



# APPEAL

ASIAN PACIFIC PARTNERS FOR EMPOWERMENT, ADVOCACY AND LEADERSHIP

## November Newsletter!

### Menthol and Flavor Bans to Greatly Impact NH/PI Communities

It may be shocking to hear that Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islander (NH/PI) smokers have the second highest use of mentholated tobacco products (with black smokers having the highest rate). A 2019 national survey provided disaggregated data revealing that "77% of NH/PI who smoked reported using menthol brands." Therefore, when the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced proposed product standards that would ban the use of menthol in cigarettes as a "characterizing flavor" in addition to all characterizing flavors besides tobacco in cigars, health advocates reacted with great excitement yet cautious optimism.

"Flavored tobacco products' popularity among NH/PIs, including menthol and flavored vapes amongst younger generations, is a major health concern for our NH/PI communities," said **Tana Lepule**, Liaison to the NH/PI Community at APPEAL. "We have been waiting a long time for a tobacco control policy like this to recognize the damage that commercial tobacco is doing to our communities."

The proposed ban would provide a significant beneficial health impact for the NH/PI populations that the tobacco companies have heavily targeted for decades. The tobacco industry continues to sponsor NH/PI heritage month activities and promote brand awareness not only in NH/PI communities in the U.S. but also in the Pacific Islands.

For decades, APPEAL and other health advocacy groups have been speaking out about the great harm that mentholated and flavored tobacco has had on NH/PI and Asian American communities as well as other communities of color and LGBTQ+ persons. Through his testimony to the FDA, APPEAL's Executive Director, **Rod Lew** urged for a comprehensive ban on mentholated tobacco products and flavored cigars on multiple levels. He emphasized banning menthol as a social justice issue due to its devastating impacts on communities of color, made possible in part by campaigns to target those communities, particularly NH/PI and Asian American populations.

"Taking these dangerous products off the market is the only answer to the most

devastating issue in our communities,” said Lew. “In addition, culturally tailored cessation services and other commercial tobacco control programs need to be provided to those smokers disproportionately impacted by menthol and cigarette use.”

Some states, such as California, are taking a proactive approach, with the recent passing of [Proposition 31](#) by California voters. This proposition, which will restrict the sale of certain flavored tobacco products - cigarettes, e-cigarettes, and other tobacco products, shows that Californians aren't waiting on the FDA to make changes.

"With the passing of Proposition 31, we hope to see a decrease in tobacco-use rates for California's NH/PI population," said Lepule.

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## **Webinar Series on How Health Agencies Can Better Serve NH/PI and Asian American Communities**

APPEAL recently hosted a two-part webinar series on advancing health equity by engaging in a dialogue with community leaders, advocates and researchers on how health departments and agencies can engage and best serve NH/PI and Asian American communities.

The NH/PI webinar released a 2022 Guidance Document for state agencies and health departments on how to engage NH/PI communities particularly in commercial tobacco control and cancer control. The Guidance Document, authored by NH/PI affinity group members, outlined key equity principles and for building trust and relationships as a foundational element for engaging communities in long, sustainable collaborations.

**Jake Fitisemanu Jr.**, a longtime NH/PI community leader in West Valley, Utah, stressed the need for disaggregated data. “We are absent in this [epidemiological] data. We are combined in the data with Asian Americans,” said Fitisemanu.

Fitisemanu also emphasized the need for high level administrative buy-in and participation in health agencies and departments. “Invitations won’t come from the mainstream members,” said Fitisemanu. “Bring others with us and start making changes that way.”

APPEAL would like to thank each of the panelists for sharing their expertise, wisdom and insights. If you missed the webinars, you can click the below to view the webinar recordings.

**Session 1: Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander session with Affinity Group Promising Practices Document Highlights and Lessons Learned**

## Session 2: Asian American Session and Dialogue and Development of Promising Practices

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### **SPARC Digital Stories**

APPEAL's SPARC Program in California is excited to announce the launch of the 2022 SPARC Digital Stories Series, which features videos created by SPARC fellows and other advocates from partner organizations like African American Tobacco Control Leadership Council and USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center. Through an extensive training provided by Story Center, the fellows and advocates developed personal stories about how commercial tobacco use impacted them or their community by writing scripts, shooting footage, recording the voiceovers and editing their pieces into 2-3 minute videos. We hope you enjoy them as much as we did!

### **SPARC Digital Stories!**

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### **United in Hope Capstone**

The United in Hope Leadership Program for young adults concluded recently with a 2-day Capstone Summit held on October 12 and 13. Throughout the 9-month long program, the fellows gained advocacy and leadership skills ranging from identifying misinformation on social media, strategizing on creative ways to developing vaccine messaging, and most recently, presentation skills that would be critical when speaking to community leaders or policymakers. Fellows who attended were able to reconnect with each other and celebrate their program accomplishments. The United in Hope fellowship brought young adults from different regions around the country to learn advocacy skills and provide opportunities to collaborate on COVID vaccine equity across NH/PI and Asian American communities. We are so grateful to have worked alongside such incredible individuals and look forward to seeing their contributions in our battle against COVID-19 and health equity.

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### **Welcoming Baolia Xiong and Sora Park Tanjasiri**

APPEAL is excited to announce and welcome our two newest board members.

“The pandemic exposed our country’s long standing structural inequities in health, and I felt the need to step up my support of APPEAL’s mission of capacity building and social justice for AAs and NH/PIs and beyond,” said **Dr. Sora Park Tanjasiri**.

“Nyob zoo os (Hello in Hmong) my name is Baolia Xiong and it is with joy to serve as a part of APPEAL’s Board of Directors. I look forward to creating a more equitable space that allows for Southeast Asian representation in health and wellness,” said **Baolia Xiong**

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## Thank You to Kaying Hang and Peter Cruz

We would like to close out November with a thank you to our outgoing Board of Directors members. **Kaying Hang**, who served as Treasurer, and **Peter Cruz**, who served as Vice Chair. Peter and Kaying have been valuable guiding forces for the organization throughout their long relationships with APPEAL.

While they’ll be missed on the board, we look forward to continuing to see their tremendous contributions to communities and to health equity.



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