



July 30, 2014

Re: The Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations Supports the Health Equity and Accountability Act

Dear Colleague,

The Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations (AAPCHO) welcomes the introduction of the Health Equity and Accountability Act of 2014 (HEAA). This legislation has a comprehensive health equity platform, which addresses many of the ongoing and deep-seated health equity issues prevalent in minority populations.

AAPCHO is a national association of 34 community health organizations dedicated to promoting advocacy, collaboration and leadership that improves the health status and access of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders (AA&NHOPIs) in the U.S. and its territories. AAPCHO members provide health care services to over 450,000 patients annually, many of whom are recent immigrants, uninsured, limited English proficient and low-income. For over 25 years, AAPCHO's work has helped AA&NHOPi-serving health centers and other health care providers ensure that primary care services are accessible, high quality, and culturally and linguistically appropriate. These patient populations' health issues are often overlooked and are therefore underfunded, resulting in large health disparities. The 133th Congress has a responsibility to remedy this issue with an inclusive, comprehensive approach. We urge you to show your support and co-sponsor this bill.

AA&NHOPIs face large disparities in disease rates, data collection, culturally and linguistically appropriate services and access to quality health care services. The gap in data and data collection mechanisms fails to disaggregate race and ethnicity in AA&NHOPi communities, masking health challenges unique to certain AA&NHOPi ethnicities. Diseases such as hepatitis B, diabetes and tuberculosis do not have adequate data disaggregated by race and ethnicity, and providers lack an awareness of disparities. Without granular data, health issues that affect AA&NHOPi communities are often not adequately tracked and program design is challenging. This is especially egregious for the Pacific Territories, who often lack adequate funding for their populations and suffer from a much heavier burden of chronic disease. Inadequate funding causes a domino effect, leading to programs that try to fill in the gaps and address disparities with highly limited resources.

We are confident that a sensible solution is possible to address the unique health challenges in AA&NHOPi communities. HEAA will promote health equity by promoting access to care. The bill also places more emphasis on solutions that address the root causes of poor health outcomes.

Specifically, this legislation:

- Improves data collection by expanding the racial and ethnic categories in national datasets, primary language, sex, gender identity and sexual orientation, socioeconomic status and disability, collected through the Affordable Care Act.

- Increases data collection for AA&NHOPIs by oversampling in national surveys.
- Reduces barriers to insurance for all lawfully present immigrants by removing the federal five-year bar from Medicaid, the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicare and the Exchanges.
- Supports the citizens of American Samoa, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands by eliminating Medicaid funding limitations, increasing the Federal Medical Assistance Percentage for certain cancers, and amending the Public Health Service Act to provide direct financial assistance.
- Promotes Native Hawaiian health by reimbursing medical assistance provided to Native Hawaiians under Medicaid and reauthorizing the Native Hawaiian Health Care Improvement Act
- Strengthens workforce training by fully funding programs that will emphasize culturally and linguistically appropriate training.
- Establishes reimbursement for culturally and linguistically appropriate services in Medicare, Medicaid and state Children’s Health Insurance Programs.
- Promotes proven strategies to address the social determinants of health, which contribute to health disparities in minority communities.
- Supports health information technology efforts to improve quality of care for the medically underserved.
- Promotes research and initiatives to address health conditions that disproportionately affect AA&NHOPIs, such as diabetes and hepatitis B.
- Works on improving grant programs established by the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIHMD).

We believe this bill promotes comprehensive and needed health equity solutions for AA&NHOPIs and other minority communities, highlights how the determinants of health can be addressed, and is mindful of the fact that the intersections in health are complex. As AA&NHOPIs and other minority communities continue to face substantial cultural, social, and economic barriers to obtaining quality health care and achieving equitable health outcomes—and as efforts to address these inequities have been limited by inadequate resources for funding, staffing, stewardship, and evaluation—HEAA will play a key role in advancing a federal legislative agenda that will support essential efforts for medically underserved and all communities.

We thank the bill’s sponsors for their dedication in working towards health equity. We urge members of Congress who have pledged to serve their community’s health needs to support this bill.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey B. Caballero, MPH
Executive Director