

Report finds troubling health trends in California's Asian, Pacific communities

April 23 2009, By Minne Ho

(PhysOrg.com) -- A new report by UCLA researchers reveals higher-than-average rates of cancer, childhood obesity and diabetes, and an alarmingly high population of the uninsured, among California's Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities.

Co-authored by Paul Ong, UCLA professor of public policy, social welfare and Asian American studies, and Ninez Ponce, UCLA professor of [health](#) services, "The State of Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Health in California Report" is the first to use statewide health data on this population broken down by ethnic subgroups, providing a comprehensive public health snapshot of one of the fastest growing populations in the United States.

Ong and Ponce led the research for the University of California Asian American and Pacific Islander Policy Multi-Campus Research Program. The report was commissioned and released by the California Asian Pacific Islander Joint Legislative Caucus.

Collectively, California's Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) population numbers more than 5 million and accounts for more than 14 percent of the state's total population.

"This data is essential to creating policies and programs that effectively address health disparities in the Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities," said California Assemblyman Mike Eng (D-El Monte), who led the effort to create the report. "By providing

disaggregated data, it provides necessary insight for policymakers and health care providers to design and implement programs that will improve the health of this vital population."

Among the report's findings:

Cancer

AANHPIs are the only racial group in California for whom cancer is the leading cause of death, with higher rates among Asian Americans (27.7 percent) and Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders (25.4 percent) than whites (23.3 percent), African Americans (22.4 percent), Latinos (20.4 percent) and American Indians/Alaska Natives (20.3 percent). In addition:

- Liver cancer disproportionately strikes AANHPIs at such high rates that the cancer burden levied on this population is unmatched by other racial/ethnic health disparities in the U.S.
- Asian American women have nearly double the rate of noncompliance with cervical cancer screening guidelines compared with the overall state average, with the lowest rates of compliance among Koreans, Vietnamese, Chinese and Other Asians ("others" includes non-Vietnamese Southeast Asians and those identified as multiracial Asians).
- Asian American men also have higher rates of noncompliance with prostate cancer screening guidelines, with Vietnamese and Koreans posting the lowest screening rates of all ethnic groups and Chinese, Filipinos and Other Asians screening at rates lower than the state average.

Tuberculosis and Hepatitis

AANHPIs account for the largest proportion of tuberculosis and chronic hepatitis B cases in California, with the majority of cases among the

foreign-born population.

Obesity

There is an alarming epidemic of overweight and obese children in California's Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities. In particular, more than half (54 percent) of all Samoan children — the largest percentage in the state — have body mass indexes that are not within the state-defined "healthy fitness zone." Among adults, 46 percent of Filipinos and 70 percent of Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders are overweight or obese, compared with the state average of 34 percent.

Diabetes

Compared with other racial and ethnic groups, Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders have some of the highest rates of diabetes; Filipinos, Vietnamese and South Asians also have diabetes rates higher than the state average, despite having a generally younger population.

Smoking

Among adult Filipino males, 25 percent are current smokers, compared with the state average of 19 percent for adult males.

Health Insurance

Koreans have the highest uninsured rate (33 percent) of any racial or ethnic group in the state, far outpacing the state average of 15 percent.

Mental Distress

Vietnamese and Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders experience frequent mental distress at higher rates than other AANHPI groups; Vietnamese represent the highest proportion of insured Californians who lack mental health coverage.

Provided by University of California Los Angeles ([news](#) : [web](#))

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