

# Mental Health Facts For Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders



## Introduction

A total of 23.8 million Americans identify as Asian American or Pacific Islanders (AA/PIs), making up 7.2% of the US population. AA/PIs consist of approximately 50 subpopulations which have ancestral ties to such places as China, India, Hawaii, and Guam.<sup>1</sup> The population is very diverse in terms of ethnicity, culture, religion, history, and language, among other identifiers.<sup>2</sup>

Asian Americans, specifically, are the fastest-growing racial/ethnic group in the U.S. Between 2000 and 2015, the population grew by 72%.<sup>3</sup> Approximately 6.7% of the U.S. population—an estimated 22.2 million people—self-identify

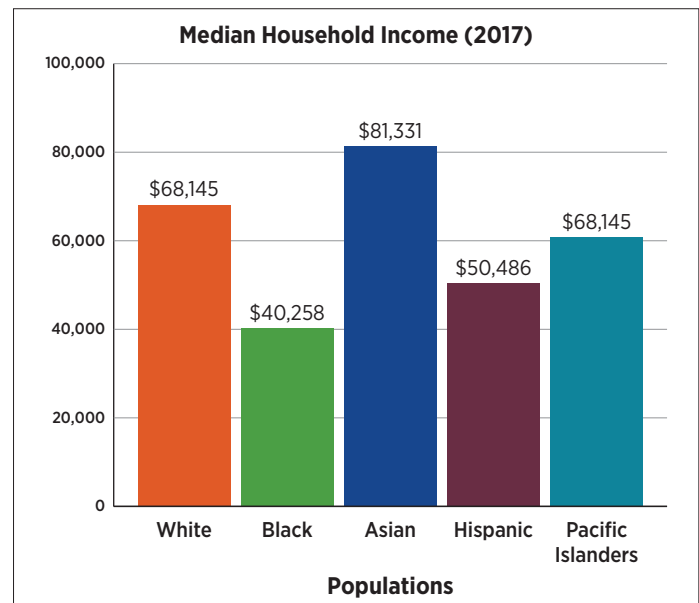
themselves as Asian American, alone. Current data shows California, New York, Texas, New Jersey, Illinois, Washington, Florida, Virginia, Hawaii, and Massachusetts has the largest population of Asian Americans.<sup>3,5</sup>

Collectively, AA/PIs speak more than 100 languages across subpopulations. English proficiency varies among Asian Americans, with data showing 30% of the population not being fluent in English. According to research, 44.8% of Chinese, 20.9% of Filipinos, and 18.7% of Asian Indians are not fluent in English.<sup>5</sup>

## Socio-economic Status

Socio-economic status for AA/PIs ranges widely. Overall, the economic status of Asian Americans, alone, exceeds that of other racial and ethnic groups. According to recent Census data on income and earnings, the median household income of Asian Americans is \$81,331, as compared with \$68,145 for non-Hispanic whites.<sup>5</sup> As for Pacific Islanders, alone, the average household income is \$60,734.<sup>6</sup>

However, 11.1% of Asian Americans and 15.4% of Pacific Islanders live at the poverty level, compared with 9.6% of non-Hispanic whites.<sup>5,6</sup> Poverty rates vary even wider among AA/PI subgroups. For example, the poverty rate for Filipinos is 6.0%; compared with 16.2% for the Hmong.<sup>5</sup>



Source: US Census Bureau, Income and Poverty in the United States: 2017. <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2018/demo/p60-263.pdf>

## Insurance Coverage Among Asian Americans, 2017

Insurance	Asian Americans	Pacific Islanders	Non-Hispanic Whites
Private Insurance	73.7%	66.9%	75.4%
Public Insurance	26.3%	33.5%	33.7%
Uninsured	6.6%	8.3%	5.9%

Source: National Center for Health Statistics, Health, United States, 2017, CDC <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/healthUS/content/2017.htm#046>

## Life Expectancy/Health

AA/PIs have the highest life expectancy of any ethnic group in the US, averaged at 80 years compared with 79.8 years for non-Hispanic whites.

Rates of health insurance coverage among AA/PIs averages at 70.3% for private insurance and 29.9% for public insurance. A total of 7.5% of AA/PI are uninsured, compared with 5.9% for non-Hispanic whites.<sup>5,6</sup>

## Mental Health Status, Use of Services, and Disparities

Research shows that 2.7 million AA/PIs have a mental and/or substance use disorder (SUD).<sup>7</sup>

Asian Americans, alone, report fewer serious psychological distress compared with non-Hispanic whites and other racial and ethnic groups,<sup>8</sup> while Hawaiian/Pacific Islander adults report similar rates of mental illness as compared with non-Hispanic whites.<sup>9</sup>

Suicide was a leading cause of death for Asian Americans, alone, from ages 15 to 24, in 2017. However, the overall suicide rate for Asian Americans is half than that of the non-Hispanic whites.<sup>8</sup>

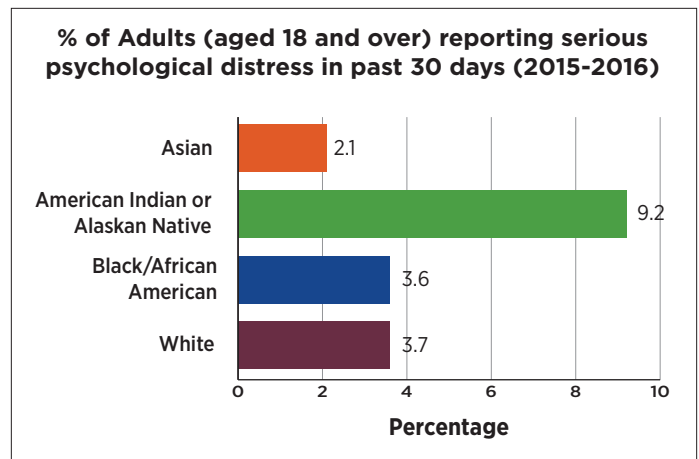
Southeast Asian refugees are likely to receive a diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) associated with immigration. A study reported that 70% of Southeast Asian refugees receiving mental health treatment were diagnosed with PTSD.<sup>8</sup>

Asian Americans, alone, have lower rates of substance abuse and alcohol use as compared with all other subgroups within the population and the general US population. Data shows that 4.8% of Asian Americans have an SUD, compared with 7.4% among the general population. Rates of alcohol use disorder and binge drinking among Asian Americans are, respectively, 3.8% and 14.7%.<sup>7</sup>

AA/PIs are least likely to seek mental health services than any other racial/ethnic group.<sup>7</sup> AA/PIs are three times less likely to access mental health services than their white counterparts.<sup>10</sup>

### Cultural barriers include:

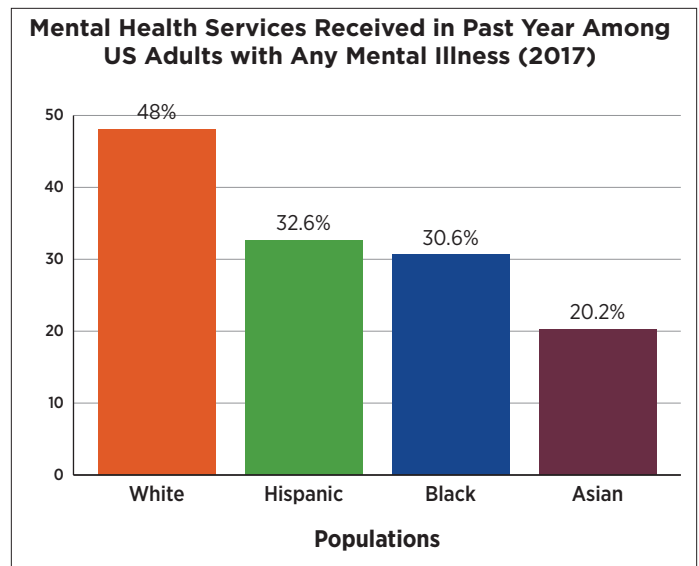
Several cultural and structural barriers prevent AA/PIs from accessing mental health services.<sup>10</sup> These Include the following:



Source: CDC, 2018. Health United States, 2017. <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hus/hus17.pdf>

	Asian American	Non-Hispanic White
Male	9.9	28.2
Female	3.9	7.9
Total	6.8	17.8

Source: National Center for Health Statistics, Health, United States, 2017, CDC <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/health/contents2017.htm#046>



Source: National Institute of Mental Health. Mental Health Information/Statistics. <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness.shtml#us17.pdf>

- The myth of model minority—racial/ethnic minority group perceived to achieve a higher degree of socioeconomic success than the population average—creates an unreasonable pressure on people to meet societal and familial expectation

leading to poor mental health well-being.

- Lack of understanding about mental health and associated stigma, especially among first-generation immigrant AA/PIs lead to denial or neglect of

mental health issues. Often mental illness is considered a weakness and source of shame/burden among the community.

## Structural barriers include:

- Lack of cultural competency among service providers may lead to misdiagnosis and underdiagnosis of mental health problems for the AA/PIs.
- Insufficient multilingual services in healthcare system makes it difficult for AA/PIs to access mental health treatment.
- Lack of or insufficient health insurance, immigration status and high cost of mental health services increase challenges for A/PIs to seek mental health treatment

## Some other challenges:

- Lack of accurate data, evaluation, and research on AA/PIs
- Lack of appropriate intervention strategies for diverse AA/PI populations (including integration of mental health and primary health care services)
- Lack of involvement of AA/PI individuals and family members

## Resources:

1. Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum [www.apiahf.org](http://www.apiahf.org).
2. Asian American Psychological Association [www.aapaonline.org](http://www.aapaonline.org)
3. Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations [www.aapcho.org](http://www.aapcho.org)
4. Center for the Pacific Asian Family [www.cpaf.info](http://www.cpaf.info)
5. Center for Multicultural Mental Health Research [www.multiculturalmentalhealth.org](http://www.multiculturalmentalhealth.org)
6. National Asian Women's Health Organization [www.nawho.org](http://www.nawho.org)
7. National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health Association [www.naapimha.org](http://www.naapimha.org)
8. National Asian Pacific American Families Against Substance Abuse [www.napafasa.org](http://www.napafasa.org)
9. National Library of Medicine <http://asianamericanhealth.nlm.nih.gov/behissues.html>
10. NIH, MedlinePlus - Asian-American Health [www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/asianamericanhealth.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/asianamericanhealth.html)
11. NICOS Chinese Health Coalition (San Francisco) [www.nicoschc.org](http://www.nicoschc.org)

## References:

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3. Key facts about Asian Americans, a diverse and growing population. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/08/key-facts-about-asian-americans/>
4. US Census. (2017) Selected Population Profile in The United States, 2017: American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates. <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>
5. Office of Minority Health, HHS. (2019) Profile: Asian Americans. <https://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?lvl=3&lvlid=63>
6. Office of Minority Health, HHS. (2019) Profile: Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders of <https://www.minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?lvl=3&lvlid=65>
7. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2019). 2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Methodological summary and definitions. Rockville, MD: Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/>
8. Mental and Behavioral Health - Asian Americans <https://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?lvl=4&lvlid=54>
9. Mental and Behavioral Health - Mental and Behavioral Health - Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders <https://www.minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?lvl=4&lvlid=172>
10. Urban Institute, Health Policy. (2019) Fighting the Stigma: Mental Health among Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

*This resource was prepared by the Division of Diversity and Health Equity. It was authored by Raissa Tanquedo, M.D. and Sejal Patel, M.P.H., and was reviewed by Vabren Watts, Ph.D.*