



30<sup>th</sup>  
1994  
2024  
ANNIVERSARY



APPEAL

# From Community into Action: 30 Years of Fighting for Health Justice and Equity

2025 ANNUAL REPORT

ASIAN PACIFIC PARTNERS FOR  
EMPOWERMENT, ADVOCACY  
AND LEADERSHIP



#### *ABOUT APPEAL*

*Asian Pacific Partners for Empowerment, Advocacy and Leadership (APPEAL) is a national organization working towards social justice for Asian American (AA) and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NH/PI) communities.*

#### *OUR MISSION*

*We aim to champion social justice and achieve equity and empowerment for Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders by supporting and mobilizing community-led movements through advocacy and leadership development on critical public health issues.*



# A LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## APPEAL LEADERSHIP

Joon-Ho Yu, MPH, PhD (Chair)

Liza Merrill (Treasurer)

Baolia Xiong (Secretary)

Jake Ryan Sumibcay, DrPH, MPH,  
CHES

Sora Park Tanjasiri, DrPH, MPH

CoCo Villaluz

Rod Lew, MPH

## 2025 APPEAL STAFF

Kim Huynh

Jonathan (Tana) Lepule

Rod Lew, MPH

Karen Nguyen

Krishna Smit, MPH, MPA

Jessica (J) Wong, MPA

Duyi (Saphir) Xu, MPH

*Dear Friends,*

Throughout this past year, we have seen our communities come under attack from policies that target immigrants and marginalized communities, threatening public health programs, and dismantling efforts to advance equity and social justice. Never before in recent memory have we seen funding for key public health programs such as commercial tobacco control at risk. And yet during these turbulent times, we have continued our collective struggle to resist attacks on our communities and the effort to silence our voice for health access and health equity. We have heard our communities amplify their voices and witness the next generation of leaders step forward with visibility and purpose. In 2025, APPEAL celebrated 30 years of fighting against the tobacco industry, against cancer and for equity in funding and the fundamental right of our communities to have access to health care and public health resources.

As we begin 2026 and APPEAL's Fourth Decade, I'm excited about the opportunity to continue our meaningful collaborative work with the NH/PI community, the Asian American community and in solidarity across priority populations. In this coming year, we are particularly excited to strengthen our community partnerships throughout the U.S. and the Pacific Islands, and nurture the next generation of leadership.

Through our community capacity building programs and engaging leadership trainings, we remain hopeful and committed to advancing collaborative advocacy campaigns on commercial tobacco, cancer and other critical public health issues that impact our communities.

We thank our many partners who have exemplified the best in community engagement and empowerment, who have fought to uphold principles of health equity and who have inspired us with their leadership to create sustainable change. And we thank those of you who have given generously to APPEAL to support our programs and organization through these difficult times. We wish each of you and your families a very Happy New Year and Happy Lunar New Year!

In solidarity towards justice and equity,

*Rod Lew, MPH  
Executive Director*



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# 30<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CHAMPIONS

APPEAL's 30th Anniversary Champions have made significant organizational, community and policy contributions in helping APPEAL achieve its mission to uplift social justice, equity and empowerment particularly for Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander and Asian American communities. They have modeled meaningful change in our diverse communities by advancing equity in commercial tobacco control policies, cancer prevention and public health systems. APPEAL's 30th Anniversary Champions have inspired all of us with their vision and tireless actions in elevating NH/PI and Asian American voices and providing leadership that has led to creating sustainable change for all of our communities.



**DILEEP G. BAL, MD**



**BARBARA "BOBBIE" S.N. BENAVENTE**



**KIM KU'ULEI BIRNIE**



**JEFFREY B. CABALLERO**



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**MAY JUAN CHEN**



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**CONGRESSMEMBER  
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**LISA FU**



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**KAYING HANG**



**BETTY LEE HAWKS**



**ELAINE ISHIHARA**



**HOWARD KOH, MD**

# 30<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CHAMPIONS



**JONATHAN "TANA"  
LEPULE**



**LILLIAN LEW**



**JAIME MARTINEZ**



**CAROL MCGRUDER**



**SARAH MESA-HAAS**



**CONCHITA MONTAÑA**



**ERIC Y. MOSE**



**VAYONG MOUA**



**ARNAB MUKHERJEA, DrPH**



**DAVID NAKASHIMA**



**JEANNETTE NOLTENIUS**



**PAULA HEALANI  
PALMER, PhD**



**LOLA SABLAN-SANTOS**



**ALISON SHIGAKI, MD**



**DONG SUH**



**FAHINA TAVAKE-PASI**



**ELISA TONG, MD**



**VALERIE R. WHIPPS**



**STAN YOGI**

# EMPOWERING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

Since the founding of APPEAL, leadership development has been our core legacy that has created ripple effects by fostering grassroots leadership, influencing policies, and transforming communities. These efforts continue to empower AA & NH/PI populations to take ownership of their health, advocate for health justice, and create sustainable changes in public health systems.

Our leadership development models have not only enhanced individual leadership skills but also nurtured community capacity, built advocacy networks and movements, and challenged systemic change that perpetuated disparities facing AA & NH/PI populations.

*I joined the APPEAL training program to deepen my understanding of the disproportionate health impacts of tobacco, building on my initial work assessing its effects on public health. Prior to APPEAL, my research focused on the legacy of historical redlining and its potential influence on contemporary cancer rates and smoking cessation outcomes. Through APPEAL, I gained valuable insight into how the tobacco industry has strategically targeted racial and ethnic communities. This perspective has provided me with critical context and inspired new ideas for future research and grant development.”*



## 30th anniversary/leadership training

In June 2025, APPEAL hosted “A New Era of Transformative Leadership: Empowering Communities for Sustainable Change”, to celebrate APPEAL’s 30th anniversary, where we will be discussing Asian Americans (AAs), Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (NH/PIs) commercial tobacco control, cancer prevention related disparities. The 2-day in-person conference is an opportunity for both newer commercial tobacco control and cancer prevention advocates and those more experienced to participate, network, and engage.



*“Before joining APPEAL, I felt like it was a case of I didn’t know what I didn’t know. Through the program, I gained valuable insights into efforts to educate AANHPI populations and the strategies tobacco companies use to target racial and ethnic communities. What resonated most with me, however, was the sense of community within the leadership cohort as we work together to drive change and creative positive impacts in our respective communities. I truly appreciated learning from the diverse roles each person plays in this collective effort. Additionally, the policy discussions and learning opportunities were incredibly insightful and enriching.”*

Mimi Ton, 30th Anniversary APPEAL Fellow

# MOBILIZING AA&NH/PI RESISTANCE TO BIG TOBACCO

The tobacco industry has aggressively focused on menthol and flavored products in neighborhoods with high Asian American populations, exploiting both biological and cultural vulnerabilities.

Menthol masks the harshness of tobacco smoke, making cigarettes easier to start and harder to quit, and companies have long promoted menthol brands as “smooth,” “cool,” or “refreshing.” These products are heavily discounted and prominently displayed in stores located in Asian immigrant communities, alongside advertising in Asian-language media.

The industry has also capitalized on higher smoking prevalence in many Asian countries, normalizing menthol use among immigrants by framing it as familiar, socially acceptable, and less harmful. This targeted marketing reinforces smoking initiation, sustains addiction, and deepens tobacco-related health disparities in Asian American communities.

Today, the industry continues to target AA & NH/PI groups through concentrated menthol marketing, point-of-sale discounts in immigrant neighborhoods, and advertising in Asian-language media. Tobacco companies also use flavored e-cigarettes, social media influencers, and culturally themed packaging to appeal to youth and immigrant communities. These ongoing tactics maintain high visibility of tobacco especially menthol within AA & NH/PI populations and make quitting more difficult.

## Community Forum: The Power of Identity: Dismantling the tobacco industry’s narrative of youth

The Power of Identity Community Forum highlighted how belonging, peer pressure, and social media deeply influence youth especially AA and NH/PI youth who often face cultural pressures, stigma around asking for help, and targeted marketing of flavored tobacco products. In collaboration with CYAN, Discussions emphasized how social media normalizes vaping, creating a false sense that “everyone is doing it,” while newer tobacco products disproportionately reach AA and NH/PI communities through culturally tailored flavors and online influencer content. The forum underscored the need to center AA and NH/PI youth voices, build culturally grounded spaces of belonging, and co-create solutions that address both identity development and targeted industry practices. Resources and support services tailored for AA and NH/PI communities were also shared.



# Breathe Free Day!

[WATCH VIDEO HERE](#)

Breathe Free Day! is a National Day of Advocacy and Awareness on commercial tobacco control in NH/PI and AA communities sponsored by APPEAL.



**Veasna Mai**  
Community Member



**Taunuu Ve'e**  
Commissioner  
CA Commission on Asian and  
Pacific Islanders Affairs



**Lucianne Latu**  
Assistant Director  
Taulama for Tongans

## Breathe Free Day

On May 1, 2025, the APPEAL team launched the 2nd Annual Breathe Free Day Campaign. Breathe Free Day is a National Awareness Day dedicated to shed more light on how commercial tobacco is impacting our AA & NH/PI communities.

Throughout this briefing and month-long campaign, we uplifted community stories, perspectives and experiences with commercial tobacco from different levels of engagement from community members, to Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and data equity. In the realm of tobacco cessation, APPEAL has implemented several strategies to promote equity through our 4-Prong Policy Change Model. We aimed to educate and guide AA & NH/PI communities in advocating for commercial tobacco control.

*“APPEAL’s events that I’ve had the honor of attending this year have taken my breath away in their inclusivity and the way you’re able to bring such a diverse crowd together. This week was no different -- every moment of connection and conversation at (these events) in person was a gift that I don’t (often) have access to. As a young person, I felt heard . I feel realigned and grounded and have so many new ideas to bring back to my own work. When you bring people together magic happens! Much appreciation to APPEAL!” - Mia Ayer, 30th Anniversary APPEAL Fellow Policy Manager, Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum*

*“We dedicate this day to those who have family members who’ve been lost due to tobacco-related disease but also to those who work tirelessly to help someone with tobacco related disease, whether in health centers, hospitals or advocates. Including those who have fought lung cancer or for lung cancer screening.” - Rod Lew, Executive Director of APPEAL*

# STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Over the past 30 years, APPEAL has recognized and championed the importance of working with various local, regional, and national partners to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate tobacco prevention resources, addressing health disparities, leveraging diverse resources, leadership development, promoting civic engagement, empowering communities, and sustaining long-term impact



## Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander Partnerships

APPEAL has continued its support of the autonomy of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI) communities. The partnership includes collaborating on activities through webinars, leadership training, and brochure development with organizations such as Pacific Islander Health Partnership.

More importantly, APPEAL supports the Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander autonomy with activities such as the development of a guidance document on how to work with our NH/PI communities. Additional support includes advocating alongside organizations like Sheri Daniels & Papa Ola Lokahi for NH/PI funding.

Our efforts towards building community partnerships amplify impact and ensure sustainable progress toward our mission of promoting health equity and social justice for Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AA & NH/PI) communities. Partnerships with community organizations help ensure that our programs and advocacy efforts are culturally tailored, linguistically accessible, and aligned with local priorities for organizations rooted in their communities.



## The Future of Commercial Tobacco for Priority Populations

*In October 2025, APPEAL convened leaders and advocates from diverse communities for a two-day summit in San Francisco, California, bringing together priority populations committed to advancing health equity. Over the course of the summit, participants examined the current barriers to commercial tobacco control facing priority communities, developed actionable strategies to elevate their leadership and influence in tobacco control efforts, and explored ways to strengthen cross-community collaboration. Together, these discussions laid the foundation for a joint health justice collective focused on advancing equity in tobacco control and cessation.*

# STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

as of 9/30/25

<b>Assets</b>		
	Cash & Cash Equivalents	1,087,980
	Security Deposits	650
	Accounts Receivable	238,266
	<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>1,326,246</b>
<b>Liabilities</b>		
	Accounts Payable	38,938
	Credit Cards	28,922
	Accrued Vacation	41,875
	Other Current Liabilities	28,173
	<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>137,909</b>
<b>Equity</b>		
	Retained Earnings	746,543
	Net Income	442,444
	<b>Total Equity</b>	<b>1,188,987</b>
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES &amp; EQUITY</b>		<b>\$ 1,326,246</b>

# APPEAL CONTRIBUTORS

*We would like to thank all of our funders and donors for your generous support of APPEAL over 30 years!*

## APPEAL CONTRIBUTORS (CURRENT AND PAST):

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation  
California Department of Public Health,  
Tobacco Prevention Program  
ClearWay Minnesota  
Minnesota Department of Health Blue  
Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota  
Tobacco-Related Disease Research  
Program  
National Institute of Minority Health and  
Health Disparities (NIMHD)  
Truth Initiative

## DONORS: BRONZE SPONSOR (\$5000)

The Tanjasiri Family  
Rod Lew and Karen Rezai

## ADDITIONAL DONORS (PARTIAL LIST)

Joon Ho-Yu and Rebecca Engrav  
Baolia Xiong  
Liza Merrill  
CoCo Villaluz  
Jake Ryann Sumibcay  
African American Tobacco Control Leadership  
Council  
APICAT for Health  
Asian Health Services (AHS)  
Asian Services in Action (ASIA)  
Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum  
(APIAHF)  
May Chen  
Betty Lee Hawks and Dick Hawks  
Elaine Ishihara  
Lillian Lew  
The LOOP  
David Nakashima  
Tobacco Cessation Policy Research Center, UC  
Davis  
Elisa Tong  
Suzanne Furuya  
Rebecca Engrav & Joon Ho Yu



## SUPPORT APPEAL!

For over 30 years, APPEAL has empowered Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander communities to lead the fight for health equity by confronting the tobacco industry's targeted harm. Through leadership development, community-driven advocacy, and cross-cultural partnerships, APPEAL equips local leaders with the tools, data, and support they need to protect their communities and advance tobacco control and cessation policies.

Your donation fuels this work supporting grassroots leaders, strengthening coalitions, and building sustainable, community-led solutions that save lives.

When you give to APPEAL, you invest in healthier futures, stronger communities, and a movement rooted in justice, equity, and collective power.



*scan to donate today!*

[www.appealforhealth.org/donate](http://www.appealforhealth.org/donate)

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AND LEADERSHIP**

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