

**Montgomery County – Department of Health & Human Services (MCDHHS)**  
**Asian American Health Initiative (AAHI) Steering Committee Meeting**  
**Tuesday, September 8, 2020**

<b>Steering Committee</b>	<b>Present</b>	<b>AAHI Staff</b>	<b>Present</b>
<b>Organizational Members</b>		Perry Chan	X
Yesle Soh (on behalf of Ji-Young Cho)	X	Betty Lam	X
Wilbur Friedman	X	Elsa Lau	
Michael Lin	X	Sanjana Quasem	X
Hina Mehta (Vice Chair)	X	Jasmine Vinh	X
Mayur Mody	X		
Nguyen Nguyen (Chair)	X		
Tho Tran			
Thao Bui			
Sovan Tun	X		
Yuchi Huang	X		
<b>Individual Members</b>	<b>Present</b>	<b>Guests</b>	<b>Present</b>
Shruti Bhatnagar		Gabe Albornoz	X
Nerita Estampador	X	Mayra Bayonet	X
Meng K. Lee	X	Beth Shuman	X
Sunmin Lee			
Cynthia Macri	X		
Judy Wang			
<b>Affiliate Members</b>	<b>Present</b>		
Anis Ahmed			

**Welcome (Nguyen Nguyen)**

- Nguyen Nguyen called the meeting to order at 6:06 PM.
- Nguyen asked for permission to audio record the meeting. There were no objections.

ACTION: Audio recording of meeting was approved with no objections.
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**Activities Updates from Chair and Vice-Chair**

- As a recap, Nguyen presented a Powerpoint slide summarizing the major activities the Steering Committee has engaged in within the last few months:

- A letter was sent to Dr. Raymond Crowel, Director of Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services (MCDHHS), on the needs of Asian Americans for COVID-19.
- Another letter was sent in response to a request for input from Wade Holland, Vision Zero Coordinator, on the community needs and recommendations to improve traffic safety in the County.
- Nguyen had a conversation with Dr. Christopher Rogers, the new Policy & Strategy Officer of Public Health Services.
- A joint statement from Asian American Health Initiative Steering Committee (AAHISC) and the Latino Health Steering Committee (LHSC) on diversity and support for minority health. This statement was shared with the County Executive Marc Elrich, County Councilmembers, Montgomery County Chief Equity Officer Tiffany Ward, and MCDHHS Director Dr. Raymond Crowel.
- Nguyen thanked the Steering Committee for their collective input at previous meetings, especially during this pandemic to help bridge the community's voice and needs.
- Sovan Tun asked if copies of the statements and letters will be shared with the rest of the Steering Committee.
  - Nguyen confirmed that copies of the above statements and letters will be shared with the Steering Committee after the meeting. He wanted to take the opportunity at this meeting to provide context first before sharing them.

ACTION ITEM: Letter of COVID-19 Needs for Asian Americans, AAHISC's Letter Response to Vision Zero's Request for Input, and AAHISC-LHSC Statement on Diversity will be shared with all SC members via email.

### **Discussion with County Councilmember and Chair of Health and Human Services Committee, Gabe Albornoz**

- Nguyen welcomed County Councilmember Gabe Albornoz, who has been invited to share the County Council's activities in addressing the different needs of the minority communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Nguyen inquired Councilmember Albornoz's vision for the Montgomery County residents moving forward in the post-pandemic period and how the Steering Committee can contribute and support the County's recovery efforts.
- Councilmember Albornoz thanked the Steering Committee for their continued leadership and dedication in bridging immigrant communities to County services and vice versa. With the current federal administration, minority communities are facing significant challenges which have a negative impact on their ability to access services during the pandemic. He acknowledged his team, including Mayra Bayonet and Beth Shuman, as well as the Council central staff for their support.

- For better context, Councilmember Albornoz prefaced that he will describe the state and local leadership infrastructure involved in the decision-making process, discuss the County's response to the current situation, and how the County can partner with and target more specifically minority and ethnic communities to better serve those populations, and the positive outlook on the horizon.
  - At the County level, Dr. Travis Gayles and Dr. Earl Stoddard are at the forefront of the County's response to the pandemic. Dr. Gayles, the County Health Officer and Chief of Public Health Services, is appointed at the local level and part of a larger network of Public Health Officers on the state and regional level. Dr. Earl Stoddard, the Director of the Office of Emergency Management & Homeland Security who reports to County Executive Marc Elrich, is also a part of a team of emergency response managers from across the state and region that assesses and evaluates local jurisdictions' responses to the pandemic.
  - In addition, the County Council serves also as the official board of public health for the County. Responsibilities of this convening body include making a public health order issued by Dr. Gayles County-wide to include the municipalities (i.e. Gaithersburg, Rockville, Takoma Park), determining penalty for non-adherence to the public health order, and receiving biannual updates from Dr. Gayles.
  - On the state level, Maryland Governor Larry Hogan, along with the Maryland Secretary of Health and his Executive Council, have the authority to issue statewide mandates. However, for jurisdictions that have higher densities of COVID-19 cases, Governor Hogan gave the flexibility for counties to make their own decisions with reopening policies. A recent example of this is when Governor Hogan announced last Friday that the state would enter phase 3 of reopening, while Montgomery County remained in phase 2. Councilmember Albornoz expressed that the delays in reopening has led to confusion and frustration among residents and businesses.
  - Councilmember Albornoz shared that Dr. Gayles, Dr. Stoddard, and the County Council have been continuously evaluating the number of cases, testing capacity, and best practices from other states to help guide how the County advances its reopening policies and practices.
- Currently, the County is plateauing at approximately 70 to 80 new COVID-19 cases per day. Back in May, the highest average in a single day was 800 new cases. However, with holiday travel and the youth between the ages of 19 and 29, there was a regression in social distancing and mask-wearing practices. Furthermore, with some independent schools reopening for in-person instruction, it is important to be cautious.
- The County has also increased its testing capacity. Unfortunately, one of the contractors, Advagenix, had issues and their license to conduct COVID-19 testing was temporarily pulled. While the investigation was ongoing, the County

moved forward with the state and the University of Maryland to make up for that loss in testing capacity and is now on target with conducting approximately 3,000 tests per week. A disproportionate amount of those tests was aimed for those who do not have health insurance or access to a primary care physician. The County's testing infrastructure does not include the private sector.

- In addition to passing local legislation for moratoriums on evictions and raising of rent, the County received funding from the federal government via the CARES Act to help cover costs related to the pandemic. The funds were used to provide various resources to County residents, namely rental assistance and direct cash assistance to those who were not eligible for the federal stimulus checks. The largest percentage of those accessing these funds are from the immigrant community.
  - Funding for specific efforts to address the unique needs of vulnerable communities has been a priority of the County. Income and race have emerged as the two major predictors of COVID-19 infections. The health disparities that existed prior to COVID-19 are exacerbated due underlying chronic health conditions, lack of sufficient healthcare coverage, and lack of transportation to access care.
  - According to the testing data, 72% of positive COVID-19 cases are in the Hispanic community, while African Americans have the highest number of fatalities. The Asian American community has been affected as well, particularly in terms of mental health as evidenced by a rise in calls to the County crisis line. With the repeated derogatory rhetoric from the federal administration, Asian American businesses and community members have felt attacked.
  - Furthermore, housing arrangements for many immigrant families do not make social distancing possible. The same immigrant population also represents a large portion of the service industry, who are unable to work from home.
- To tackle these issues, the County has significantly increased its pop-up testing efforts in high-density areas where oftentimes the immigrant community resides, as well as provide more language-appropriate contact tracing.
  - In addition, the Germantown Hub model, which was originally developed to address food security issues, has evolved into a centralized coalition of community, faith-based, local businesses, non-profit organizations to also provide information and case management services to address holistic needs of the community. This model in which the community has taken lead is an important part of the County's safety net.
  - Improvement in language access continues to be an area of priority for the County. With regards to in-language calls coming into 311, the level of the responses in Vietnamese and Korean did not adequately meet the needs of residents. Ken Hartman's team includes bilingual County employees from DHHS, the Department of Recreation, the Montgomery County

Public Libraries, and several other programs who have passed the language competency tests to provide language-proficient services to translate information, support 311, and provide outreach.

- Councilmember Alborno mentioned that there has been significant progress in telemedicine and telehealth. Not only do we better understand the insurance reimbursement process and the technology need for both providers and patients, but telemedicine and telehealth can provide another means to be more efficient and provide better access to vulnerable community members.
- In the last several years, the County's public health infrastructure exclusively included non-profit organizations, clinics, and hospitals, often excluding private family medical practices. During the pandemic, many private medical practices reached out to the County for assistance and support, which has opened the doors to promising conversations on how to better leverage resources of both sectors to expand our reach and help more families.
- Councilmember Alborno opened the dialogue to take questions from the Steering Committee.
- Sovan asked the County's plan to address the upcoming election, voting by mail, and concerns with the U.S. Postal Services.
  - Councilmember Alborno mentioned that the state and County are encouraging residents to mail in their ballots by first completing the application to vote by mail. Almost half of the registered voters have already requested their mail-in ballots. With the concern that there will not enough poll workers, the County has consolidated the number of voting stations through a partnership with the state. In-person voting is still an option, and additional support has been given to the County Board of Elections to hire more staff in order to process ballots as efficiently and safely. The concerns with the U.S Postal Services are real and the County is monitoring the situation closely to ensure a safe election.
- Cynthia Macri inquired about the County's strategy to administer the COVID-19 vaccine, when it is likely to become available in Spring 2021, and how it will prioritize these vaccines for front-line workers, who from minority communities. With these rushed clinical trials to develop a vaccine, she mentioned her concern in increasing the lack of trust by having minority groups will be the first to receive the vaccine that has been primarily tested on non-minority communities.
  - Councilmember Alborno expressed the same concern in regards to the rushed efforts in the vaccine clinical trials. The lack of coordinated response effort from the federal level has presented challenges that has left local jurisdictions to fend for themselves in securing personal protective equipment (PPE), tests, and other critical items needed to keep the community safe during the pandemic. The trust from the community is critical in the dissemination of vaccines. Councilmember Alborno mentioned that Dr. Gayles and his team is focused on developing a plan

to address these issues as mentioned in the weekly Friday calls with the County Executive and County Council.

- Yuchi Huang mentioned his concern of the COVID-19 infection and death rates in Montgomery County has been consistently higher than that of Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, D.C. He inquired if there is anything residents can do collectively to make the County safer.
  - Councilmember Alborno responded that as the largest jurisdiction in Maryland, Montgomery County is extremely diverse in terms of its demographic, economic, and agricultural profile. With the growing distrust of government and the growing health and socioeconomic disparities among those living in poverty, it is important to have continued conversations about the gaps in service delivery. There needs to be a collaborative effort to go deeper into the community.
  - Councilmember Alborno also shared that the County is seeing record numbers of resident accessing County services. This is evidenced by the calls to 311 increasing by 300% since the beginning of the pandemic. Operators used to spend four to seven minutes to respond to the needs of the caller; now, operators are taking over 20 minutes because callers have multiple needs and need to be referred to several County services.
  - Yuchi asked what can be done on the individual level.
  - Councilmember Alborno shared that the immigrant communities are especially vulnerable to misinformation. There is a need for trusted and respected community and faith-based leaders on the Steering Committee who have the influence to educate their constituents on how to stay vigilant and continue public health practices to keep the community and their families safe.
- On behalf of the Steering Committee, Nguyen thanked Councilmember Alborno for his time in sharing updates from the County's response in leading the COVID-19 relief efforts. Both the Steering Committee and Councilmember Alborno's team will be in touch with any future opportunities for collaboration.

### **Approval of Agenda (Nguyen Nguyen)**

- Today's meeting agenda was shared with members prior to the meeting. Nguyen asked if there were any objections to the agenda.
- Wilbur Friedman moved to approve the agenda. Yuchi seconded the motion. The meeting agenda was approved.

ACTION: Meeting agenda was approved with no objections.
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### **Approval of Meeting Minutes (Nguyen Nguyen)**

- The SC meeting minutes from Tuesday, July 14, 2020 were shared with members prior to today's meeting. A motion to approve the July meeting minutes was presented.
- Wilbur Friedman moved to approve the meeting minutes. Yuchi seconded the motion. The meeting minutes were approved.

ACTION: July's meeting minutes were approved with no objections.
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### **Program Updates (Perry Chan)**

- Perry Chan shared that COVID-19 remains a priority for the County and AAHI.
- AAHI developed the COVID-19 Resources Guide to help residents navigating resources to address various needs caused by the pandemic.
  - If Steering Committee members are assisting the community in need of information, they can reference this condensed summary of high-demand County services, which is available on the AAHI website at <https://aahiinfo.org/aahi-resources/#covid-19-resources>
  - This resource guide was also disseminated to local community and faith-based community leaders and partners who worked with AAHI in recent years.
- AAHI's bilingual staff continue to assist Korean and Chinese speaking community members who call the Food Access Call Center in need food resources. In-language calls are also forwarded to other organizations as needed to provide language support to residents.
- AAHI engages daily on its multiple social media platforms to share information on resources for community members related to food distribution events, COVID-19 testing, rental assistance, and mental health support services.
- Perry also announced that AAHI's Program Manager I Sanjana Quasem will be leaving AAHI for another opportunity with a national non-profit organization. Her last day is this Friday, September 11<sup>th</sup>. Sanjana has dedicated many years with AAHI and has been instrumental in AAHI's outreach programming, data collection, and evaluation efforts.
  - The Steering Committee thanked Sanjana for her years of service and collectively wish her the best on her career endeavors beyond AAHI.
- Nguyen asked if the Steering Committee had questions related to Perry's updates.
  - Nguyen noted that although COVID-19 is the priority, it is important to remember that the priorities and needs of the Asian American community before COVID-19, such as the need for mental health and senior services, have remained the same. It is his hope that AAHI can strike a balance and reach out to the Steering Committee for support if needed.
  - Cynthia shared that Asian American Inter Community Service, Inc. (AICS) is offering evidence-based depression screenings. This program is offered in a couple of Asian languages and grant funding is available to offer

trainings to individuals in other languages. For those that are interested in learning more about this program, the Steering Committee should contact Cynthia.

- Perry asked Cynthia to share information about this program with him so that he can circulate it among the Steering Committee and the DHHS' Behavioral health staff.

### **Steering Committee Retreat Discussion**

- For the interest of time, Nguyen briefly introduced some preliminary questions in regards to the annual Steering Committee retreat.
  - If the Steering Committee decided to host the annual retreat virtually, what would you like to accomplish?
  - What format will be optimal for the retreat?
- An attachment was shared with the Steering Committee prior to the meeting detailing the highlights and outcomes of the FY19 and FY20 retreats.
  - During the FY19 retreat, there was a focus on data and advocacy, which led to the development of the *Blueprint for the Asian American Health Initiative, 2020 – 2030*. In FY20, discussions were had on how to better empower local community- and faith-based organizations. AAHI is currently working on this mechanism and Perry will update the Steering Committee when it is further developed.
- With those examples in mind, Nguyen asked the Steering Committee what are some urgent topics that should be discussed at the retreat to lead into action.
- In terms of the medium, Wilbur noted that with COVID-19, it may take some time before in-person meetings can safely resume. Most likely, the retreat will need to be virtual.
- Michael Lin suggested that if a retreat is held, a half-day format may be more suitable for a virtual setting.
- Yuchi noted that a potential topic of discussion may be for the Steering Committee and as a community, how do we adjust to this new normal strategically moving forward.
- M.K. Lee suggested that the Steering Committee skip the retreat this year due to the limitations of hosting it virtually. Otherwise, the retreat will be like any other online meeting. He feels that the retreat will not be as effective if hosted online.
  - Nguyen reassured they can work around the technology, which should not be a barrier to the Steering Committee connecting and having important conversations to prepare for the future.
- Mayur Mody expressed that bringing mental health services for the Asian American community will need to be a priority post-COVID and months beyond.
- Cynthia shared that misinformation is a huge issue during this pandemic. As for the preparation for the retreat, the Steering Committee can break up into smaller groups and focus on certain topics. She emphasized that there is a need to

change the way we do things and, if anything, the Steering Committee should meet more frequently to solidify their positions.

- Hina Mehta suggested that the Steering Committee share their suggested topics by a specified deadline and based on the responses, members will be grouped by topics to discuss details of what they want to achieve. She proposed that once the groups have a chance to work on their own, there should be another two to three-hour session in which the members present to the whole group about their topic, the needs, and action items. This entire process may take up to a whole month, but it is more approachable because it is broken up into multiple parts. It also would allow for the Steering Committee some time to think about the priorities to discuss.
- To follow-up with this discussion, a survey will be sent out to the Steering Committee to collect input on the goals and potential topics of discussion for the annual retreat.

ACTION ITEM: A brief survey will be sent out to Steering Committee members to collect their input on potential topics of discussion for the next annual retreat.
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### **Updates from Organization Members**

- Nguyen opened the conversation to allow organizational members to share their updates with the group.
- Sovan shared that the Cambodian Buddhist Temple is organizing a grocery distribution event on September 25<sup>th</sup>. A previous food distribution event was held back in June 19<sup>th</sup> at the temple.
  - This is also a special period for ancestral prayer at the Buddhist temple, which has been a challenge with the COVID-19 community gathering restrictions. Visitors are welcome to join at 9:00am – 9:30am and 7:00pm – 7:30pm, but capacity may be limited.
- Mayur mentioned that the American Diversity Group (ADG) has been organizing several food drives in recent months. He noted that there are many Asian Americans attending these food drive, including community members from Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Srilanka, and Korea.
  - ADG is also starting up its dental services for those who do not have dental insurance; information will be sent to Perry and Jasmine Vinh to share.
  - In addition, ADG is providing free flu shots in Silver Spring for those with no insurance on September 20<sup>th</sup>. Another flu shots event will be held at MCC Clinic in October.
  - ADG is seeking candidate for a part-time grant writer/business developer position. If you know anyone who would be interested, Mayur will send the information to Perry and Jasmine to share among the group.

- Lastly, ADG is planning to provide free COVID-19 testing starting in October.
- Wilbur shared that the Organization of Chinese Americans Greater Washington, D.C. Chapter has several new and younger members join the organization within the last year.
- Ji-Young Cho shared that the Korean Community Services Center of Greater Washington (KCSC) has reopened their offices at 25% capacity since July 6<sup>th</sup>.
  - With the help of the County, KCSC has completed their grocery care package service for Korean seniors.
  - During the last three months, KCSC raised over \$350,000 for their Share the Love campaign, which helps to provide rental assistance and food support to Korean community member.
- Yuchi mentioned that the Chinese Culture and Community Services Center (CCACC) has been operating non-stop in terms of their in-home care services, adult daycare services, and clinic operations. Summer has been a bit slower, but with the Chinese language schools restarting in the fall, things will be busier.

### **Updates from Liaisons and Members**

- **Healthy Montgomery (Nguyen)**
  - Due to the Labor Day holiday, the next meeting is scheduled for Monday, September 14<sup>th</sup>.
  - Nguyen stated that there are no updates since the last meeting. The main topic at hand is the Community Health Needs Assessment, which will take one year to conduct and has a significant impact on the community. Nguyen anticipated that Healthy Montgomery may need support in engaging the Asian American community in that conversation. Nguyen will monitor the progress of the CHNA and update the group.
- **County Executive's Asian American Advisory Committee (Sovan)**
  - Sovan noted that the next meeting will take place on September 22<sup>nd</sup>. The Asian Liaison Yi Shen from the Office of Community Partnerships will give a talk about the upcoming election.
  - The previous meeting was held to discuss the US Census, the upcoming election, and COVID-19.
- **The Governor's Commission on Asian American Affairs (Sovan)**
  - Sovan mentioned that there has not been a meeting for several months, so there was no update to share.
- **The Governor's Commission on South Asian American Affairs (Mayur)**

- Mayur shared that there have been no meetings for several months due to COVID-19, so there is no update.
- **Commission on Aging (Tho)**
  - Tho Tran is not present at the meeting, so no updates were provided.
- **The Governor’s Commission on Suicide Prevention (Cynthia)**
  - Cynthia shared that the issue of suicide and overdosing has not gone away during the pandemic. In addition to that issue, the problem of disaggregated data came up in the conversation. As a part of the data subcommittee, she learned that data was collected in the following categories: “Black,” “White”, “Hispanic”, and “Other”. In the “Other” category, Asians, Native Hawaiians, Other Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, and Alaskan Natives are lumped together. The data subcommittee is working to parse out the data in a meaningful way.
  - Cynthia noted that the Commission has done a lot of activity to address gun ownership and how to safely store weapons. According to the statistics, suicide by firearm is not as big of an issue in the Asian Americans as it is for their White counterparts.

### **Adjourn**

- Nguyen adjourned the meeting at 8:03 PM.

ACTION: Meeting adjourned at 8:03 PM.
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**Next Meeting:** Tuesday, November 10, 2020.