significant mental and emotional stress on SEAA youth who never even lived through the refugee experience themselves.

### **4. Neighborhood Culture and Climate - AAPI communities in Oakland and Stockton live in unsafe and unaffordable neighborhoods.**

In aggregate, one in four respondents reported feeling unsafe in their neighborhoods. Disaggregated city data shows that these rates were higher for Oakland and Stockton where 38% of Oakland respondents and 77% of Stockton respondents feel unsafe in their neighborhoods. Additionally, a majority of Oakland and Stockton respondents also reported that their families worry about affording to stay in the areas where they live, despite already living in areas where they felt unsafe. While some young men in the focus groups described being desensitized to violence in their neighborhoods, others explained how feeling unsafe impacted their mental and emotional health, noting feelings of paranoia for their safety and the safety of their family.

### **5. Interaction with the Criminal Justice System - AAPI young men are more likely to feel pressure to join gangs than AAPI young women.**

Male respondents were four times more likely than female respondents to have thought about joining a gang. While none of the focus group participants said they were involved in gangs, some SEAA participants explained their peers joined gangs as a way to make money, cope with feelings of isolation or lack of family support, seek protection from bullying, or to protect themselves in their unsafe neighborhoods.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The CA AAPI Youth Assessment responses and focus group discussions demonstrate that more research and expanded data are necessary to deepen our understanding of the challenges that AAPI youth and young adults face, as well as their unique assets and strengths, in order to adequately address health, education, and socio-economic disparities. SEARAC and CHARGE make the following recommendations to California policy makers and stakeholders as they shape policies and programs to appropriately serve all California youth:

### 1. Data Disaggregation

While our survey indicates areas of high need, state-level data systems across institutions must do a deeper dive through large-scale disaggregated data collection and analysis to reveal the challenges and successes of each AAPI community. Data disaggregation across education, health, criminal justice, and social service institutions is necessary to reveal the successes and challenges our communities face in different aspects of their lives, including the challenges they face at home.

### 2. Increasing Culturally Informed K-12 Institutions and Implementing Ethnic Studies Curriculums

The dehumanizing experience of bullying for AAPI youth is a direct result of cultural invisibility. When staff, faculty, and students at California's K-12 institutions are not taught about diverse AAPI communities and histories, racist stereotypes and assumptions go unchallenged and unaddressed. Education institutions must train staff and faculty on the diversity of AAPI histories, communities, needs, and challenges, as well as increase safe and appropriate spaces for AAPI student and parent engagement. In addition, K-12 institutions must adopt and implement a strong Ethnic Studies curriculum as a powerful means to teach community histories and promote a sense of belonging for all youth. Without a curriculum to address our students' diverse histories and identities, our institutions continue a cycle of injustice against SEAA and other AAPI communities that have lasting and intergenerational effects.

### 3. Cultural Competency and Relevancy

Education and mental health resources must be culturally competent and relevant to serve all AAPI communities, especially underserved SEAA and PI communities. The oldest and most vulnerable community members require care that is culturally relevant and in their own language. Treating unaddressed trauma among older generations can create a much-needed healing process, and prevent younger generations from suffering the effects of intergenerational trauma.

### 4. Invest in Social Safety Nets

Youth today experience multiple challenges from neighborhood safety to economic insecurity that impact not just them but also their families. To meet these multiple needs, California needs to make larger investments to strengthen its social safety net programs to improve neighborhood safety, increase access to sustainable jobs, and increase support services to immigrant and refugee communities.

## CA AAPI YOUTH EQUITY

The 813 survey responses and five focus groups conducted throughout California shape a California AAPI youth equity agenda. AAPI youth in California face real challenges in economic, educational, mental health, and criminal justice systems that threaten the opportunity to live and lead a quality and just life. CHARGE urges local and statewide stakeholders and policy makers to champion policies that will reveal the true diverse AAPI experiences and address the needs and challenges of all AAPI communities.



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## CHARGE

In 2014, SEARAC formed the Southeast Asian American Young Men's (SEAAYM) Collaborative, in partnership with Khmer Girls in Action (KGA), 1Love Movement – San Diego, Stone Soup Fresno, and the Vietnamese Youth Development Center (VYDC) to empower young men to actively engage in creating safe, healthy, and thriving communities. The collaborative has since expanded from a Southeast Asian American collaborative to a broader Asian American and Pacific Islander coalition, now called the Asian American and Pacific Islander Boys and Men of Color Coalition Helping Achieve Racial and Gender Equity (CHARGE). The following CHARGE coalition members work collectively to grow an AAPI youth and community-driven movement to impact policy change, uplift accurate AAPI youth narratives, and build youth advocacy capacity to ensure AAPI communities are faithfully represented:

- Asian Prisoner Support Committee (APSC)
- AYPAL: Building API Community Power
- East Bay Asian Youth Center (EBAYC)
- Educated Men with Meaningful Messages (EM3)
- Empowering Pacific Islander Communities (EPIC)
- Fathers and Families of San Joaquin (FFSJ)
- Filipino Advocates for Justice (FAJ)
- Fresno Interdenominational Refugee Ministries (FIRM)
- Khmer Girls in Action (KGA)
- Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)
- Vietnamese Youth Development Center (VYDC)

## FUNDERS

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## SPECIAL THANKS

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Most importantly, we thank all the AAPI youth and young adult respondents and focus group participants.

Your voice matters!