

Peer TA: Director's Den

May 2014: Addressing the Needs of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in Poverty



The Director's Den is a special section of the Peer TA website that was created to facilitate communication between the Director of the Office of Family Assistance (OFA) and TANF program stakeholders. Periodically, the OFA Director will provide timely insights and useful information. This article seeks to address current issues related to the program, poverty, and American families. I welcome (and encourage) your feedback and communication through peerta@icfi.com.

Greetings. I was sitting in my office earlier this month when I came across a [news clipping](#) about a growing challenge facing many families. As we celebrate Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month this May, we recognize that Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders have a rich history and illuminating culture that have been delicately woven into the fabric of America. We must also take this time to recognize a growing set of [challenges](#) that many Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) face, the fact of which contradicts some common misconceptions. Many Asian Americans experience higher levels of socio-economic status. However, due to changing demographics, evolving labor markets and shifting economics, a growing percentage of AAPI are living in poverty.

An estimated [13 percent](#) of AAPI families lived in poverty in 2012. The 13 percent represents an increase of [24 percent](#) between 2007 and 2012 (higher than the rate of increase for non-Hispanic whites and African

Americans).¹ Despite consistently lower rates of child poverty when compared to other racial/ethnic groups, [poverty](#) among AAPI children has seen an uptick since the Great Recession.

AAPIs represent the [fastest growing](#) racial/ethnic group in the United States. The AAPI population is increasingly diverse, as are the needs of the families in different communities experiencing varying rates of [housing instability](#), [food insecurity](#), [healthcare coverage](#) and [domestic violence](#). AAPIs, for the most part, are [concentrated](#) in regions of the country with consistently higher cost-of-living areas, which increases economic uncertainty. Despite some variations based on ethnicity and household type, AAPIs have higher rates of unemployment and underemployment than the general population. Greater rates of poverty are being seen among [native born](#) AAPIs, as poverty rates of AAPI immigrants—which account for the largest share of new residents—have remained relatively stable.

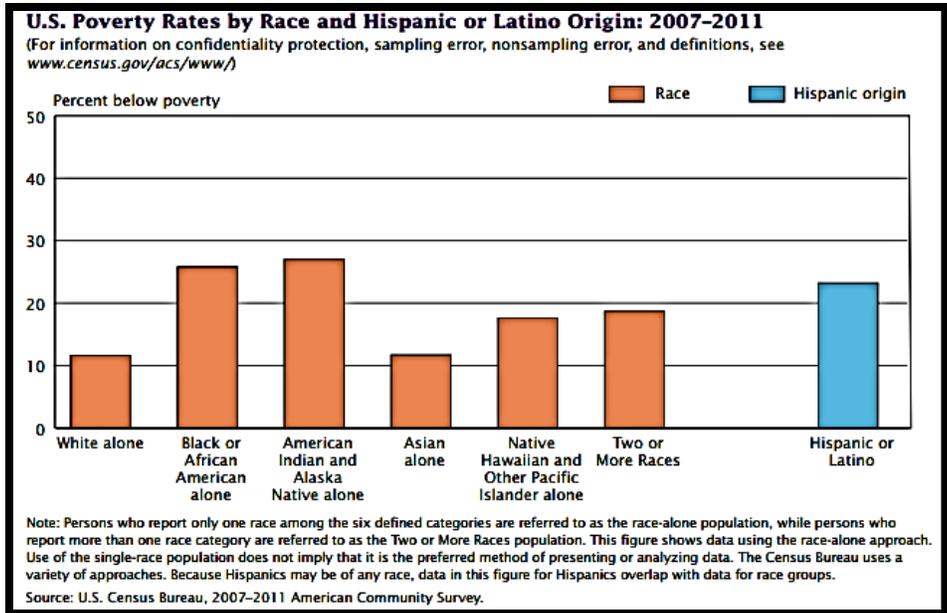
¹ 2012 data:

http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_12_1YR_S1701&prodType=table

2007 data:

http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_07_1YR_S1701&prodType=table

Passed in 1996, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program has been utilized by millions of families for a variety of benefits. Approximately two percent of TANF recipients are AAPIs and these individuals have access to direct cash assistance, job skills training, employment placement services and subsidized employment opportunities that can



stabilize economic situations and build ladders to economic success. A while back, as I was driving around the San Francisco Bay area, I witnessed firsthand the “invisible” phenomena. Despite pockets of poverty from coast to coast, there are tremendous opportunities to identify and address the challenges faced by AAPIs through strategic partnerships between TANF, community- and faith-based organizations, immigrant-serving programs, workforce development programs and other health and human services. As was stated earlier, May is Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month – and with that comes an opportunity to begin a dialog about how to address increased poverty among AAPIs and how we can work together to support families on the journey to economic self-sufficiency.

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