

## THE RECOVERY AND LOW-INCOME AAPI COMMUNITIES

# RESILIENT AAPI COMMUNITIES IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

## HOW AAPI COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS ARE RESPONDING TO THE PANDEMIC

### COVID-19 AND AAPI COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) has dramatically changed the economic and social landscape of our nation. COVID-19 has infected well over 25 million Americans, with over half a million lives lost. Millions of people have lost their jobs. People's mental and physical health has been taxed as everybody tries to adjust to our current conditions. And—as in so many crises—people who were already vulnerable have been hit hardest. It is well documented that COVID-19 has had disproportionate impact on seniors, communities of color, low-wage workers, persons with disabilities, persons who are marginally housed, immigrants, women, LGBTQ persons—with increasing levels of impact on people who live at the intersections of multiple categories.

Nonprofit community-based organizations (CBOs) that serve vulnerable populations have been doing heroic work—in providing food and emergency services, in keeping people housed and engaged, in doing everything that they can to keep their communities afloat. Since the start of the pandemic, National CAPACD member and sub-grantee organizations have raised and distributed over \$18 million dollars in emergency cash assistance to more than 8,000 families in their communities. And, while they have been doing this heroic work, they have been stretched to near breaking points, with funding from state and local governments becoming increasingly scarce in this difficult economy.

National CAPACD is a coalition of 100 CBOs working in low-income Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities. Through our advocacy, programmatic support, and coordination, we help local organizations to better engage and serve their communities. From our work with our CBO members, we have seen the deep, devastating impact of COVID-19 on our communities. Our CBO members report that, even before local shelter in place orders were declared, AAPI-owned small businesses in their communities had seen substantial drops in revenues, with customers driven away by xenophobic and racist fears that an individual might be more likely to catch the virus from a person of Asian descent. Likewise, reports of hate crimes against AAPIs have gone up as national leaders stoked fears of the “China Virus.” And for low-income AAPI families and individuals—as with other communities at the intersecting categories of class and race—the pandemic has meant a disproportionately increased risk of loss of jobs, loss of housing, and loss of life.

Our analysis of the geographic distribution of COVID-19 shows that low-income and vulnerable AAPI communities continue to be at risk<sup>1</sup>. In the 30 Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) with the most confirmed COVID-19 cases on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021, there are over 1.2 million AAPIs living in poverty. This represents approximately 60% of all AAPIs in poverty in the US. In comparison, approximately 40% of the overall, general poverty population lives in the 30 MSAs with the most COVID-19 cases. That is, AAPIs in poverty are disproportionately concentrated in COVID-19 hot zones. Similarly, other vulnerable AAPI populations in the 30 MSAs with the most COVID-19 cases include over 1.6 million AAPI seniors and over 3.6 million Limited English Proficient (LEP) AAPIs.

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## PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

At National CAPACD, as the scope and scale of the pandemic and its impact on our communities have become more apparent, we understood that the crisis urgently required a deeper level of coordination and support than our business as usual. And, at the same time, in reaching out to our members, we have observed the resilience and creativity of our member organizations in how they have risen to the challenge of mobilizing, serving, and protecting their communities in many inspiring and innovative ways.

In order to learn from our members about how they are better serving their communities and to better inform our own response to the pandemic in terms of our policy advocacy and programmatic support, we surveyed our members three times (in March, July, and December 2020) and held a number of virtual focus groups and an online “town hall” meeting. Over 60 CBOs participated in this process, with the majority providing multiple touch points over time, allowing us to have a sense of how the on-the-ground response to the pandemic has evolved.

Resulting from our engagement with our members, this document is part of a series of three briefs, each organized around our members’ pandemic responses within a specific set of issues. In this series of briefs, we document the pandemic’s impact and our members’ on-the-ground response for the following issues:

- Housing,
- Senior Services and Language Access,
- AAPI Community Needs for the Recovery.

These briefs serve the purpose to:

- Document and lift up the innovation and best practices of our member organizations;
- Call attention to the ongoing needs (and how these needs have changed as the pandemic has progressed) within low-income AAPI communities;
- Advocate for policies and programs that would better serve low-income AAPI communities during the pandemic and into the forthcoming recovery.

This brief addresses issues of AAPI community needs for the Recovery.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nationalcapacd.org/covid19-response/aapi-demographic-data-for-covid-19-hot-spots/>

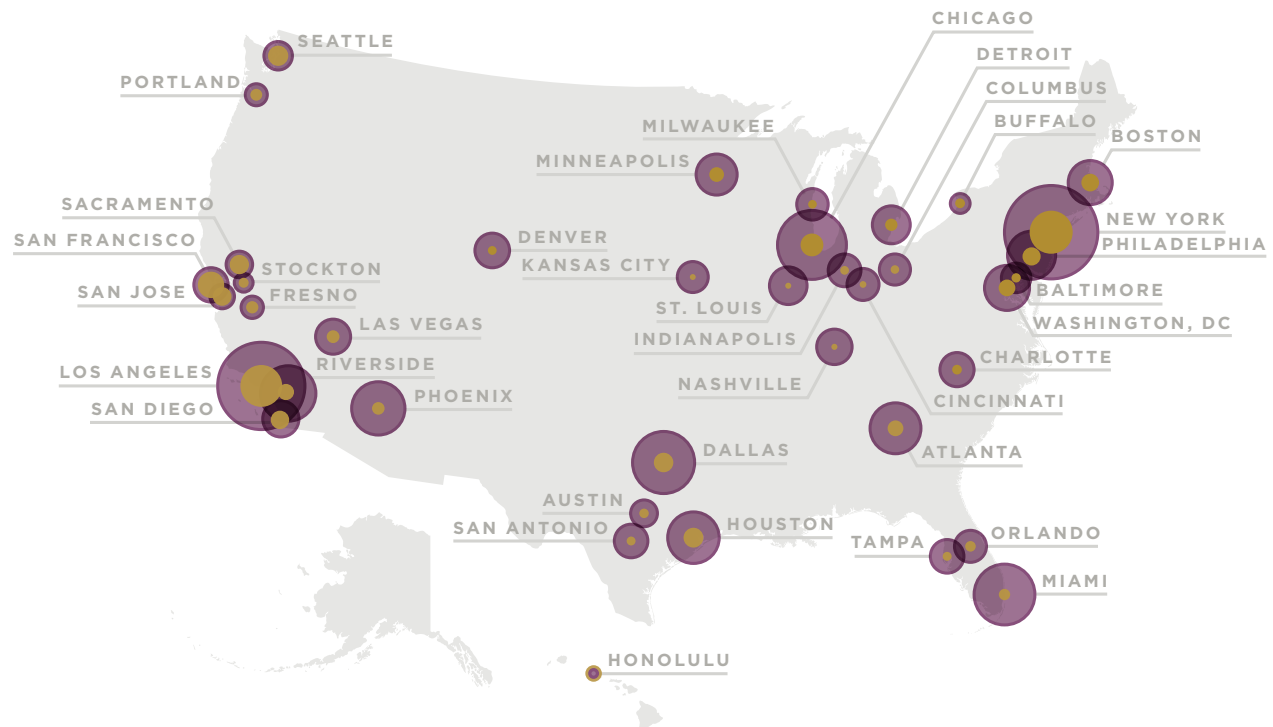
# AAPI POVERTY POPULATION IN TOP 30 CITIES WITH HIGHEST COVID CASES\*, BY MSA\*\*

● NUMBER OF CONFIRMED COVID CASES

● NUMBER OF AAPIS IN POVERTY

\*As of 1/22/21

\*\*MSA listed by major city



Listed alphabetically by major MSA city, with confirmed number of COVID cases followed by AAPIs in poverty

ATLANTA 433,945 / 33,735 // AUSTIN 120,233 / 12,143 // BALTIMORE 146,178 / 11,722 // BOSTON 324,963 / 42,544 // BUFFALO 65,474 / 13,025 // CHARLOTTE 195,351 / 12,797 // CHICAGO 796,104 / 70,683 // CINCINNATI 171,528 / 6,089 // COLUMBUS 162,200 / 9,906 // DALLAS 646,017 / 51,627 // DENVER 201,106 / 10,526 // DETROIT 240,574 / 20,552 // FRESNO 83,591 / 20,354 // HONOLULU 20,297 / 37,155 // HOUSTON 444,806 / 53,355 // INDIANAPOLIS 179,788 / 10,320 // KANSAS CITY 160,677 / 4,658 // LAS VEGAS 205,926 / 22,156 // LOS ANGELES 1,277,006 / 237,587 // MIAMI 619,616 / 17,507 // MILWAUKEE 165,755 / 10,171 // MINNEAPOLIS 282,311 / 29,349 // NASHVILLE 210,161 / 5,044 // NEW YORK 1,461,952 / 251,737 // ORLANDO 171,634 / 15,163 // PHILADELPHIA 387,631 / 44,697 // PHOENIX 475,969 / 21,497 // PORTLAND 81,190 / 19,094 // RIVERSIDE 514,550 / 35,515 // SACRAMENTO 117,907 / 50,398 // ST. LOUIS 236,974 / 4,890 // SAN ANTONIO 188,854 / 10,779 // SAN DIEGO 219,794 / 46,143 // SAN FRANCISCO 197,655 / 94,515 // SAN JOSE 100,978 / 47,088 // SEATTLE 135,966 / 55,614 // STOCKTON 59,096 / 13,560 // TAMPA 188,942 / 10,886 // WASHINGTON, DC 339,969 / 37,976

Sources:

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/coronavirus-us-cases.html>

US Census, 2018 1-year American Community Survey

## A API COMMUNITY RECOVERY RECOMMENDATIONS

As the impact of COVID-19 is likely to be deep and long-term, recovery efforts will need to be large-scale and comprehensive. As part of comprehensive, community-based recovery efforts, we advocate for the inclusion of the following principles:

- Economic recovery must include small businesses of color;
- Economic stimulus investments in low-income communities should promote neighborhood stability, not gentrification and displacement;
- Recovery must be planned and implemented on the local level, led by low-income community members and community-based organizations;
- Recovery efforts should not simply seek to replicate the pre-existing status quo, but to redress inequities in resources and power.

### THE VIEW FROM THE FIELD

**Small Businesses & Neighborhood Economies:** Our CBO members described that the small businesses at the core of their neighborhoods have been struggling during the pandemic, with many small businesses closing. Previous rounds of federal emergency assistance (e.g., the Paycheck Protection Program) have not adequately reached our neighborhoods and, in general, have under-served small business owners of color. To get back on their feet, our small businesses will need substantial, targeted re-investment (especially in the forms of grants and forgivable loans), as well as technical assistance and capacity building. CBOs will need resources to organize small businesses and promote neighborhood business districts.

**Neighborhood Stability & Anti-Displacement:** Prior to the pandemic, low-income AAPI communities were at risk of gentrification and displacement due to rapidly rising rents and luxury-oriented market development. Our members fear that, after the pandemic, the hot real estate market dynamics will return and the displacement of low-income community residents and small businesses will accelerate. In the recovery from the Great Recession, for example, foreclosed properties were snapped up by corporate investors and market-rate developers, contributing to a wave of gentrification. To prevent this from happening again, all publicly subsidized recovery efforts should include safeguards and policies (e.g., inclusive requirements for the development of affordable housing) that prevent gentrification and displacement.

**CBOs as Leaders of the Recovery:** To assure that recovery efforts benefit low-income communities and do not promote displacement, recovery initiatives should be planned and implemented by community members and community-based organizations. Our members are already deeply engaged

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## COMMUNITY STORY

Ms. Yang comes from a family of livestock keepers. Her parents were poultry farmers, and in an effort to keep her family tradition alive, Ms. Yang took over the poultry business after her parents passed away. She runs her business out of Hmong Town Marketplace in St. Paul, MN.

Poultry is a valuable cultural and spiritual asset for Ms. Yang and members of her Hmong community, especially seniors. Chickens are often sought after for religious practices throughout the year. Demand is particularly high during the New Year's harvest celebration, which occurs from October through December.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted Ms. Yang in more ways than one. Due to state and local restrictions and fear of contracting COVID-19, many of Ms. Yang's customers are now reluctant to come to the Marketplace to purchase chickens. Additionally, restrictions on social gatherings mean that religious practices are no longer allowed. A large part of her business comes from supplying chickens for these ceremonies. Consequently, her business has suffered a 50% decline during the pandemic.

Ms. Yang applied for an emergency small business grant from Hmong American Partnership (HAP) to support her business. A HAP business counselor helped Ms. Yang collect application documents and answered her questions. The business counselor conducted wellness checks over the phone and in person while Ms. Yang was waiting for the grant. Ms. Yang received her grant in December 2020, which would normally be her busiest season. The grant alleviated a lot of stress for Ms. Yang, but it has not provided enough relief to cover all of her losses. Like many other AAPI small business owners, Ms. Yang continues to struggle to find resources for her family's business during the pandemic.



in such efforts. They simply need the funding to expand the scope and scale of their current activities, as well as a seat at the decision-making table that recognizes their essential role and valuable experiences. To assure that the recovery from the pandemic actually serves low-income community members, CBOs need:

- Funding for ongoing organizing and community-led planning post-pandemic;
- Multi-year operating support for CBOs to lead locally-based pandemic recovery;
- Funding for the physical infrastructure for healthy, thriving communities (e.g., funding for the development of community-owned, community-controlled facilities such as clinics, community centers, recreation centers, cultural and arts spaces, senior centers, childcare centers, etc.);
- Increased additional resources for community-based safety net services and low-income community advocacy.

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**The Recovery as Transformative Systems Change:**

COVID-19 has exposed and exacerbated gaps in our society. The virus, because of pre-existing inequities, has disproportionately impacted the most vulnerable. Recovery from the pandemic, therefore, should seek to close these longstanding, historic gaps and to elevate low-income communities such that all people are healthy and thriving. To do so, our members expressed support for broader policy transformations such as universal basic income, universal health care, and comprehensive immigration reform. At a local level, our members support re-envisioning community safety – shifting resources from a model based upon policing and punishment to models of community support and empowerment that are proactive and preventative. These levels of social and systems change will require deep engagement and sustained community empowerment and advocacy efforts, including centering the role of grassroots community institutions as social change agents and the commitment of philanthropy to support such a vision.

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For more information about the work of National CAPACD and our member organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic, please contact [info@nationalcapacd.org](mailto:info@nationalcapacd.org).

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