



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Asian American and Pacific Islanders Commission

Event Description: These notes highlight the most important takeaways from the Massachusetts AAPI Commission's Mental Health Listening Session, which was held Tuesday, June 12th, 2023, on Zoom.

Contact: If you have any questions about these notes, the AAPI Commission, or want to work with us, please contact Esther Kim, Program and Research Director, at esther.kim@aapicommission.org

Main Takeaways

- Culturally and linguistically competent care is incredibly important, and is one of the largest barriers to AAPI communities accessing mental health care
 - There needs to be a better pipeline for new AAPI mental health workers, and sustained cultural competency among all mental health workers
- It is critical to think of mental health and wellness comprehensively: systemic need is often the root cause of mental health issues
- It is important to not generalize the AAPI community: the AAPI community is vast and diverse, and has varying needs

Invited Presenters

- Chien-Chi Huang, [Founder of Asian Women for Health](#)
 - Think of mental health as a disorder or disease: if you break your arm or have a cold, you want to go see a doctor. If you aren't feeling well mentally, you also should see a specialist without shame! We need to be okay not being okay, and let people say what they're feeling
 - It can be helpful to use simple icons to help people describe how they are feeling
 - We need to have more people from our community that can work as peer specialist, recovery specialists, therapists, who can provide linguistically and culturally competent care
- Dawn Sauma, MSW, LICSW, [Asian Task Force Against Domestic Violence \(ATASK\)](#)
 - ATASK provides holistic services to Asian survivors of sexual assault throughout the state, and sometimes even statewide
 - The root cause of mental health issues is often being in systemic need: it is important to address how systemic barriers affect survivors when they don't have access to healthcare, are socially and informationally isolated, when they are forced to live under-paying jobs, and much more
 - Health and resources should be equitable and inclusive, including the existence of spaces for communities to gather

- It is important to think of mental health and wellness comprehensively, including financial stability and safety
- Heidi Hyunjin Lee, Harm Reduction Case Manager and Mental Health Advocate
 - We need to actually understand what mental health and wellness means for the AAPI community without generalizing
 - Having access to culturally competent care is critical to helping AAPI communities
 - Even being able to see someone that looks like you can be very helpful
- Aishwarya Chitoor, [Saheli](#)
 - Creating a sense of identity and belonging is an important part of mental wellbeing
 - How can we bring more AAPIs into this space? How can we change what it means to succeed in America and make work in this space more accessible?

Public Comment

- Intergenerational trauma
 - Intergenerational trauma is a major factor in the mental wellbeing of AAPI communities, and is easy to ignore
 - It is good to remember that we are not alone in our experiences
- Barriers to AAPI men in seeking mental health help
 - It is harder for men as a whole to access mental health care, especially AAPI men: AAPI people are three times less likely to seek help than white people; men are even less likely
 - It is important to have a trusted leader when doing outreach and connecting with communities
 - Having one person stand up and tell their story can give them the support and confidence to share their story
 - Anger is often the main emotion allowed for men, especially in public, but in private, and with time and work, men are willing to talk and share: culturally competent care is an incredibly important aspect of this
- Cultural competency
 - In order to get your license to work as a mental health professional, you need to take one class on cultural competency, but you never need to take that again, despite continuing education being required to renew your license every two years
 - Insurance has very low reimbursement rates for mental health workers, with no additions for cultural competency, meaning fewer mental health professionals accept insurance, which creates a financial barrier to accessing care
- Youth
 - Self-expression is important for young people and mental wellbeing

- Starting in the classroom is a great place to start with being centered, self-aware, and reprocess negative thinking
- Young people are thinking more about mental health than older generations, which is fantastic
- Social media can be both positive and negative

Online Resources

- <https://www.asianwomenforhealth.org/mental-health.html>
- <https://www.asianwomenforhealth.org/aamhf23.html>
- <https://www.asianwomenforhealth.org/achieving-whole-health.html>
- <https://www.asianwomenforhealth.org/anti-racism.html>
- Asian American Mental Health Collective: <https://www.asianmhc.org/>
- <https://namimass.org/>
- <https://www.naapimha.org/>
- <https://www.naapimha.org/general-resources>
- <https://www.asianwomenforhealth.org/>
- Asian American Mental Health Forum: Pata Suyemoto, kotoridesigns@gmail.com
- <https://saheliboston.org/>
- <https://www.atask.org/>
- <https://www.mcspnow.com/equity>