

## Asian-American Health Disparities: an Interview with Ryan Natividad by Katy Delaney

Ryan Natividad, a health policy coordinator at the Coalition for Asian American Children & Families, has been working in the public health field since his early college days. Eventually, he got involved in research work that focused on health concerns in the Filipino-American community, leading him to the Coalition, where he coordinates Asian Pacific Americans Healthy Eating and Active Living In Our Neighborhoods (APA HEALIN'), a collaborative with the goal of addressing food systems, healthy eating, active living, and build environment disparities and inequities in the APA communities of NYC.

For Natividad, the biggest issue facing this field is the lack of awareness and education about health disparities in this community. "In the ongoing battle to address cardiovascular disease and obesity, the Asian American community is often left out of the discussion," he explains. "While the community may not show outward signs of obesity, Asian Americans are just as susceptible to obesity-related diseases and health complications, usually just at lower BMI rates". Through his research, Natividad is bringing increased awareness to the fact that even the World Health Organization recommends a different BMI measurement for Asians. He is determined to draw attention to the fact that "no community is exempt from chronic and cardiovascular diseases when exposed to unhealthy environments and unhealthy eating patterns".

For Natividad, the solution to this problem involves advocating for policy changes to promote data disaggregation when collecting and reporting information. From his point of view, the Asian American community is often "aggregated as a whole, which can hide health disparities specific to different ethnic communities." This, combined with the stereotypes of the 'model minority,' can make it challenging to change the perception that Asian Americans can be afflicted with "diseases of civilization" like anyone else.

The Coalition for Asian-American Children and Families was recently awarded a grant by the Asian and Pacific Islander American Health Forum,

through the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. With this grant, they plan to implement “Project I CAN” (Increasing Children’s physical Activity and transforming Neighborhoods). Through this program, Natividad and his colleagues seek to “support the implementation of policy, system and environmental change strategies to increase opportunities for physical activity and to promote well-being for vulnerable Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander children and their families”. During this 3-year grant, they will be working closely with selected community-based organizations to evaluate and assess factors that promote or hinder physical activity in the community before training residents and community members through “built environment walk audits,” culminating in a community-led advocacy.

Natividad has worked at the Coalition since 2012 and continues to impact the community through his dedication and innovative programs.