

Debunking common misperceptions of Asian community health

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Asian Americans have higher or faster-growing rates of cancer of various kinds—including breast cancer and cervical cancer—than any other ethnic group, yet often don't receive the necessary medical treatment. Common misperceptions about Asian health issues contribute to a lack of health awareness and a reluctance to seek care, according to research published in *Public Relations Review*.

Asian Americans don't fit the common societal perception of a group suffering from health disparities, according to Lan Ni, University of Houston associate professor of communication and lead study author. Compounding the problem, health care organizations positioned to help may be hindered by their own misperceptions about this ethnic group.

"As a group, Asian Americans are mistakenly assumed to have both good physical and [mental health](#) and to have the financial resources to take care of themselves. The reality is they face as many challenging health issues as other [ethnic groups](#)," said Ni, who collaborated with Zhiwen Xiao and Wenlin Liu at UH and Qi Wang at Villanova University.

Heart disease accounts for about 26% of total deaths for Asian immigrants while mental health problems and overall suicide rates are also high in the Asian immigrant community. This study focused on cancer prevention and awareness in the Asian community. Previous research has shown Asian immigrants are the first racial group to experience cancer as the leading cause of death (2000), while heart disease is the leading cause of death for other Americans.

The 222 Asian American survey participants from Houston, Texas rated their perceptions of how community health organizations, including those run by churches and other programs, could improve relationship management tactics and communications to empower the community to seek appropriate care.

Among the suggestions, [health care organizations](#) need to not just focus on the design of their messages to ensure it will resonate with its intended audience, but they must also build genuine relationships with members of the community they serve in order to better understand their needs.

"When individuals perceive that their community organizations have the best intentions for them, they may be motivated to communicate actively about their health issues," said Ni. "This effect can be considered as one way to manifest community empowerment and promote the participation of people and organizations toward the health goals of the community."

More information: Lan Ni et al, Relationship management as antecedents to public communication behaviors: Examining empowerment and public health among Asian Americans, *Public Relations Review* (2019). DOI: [10.1016/j.pubrev.2019.101835](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2019.101835)

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