



ASIAN PACIFIC DEVELOPMENT CENTER

In 2014, The Colorado Trust launched the **Health Equity Advocacy (HEA) Strategy**, a multi-phased investment in building a strong and diverse field of health equity advocates to ensure equitable health outcomes for Colorado’s most vulnerable. A centerpiece of the second phase of this strategy (2015-2016) included providing financial and capacity-building support to a cohort of direct service, community organizing, and policy advocacy organizations across the state. This support was designed to strengthen individual and collective capacity to “seed” an emerging health equity advocacy field in Colorado.

The following is part of a **“Seeds of the Field”** series of profiles of each of the 17 cohort members funded in the second phase of the HEA Strategy.

Seeding a Health Equity Advocacy Field: The Story of Asian Pacific Development Center

The mission of the [Asian Pacific Development Center](#) (APDC) is to advance the well-being of Asian Pacific Islander (API) communities of Colorado by providing culturally appropriate and integrated behavioral, medical, and related health services. APDC was formed in 1980 by a group of community leaders who endeavored to provide culturally relevant mental health services to Southeast Asian immigrants and refugees who sought sanctuary in Colorado during and after the Vietnam War. Today, APDC provides a comprehensive, integrated system of care that meets the needs of API, immigrant, and refugee communities in Aurora and throughout the Denver metro area. These blended services ensure a comprehensive and coordinated approach to behavioral health,

primary medical care, adult education, youth mentoring and leadership development, victim assistance, health insurance enrollment assistance, legal aid, and translation and interpretation through Colorado Language Connection.

As a leader in advancing the well-being of API communities through direct services, APDC is a key partner in building a health equity advocacy field throughout Colorado. By nature of its work, APDC has a direct connection to API, immigrant, and refugee communities facing health inequities. The organization serves as a trusted community resource that brings community voices and stories to the fore of policy debates, which makes for a more robust and diverse health equity advocacy field. Additionally, public data has historically been lacking for API communities, especially at the disaggregated level, and service organizations such as APDC have become a key source of data for documenting disparities.

APDC's Phase 2 Work

Entering Phase 2, APDC decided to focus on growing its organizing efforts to advocate for programs and policies that directly affect API, immigrant, and refugee communities. Historically, APDC had done some advocacy work, but now—being a part of the HEA cohort—it wanted to leverage the knowledge and resources of its partners to deepen its advocacy work. APDC built its advocacy capacity by developing new and existing advocacy partnerships and adapting organizing trainings for community leaders.

Through their work providing health insurance assistance, APDC's staff discovered that Medicaid benefits for refugees, asylees, and other protected-status immigrants that do not become US Citizens were terminated after seven years, according to a Health Care Policy and Financing (HCPF) Medicaid policy. This policy greatly affected Colorado's vulnerable refugee community and APDC decided to take action. By collaborating with policy advocacy partners, including HEA cohort member Colorado Center on Law and Policy, APDC successfully advocated to change this policy so Medicaid benefits were no longer time-bound.

Even though this was a big policy win, APDC recognized that the problem could have been prevented if they had been at the table from the beginning to educate decision-



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– Harry Budisidharta, Chief Executive Officer

makers about the impacts of policy decisions on its communities. This realization continues to drive APDC's efforts to infuse health equity advocacy in its work to reduce obstacles and burdens in direct service work. Harry Budisidharta, APDC's chief executive officer, elaborates,

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With support from an HEA technical assistance grant, APDC sought to increase its organizing capacity by partnering with the Stapleton Foundation, another HEA cohort member. The Stapleton Foundation's *be well* Block Captain Community Engagement Model trains community leaders to engage fellow community members in advocating for issues that most affect their families. APDC piloted the Block Captain trainings among its Karen community, an ethnic minority population of refugees from Burma. Through this leadership training program, Block Captains were able to recognize, understand, and use their power to influence systems, policies, research, and programs that could hinder or advance their ability to lead healthy lives in their communities. They also identified recurring issues and patterns affecting their communities, while providing direct feedback and direction for APDC's advocacy work. APDC hopes to build a pipeline of leaders in the API immigrant and refugee community so they can begin to occupy and have access to the spaces and decision makers that influence the policies and programs directly affecting their communities. Justin Valas, APDC's health policy advocate, further explains,

The communities we serve are often heavily impacted by policy decisions where they're never consulted or brought to the table, and so in order for us to really represent and center our community, we decided we needed to continue to provide direct services, but we also need to advocate, and make sure that there's less work on mitigation of negative impacts and actually moving forward on the policies that really reflect the needs of the community.

Laying the Groundwork for an Emerging Field

APDC is committed to building upon the advocacy work seeded in Phase 2, and APDC staff have recently completed an 8-week advocacy training hosted by HEA cohort member Colorado Cross-Disability Coalition, which will be a crucial component of deepening APDC's organizing and advocacy work. APDC is dedicated to empowering its communities to advocate for themselves, building up new community leaders to serve



leadership roles on APDC's board, management, and staff, and ensuring that community leaders are present at decision making spaces within other coalitions. APDC's community leaders have identified critical needs for their communities around housing, transportation, and health coverage, and APDC has begun to hold workshops regarding renters' rights, immigrant rights, police interactions, family law, and other common legal issues within the immigrant and refugee community.

A crucial component of ADPC's work moving forward will be to connect with other API populations not currently engaged in advocacy work or connected to APDC. The API community of the Denver-Metro area is comprised of a multitude of ethnic communities, each with distinct needs, languages, and structures. In order to build the health equity advocacy field, APDC plans to expand their outreach to these communities through intentional, long-term relationship building, as well as to refine their advocacy trainings to ensure that they are accessible and draw in segments of the community who are new to advocacy.

Looking Forward

Beginning in 2017, the 17 HEA cohort members, including APDC, are launching a new phase of work focused on further cultivating the seeds collectively planted across the state in Phase 2. Ultimately, guided by common values and empowered communities, cohort members will be aligning their change efforts to dismantle structural and racial inequities and build equitable health systems so that all Coloradans can thrive. APDC is poised to serve as a leader in this collective endeavor.

Highlights: APDC's Seeds of the Field

- Relationships with policy advocacy and community organizing groups expanded to support more effective advocacy efforts
- Cadre of community leaders from the API community trained in community organizing and equipped to advocate for immigrant and refugee rights
- Leadership pipeline for the API community

