

**Massachusetts AAPI Commission**  
**Older Adults Listening Session**  
**Wollaston Senior Center, Quincy**  
**Friday, April 14, 2023**

Contact: Jennifer Best, Communications and Outreach Manager,  
[jennifer.best@aapicommission.org](mailto:jennifer.best@aapicommission.org)

**Primary Issue Areas**

- The biggest challenge facing AAPI older adults is language access.
- Housing is another major issue, including safe, affordable, and secure housing, as well as senior living centers that have connections with ethnic communities, including serving ethnic food and having staff that speak languages spoken by the older adults they serve.
- Transportation: often infrequent and not accessible.
- Mental health: older adults, especially those who do not speak English well, easily become isolated, which leads to mental health challenges, including problem gambling.

**Policy and Legislative Actions Needed**

- More funding for translation services, including written translation and spoken interpretation.
  - It is important for the government to remove language barriers, and provide support to community organizations for translation and interpretation.
- More funding for transportation services and affordable housing.
- Providing funding for culturally sensitive mental health programs, including help for those experiencing gambling addiction.
  - Work to create a pipeline of mental health workers.

**Elected Officials**

State Representative Tackey Chan

- Issue that Rep. Chan has been hearing when talking to older adults, regardless of the language they speak: when they reach out for help, they do not hear back, or the person cannot help them and does not help the senior find someone else.
- It is an issue when organizations tell their seniors to not make a problem: this happens more often with seniors who do not speak English well. Everyone deserves an answer and deserves help.
- There are hate crime policies being discussed in the State House, as well as funding for a UMass Boston center to study hate crimes. He is also advocating for expanding ethnic

studies in K-12 schools and pushing for more language access throughout the government.

State Senator John Keenan

- Housing: Sen. Keenan is working with agencies and organizations to make sure that housing is safe, secure, and affordable.
- Increased bilingual services and translation is a priority.
- The government needs to get better at providing these services for people.
- We have an obligation to take care of one another.

### Presenters

- Joyce Guan, Wollaston Senior Center
  - The primary issues facing AAPI older adults at the Wollaston Senior Center are language barriers, and lack of transportation and housing.
- AAPI older adults in Quincy (2-3 individuals)
  - Shing Hou - lived in U.S. for 30 years
    - It is hard to make a living in the U.S., both as a younger and older adult, because of language barrier and transportation.
      - Wait times for the bus are long: more accessible transportation.
    - The Wollaston Senior Center provides critical services that did not exist when he first came to the U.S., and Shing hopes that the state can give the Center more funding.
  - Bochem Chan - been in the U.S. for more than 30 years
    - Bochem feels that the community in the U.S. really cares about seniors.
- Ramakrishna Penumarthy – Co-Founder, [Volunteering for Seniors](#)
  - Mission: help seniors stay energetic and active participants in their communities.
  - Vision: empowering seniors to live life to their fullest potential.
  - What they do: working with senior centers in MA, they provide educational webinars, friendly at-home visits, tech help, karaoke nights, senior portraits, yoga, dance, walk in the evening, going to the mall, reading books to the elders, engaging children with the seniors, and more!
  - Health-related work: making sure seniors were and are educated about COVID-19, age-related infections, and other health issues.
  - VFS would appreciate being able to work with Wollaston Senior Center.
- Frank Poon – Founder, [Civic Education Alliance](#) (CEA)
  - CEA is a non-profit that serves the Asian American population in Quincy, especially the Chinese-American community.
  - Mission: provide voter engagement and civic engagement.
  - Slogan: “Connecting to the community”

- They have expanded to offer community services and connect people of all ages.
- Needs they see among older adults include: applying to SNAP programs, SSI, housing applications, recertification applications, government health recertification, voter education and registration, translation and interpretation, developing care givers in families, and getting families involved.
  - Language is always the biggest obstacle for older adults.
- They work with community orgs to provide workshops such as identity theft, financial exploitation, elder abuse, mental health challenges, mental health first aid, problem gambling, emergency preparedness, wellbeing and health awareness.
- Ben Hires – CEO of [Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center](#) (BCNC)
  - Multiservice agency that helps the elderly be successful.
  - Many Asian families live together to take care of elders: this is an important cultural value that many Asian families practice but as with any family, there are many challenges.
  - Mental health in older adults is often overlooked: many Asian older adults who came to the U.S. do not speak English and can feel isolated.
  - They see many older adults attracted to gambling, McDonalds, and Dunkin for a long period of time.
  - Issue: there are fewer students going into mental health fields, especially those who are interested in working with older populations.
    - BCNC would like to work with the state to address these pipeline issues.
- Usha Vakil – Friends of Indian Senior Citizen Organization ([FISCO](#)), Co-founder of [Saheli](#)
  - Mission: compassion, connection and companionship; help compassion from the family and community to grow.
    - Help connect people with others of their background and community, helping older adults come together to lead healthy lives.
  - Based in Burlington and works closely with Burlington Senior Center
  - Hold weekly meetings and other events throughout the year, including meditation, chat sessions, lunch, summer picnics, overnight trips and sightseeing visits in neighboring states, Diwali celebration, and providing moral support and counseling to seniors, providing support to caregiving family members, and more.
  - Challenges: mental health and nutrition, family caregiver training, housing with ethnic food, ethnic food meal delivery, living independently while living closer to children, fear of isolation, AAPI hate, and transportation.
- Angie Liou – Executive Director, [Asian Community Development Corporation](#) (ACDC)
  - Mission: invest in building empowering communities for low-income Asian families through programming and affordable housing.
  - Founded 1987, expanded to Quincy in 2009 as constituents moved out of Chinatown.

- Two affordable housing options in Quincy: 6 Fort St, Martinson
- Programs: emergency housing assistance program, Chinese hotlines, helping applicants apply for funds, acting as intermediaries between tenants and their landlords, first-time home buyer education, U.S. bank system and credit education, retirement education, and more.
  - 40% of the calls they receive are from Quincy.
- Most people in the Chinese speaking community do not know that government resources are available for housing assistance.
- Call to action items: Quincy has met the state threshold of 10% affordable housing stock, but there is still an urgent need for affordable housing.
- Language access: it is not enough to just have materials translated, but it is important to have bilingual staff connecting residents to services.
  - Funding for not only written translation but funding for community organizations who are already doing this work is important .