



**Asian American Federation  
of New York**

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**ELDERLY ASIAN AMERICAN NEW YORKERS FACE HIGHER LEVELS  
OF POVERTY AND DEPRESSION, ASIAN AMERICAN FEDERATION REPORTS**

***Nonprofit Group Calls on Policy-Makers and Service Providers  
To Meet Urgent Needs of Fast-Growing, Diverse Population***

**NEW YORK** – Elderly Asian American New Yorkers experience poverty and depression at a higher rate than the general elderly population, and few programs and services are available to meet their needs, according to a landmark study released by the Asian American Federation of New York today.

*Asian American Elders in New York City: A Study of Health, Social Needs, Quality of Life and Quality of Care* is the first comprehensive examination of the demographics, living conditions, social supports and overall life satisfaction of elderly Asian Americans. The Federation, a public policy leadership organization, collaborated with the Brookdale Center on Aging at Hunter College to produce the study, which provides an in-depth portrait of older Asian Americans, identifies critical unmet needs, and recommends action steps to fill service gaps.

The study is based on a regionally representative survey, conducted by Harris Interactive, Inc., of more than 400 New York City residents age 65 and older and belonging to the city's six largest Asian American ethnic groups: Chinese, Korean, Indian, Filipino, Vietnamese and Japanese Americans.

"*Asian American Elders in New York City* delineates the social and economic forces behind some striking census figures," said Cao K. O, executive director of the Asian American Federation. "Census 2000 revealed that 24 percent of elderly Asian Americans in New York City, or nearly 1 in 4 of them, were living in poverty – in contrast with 18 percent of the general elderly population. What's more, the city's Asian American senior community grew by 86 percent during the last decade, reaching 60,000."

O continued, "Our research demonstrates that Asian American elders experience greater economic and social vulnerability, and have fewer options for available, culturally- and linguistically-appropriate health care and social services than the average older New Yorker. As a result, Asian American seniors endure disproportionate poverty and depression, with related health and social consequences."

Major findings of the study include the following:

- Family finances are a major concern for 40 percent of Asian American senior citizens, whose median household income ranges from \$6,000 to \$8,500. Medical bills are a particular worry.
- Depression is overrepresented among elderly Asian Americans, with 40 percent of them reporting symptoms of the condition – a higher incidence than for the general elderly population.
- Only 37 percent, or slightly more than one-third, of older Asian Americans receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and about half receive Social Security benefits.
- Only about half of elderly Asian Americans have health insurance through Medicare, in contrast with 90 percent of the elderly population at large. In addition, 41 percent of Asian American seniors receive Medicaid benefits, and 24 percent are covered by health maintenance organization (HMO) plans.

The study links depression, general mental health issues, and social difficulties among older Asian Americans with stress, inability to read English, a lack of private health insurance, and dependence on children. Almost all study participants immigrated to the United States in middle to late-middle age – a factor associated with limited English ability, low educational attainment, and little time to accrue Social Security benefits.

“Our seniors have spoken; it is now our turn to act,” O said. “We urge policy-makers, service providers and philanthropic decision-makers to place a high priority on expanding opportunities for elderly Asian American New Yorkers to lead happier, healthier lives. A key will be tailoring services to take into account specific cultural and language needs of the city’s various Asian American ethnic communities.”

The Federation called on city, state and federal officials, along with heads of community agencies and charitable-giving programs, to follow recommendations to:

- **Increase accessible and appropriate health care and social services.** Make services user-friendly for older Asian Americans, through such measures as outreach, education and language translation. Address the prevalence of depression among elderly Asian Americans by establishing culturally appropriate geriatric mental health clinics.
- **Integrate informal social support systems into program development and service delivery.** In so doing, nurture social networks, reinforce time-honored values, and recognize the impact of acculturation levels and generational gaps on family relationships and mental health.
- **Improve the cultural competence of programs serving older Asian Americans.** Offer culturally suitable programs to prepare elderly Asian American immigrants for citizenship and teach them English. Train and hire Asian American professionals to work with Asian American seniors. Devise culturally and linguistically sensitive ways to increase older Asian Americans' access to information on entitlements and legal and social services.
- **Change federal policies and take other action to upgrade economic conditions for elderly Asian Americans and their families.** Develop federal and state policies to improve retirement protections for older Asian American immigrants who do not qualify for Social Security. Revise federal welfare policy to make elderly immigrants eligible for Medicaid and other basic benefits. Make health insurance more accessible to Asian American immigrants without Medicare or Medicaid coverage. Increase availability of affordable and appropriate housing to this population group. Expand job and skills training for unemployed and underemployed older Asian Americans who are able to work.

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The Asian American Federation of New York is a not-for-profit organization that provides public policy and community service leadership to identify and meet the critical needs of Asian Americans in the New York metropolitan area. The New York City-based Federation serves the Asian American community by analyzing issues, voicing common concerns, advocating for responsive policies, offering financial and management assistance, coordinating service delivery, and creating unified, community-wide initiatives. The Federation, which began operations in 1990, has a membership of 36 community agencies that provide health and human services to diverse populations. For more information, visit [www.aafny.org](http://www.aafny.org) or call 212-344-5878.

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