



STATE OF  
ASIAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDERS  
IN SAN FRANCISCO

# Executive Summary



# INTRODUCTION

San Francisco is renowned for its diversity and multicultural vibrancy, home to significant Asian and Pacific Islander populations whose presence enriches the city's social, economic, and cultural fabric.

Asians and Pacific Islanders are over a third of the city's population. San Francisco's API community is diverse, made up of first-generation immigrants and those whose families have been in the city for generations; of elders and the next generation of youth. Members of the API community speak many languages, including English, Cantonese, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Mandarin, Japanese, Korean, Thai, Burmese, Cambodian, and more. Together, Asians and Pacific Islanders are a powerful cultural, economic, and civic force in San Francisco's rich history and hopeful future.

Yet the unique needs of the API community in San Francisco have too often been overlooked and misunderstood by city leaders. More than a third of Asians and Pacific Islanders in the city are living below the poverty line, making up a disproportionate share of those in poverty.

The city's housing and displacement crisis has had an acute impact on API communities, threatening historic API neighborhoods and worsening the economic challenges API families face. Overall, despite their significant presence and ongoing contributions,

these communities face a range of pressing challenges that influence their health, safety, economic stability, housing security, and political representation.

The API Council is a 57-member coalition of nonprofit organizations in San Francisco that is building the voice, visibility, and influence of the city's diverse Asian and Pacific Islander community.

The API Council advocates for the needs of the API community through data and research to highlight the resource gaps that exist and the need for linguistically and culturally appropriate programs to serve our multi-ethnic community. Nearly 76% of the clients that API Council's member organizations serve are immigrants, and 90% are living below the poverty line. Our members work to ensure that these diverse San Franciscans have the resources they need to thrive.

The Council commissioned the ["State of Asian and Pacific Islanders in San Francisco"](#) report to illuminate both the challenges and potential policy solutions to improve the wellbeing of the API community. The goal of the report is to provide a substantive overview of the current state of APIs in San Francisco that can foster a deeper understanding among policymakers, community leaders, and stakeholders to drive informed decision-making and resource allocation.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This executive summary offers a high-level summary of the report's findings across five critical areas: health, safety, economics, housing, and political representation. The full report with a deeper dive into the data can be found [here](#).

A companion [policy platform](#) from the API Council will detail targeted initiatives and actionable steps the city can undertake in collaboration with community leaders, healthcare providers, businesses, and civic organizations. This executive summary includes select policy recommendations at the end.

## POPULATION

San Francisco is home to a growing and diverse Asian and Pacific Islander population. Between 2010 and 2020, the share of the city's residents who are Asian grew from 35.8% to 37.5%. The Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders population held steady at .8%.

- The API community is changing. A breakdown of Asian ethnic groups shows that Indians had the highest growth in population. The Chinese portion of the Asian population decreased, but is still the majority ethnicity at nearly 38%.
- The API community is aging. Among all major racial/ethnic groups, the Asian population has the highest proportion of seniors.
- The API community is in school. API students make up the largest racial/ethnic group in San Francisco Unified School District, at 37.7%.

**37.5%**

Asian and Pacific Islanders make up nearly 40% of San Francisco's population and are a powerful cultural, economic, and civic force in the city.



# HEALTH

Stigma and lack of access to culturally competent health care exacerbates physical and mental health disparities. API residents also face barriers to accessing affordable and healthy food. Economic struggles have a direct impact on the health outcomes of API residents. Lower income correlates with higher health risks, and the stress associated with economic instability can exacerbate mental health issues.

- Only a small fraction of food outlets in API-dense neighborhoods accept SNAP or WIC, essentials for low-income families seeking assistance.
- Language barriers may further hinder access to information about available food assistance programs and resources.
- Despite high levels of poverty, API residents utilize safety net services, including those related to food security, at rates much lower than the average.
- Asians suffered the highest number of deaths from COVID, showing the vulnerability of this group in terms of exposure and lack of access to treatment.
- Risk of preterm birth in San Francisco varies significantly by race/ethnicity. Risk of preterm birth is approximately 30% higher for Asian pregnant people than for White pregnant people.
- A strong network of community-based organizations (CBOs) advocates for and provides culturally appropriate food services. Trust in these organizations is high: approximately 25% of API residents have accessed food from local CBOs for over three years.

Trust in CBOs providing culturally appropriate food services is high: approximately 25% of API residents have accessed food from local CBOs for over three years.

# SAFETY

The rise in anti-Asian hate incidents and racism, particularly as exacerbated by the pandemic, remains a significant concern.

- Many older residents still don't feel safe, despite reported hate crimes targeting Asian people decreasing since 2021.
- SF police investigated 60 reports of hate crimes against API residents in 2021, a six-fold increase over 2020. In 2023, the SFPD investigated 14 incidents.
- The Coalition for Community Safety and Justice, founded in 2019 to address public safety concerns, provided rapid-response support to 73 residents in 2023. The coalition focused on community-centered services and built cross-racial solidarity while supporting victims with wrap-around services.

## ECONOMICS

The API community faces challenges and systemic barriers in securing stable, equitable economic opportunities and employment.

- There is significant unemployment among highly educated API residents.
- API workers face barriers to career advancement stemming from racial discrimination, limited access to professional networks, and cultural biases, among other factors.
- APIs who seek to start their own businesses often grapple with challenges such as access to capital and competing in markets that may not understand culturally specific products or services.
- Community organizations play a pivotal role in supporting API individuals through job training, advocacy of workers rights, and programs to improve financial literacy.

A significant portion of the API community is paid low wages and struggles with underemployment particularly among recent immigrants and seniors.

## HOUSING

API residents often face specific hurdles related to housing affordability and quality. Despite the significant percentage of API residents who live in poverty, the public discourse and policy narrative surrounding housing and homelessness often overlooks how APIs are impacted.

- API community members in low-paying jobs face significant challenges in securing affordable housing.
- Many API residents live in increasingly precarious housing situations, such as SROs, or in overcrowded, multigenerational homes. While technically considered “housed,” these individuals and families often hover on the brink of homelessness, lacking security and adequate living standards.
- Almost 40% of API households in San Francisco are considered rent burdened or severely rent burdened.
- API-focused organizations are pivotal in providing support. During the pandemic, organizations used their resources and networks to provide funds for rent relief and other supports.

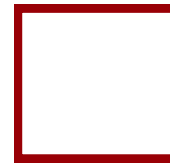
Many API residents live in increasingly precarious housing situations, such as SROs, or in overcrowded, multigenerational homes.



# POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

Despite being more than a third of the city's population, API residents are underrepresented in local politics. This underrepresentation is misaligned with the growing, diverse, culturally and economically significant contributions of the API community.

- API elected representation has declined sharply in the past decade.
- Asians represent a powerful if untapped voting bloc. Voter turnout in the February 2022 school board recall was highest among those receiving Chinese-language voting materials.
- API Council member organizations engage community members and empower them to get involved in advocacy.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

Through an equity lens, we must uplift the API community's enduring role as key contributors to the city's vibrancy, by expanding services and resources for low-income and underserved API residents who are part of the largest community in need in San Francisco.

The API Council [policy platform](#) will provide recommendations for strengthening the API community's safety net and reimagining the city's cultural hubs. These recommendations will include:

## Health

- Expand safety net programs that provide vital life-linking services
- Institute a Mayor's Office of Food Security and Justice to strengthen coordination and alleviate hunger

## Safety

- Invest in pedestrian-friendly streetscapes and other infrastructure improvements to create a safe and welcoming environment for all
- Build robust initiatives to fund community safety and security
- Expand creative placemaking to foster belonging and attract visitors

## Political Representation

- Reflect API representation in the Mayor's office and other leadership positions
- Apply API racial equity lens to policies and resource allocation
- Foster and provide resources for collaboration across BIPOC community coalitions

## Economics

- Strengthen commercial corridors and extend small business entrepreneurship
- Leverage Inflation Reduction Act opportunities to promote local hiring and green our neighborhoods

## Housing

- Ensure key priorities of APIs through a racial equity lens at the county level as it builds new housing, acquisitions and preservation with a concurrent focus on neighborhood infrastructure

# METHODOLOGY

The State of Asian and Pacific Islanders in San Francisco uses data from the 2010 and 2020 decennial Census alongside other significant community surveys, peer-reviewed journal articles, and in-depth interviews with key stakeholders. A full methodology can be found on page four of the [full report](#).