



**Asian American Federation**

# **Asian American Seniors in New York City: *An Updated Snapshot***



***August 26, 2016***

Dedicated to the memory of  
Midori Shimanouchi Lederer and Ida Shimanouchi

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# About the Asian American Federation

## **Mission Statement**

To raise the influence and well-being of the pan-Asian American community through research, policy advocacy, public awareness, and organizational development.

## **What We Do**

As a nonprofit leadership organization, AAF strengthens the capacity of community-based social services by supporting over 60 member agencies and other grassroots organizations in the fields of health & human services, education, economic development, civic participation, and social justice. Our expertise includes:

- *Research & Policy Advocacy:* We produce comprehensive socioeconomic research publications to highlight community needs and advocate for policy changes to improve access to essential services.
- *Organizational Development:* We identify newcomer communities that need social services and incubate new nonprofit groups to meet those needs. We also provide technical assistance and leadership development to help agencies build their capacity.
- *Special Initiatives:* We respond to emerging community needs, such as natural disasters, senior services, and mental health issues. We focus our efforts to raise awareness of and address issues affecting the community.

# Welcome

In New York City, Asians have the fastest-growing senior population, with a significant portion of those seniors being some of the poorest New Yorkers. While our community has a number of strong nonprofit organizations to help our seniors adjust to their lives in the U.S., these organizations are operating beyond full capacity, as advocates have to help seniors with a gamut of services, from finding affordable housing, to combating food insecurity, to accessing medical and mental health services, and much more. The biggest challenge they face is the limited public and private funding available to adequately support the growing demand for services.

Rather than simply present the demographic information about our city's Asian American seniors, we thought it was important to give the seniors and frontline leaders a voice in outlining what they felt were the unmet needs, as well as the policy changes necessary to ensure that seniors are given the resources to live full lives.

Many thanks to our member agencies who helped us collect extensive data for the senior survey and gave thoughtful feedback on our report: Chinese-American Planning Council Open Door, Council of Peoples Organization, Hamilton-Madison House, Homecrest Community Services, India Home, Japanese American Association of New York, Japanese American Social Services, Inc., Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York, South Asian Council for Social Services, and United Chinese Association of Brooklyn. We also thank Dr. Duy Nguyen of Temple University for his help in planning our report.

This report would not have been possible without the generous support of our funders: AARP, Long Mountain Road Foundation, and the Office of the Queens Borough President, Melinda Katz. Finally, we thank New York City Councilmember Margaret Chin, Chair of the Aging Committee, who remains one of the biggest champions for senior services.

Sincerely,



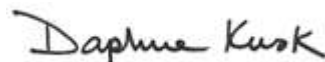
Jo-Ann Yoo  
Executive Director  
Asian American Federation

AARP is honored to support Asian American Federation's and all of its coalition members' commitment to the Asian American & Pacific Islander (AAPI) community in New York City. "Asian American Seniors in New York City: An Updated Snapshot" demonstrates the rapid growth of the Asian American seniors of New York City.

Now at 16 percent of the overall New York City 50-plus population, the Asian 50-plus population faces language barriers, educational attainment, income, housing, social isolation and health challenges and barriers. With the AAPI community, useful meaningful data to get to the true needs of each separate ethnic group means disaggregated data. This report delves deeper by providing the rich disaggregated data that reveals the stark needs of each AAPI ethnic group reported.

Thank you, Asian American Federation, for preparing this vital report adding invaluable information and insights for this rapidly growing AAPI 50-plus segment. As AARP is committed to raising the issues and needs of the AAPI 50-plus communities, we hope this report will be used by individuals, community-based organizations, non-profit groups, the media, funders, and policy makers to build the cases for funding, policies, legislation, and advocacy to improve the lives of Asian Americans & Pacific Islanders 50-plus.

Sincerely,



Daphne Kwok  
AARP Vice President of Multicultural Leadership  
Asian American and Pacific Islander Audience  
Strategy

# Executive Summary

Asian Americans are the fastest growing segment of the senior population in New York City, now representing 16 percent of all seniors ages 50 years and older. Yet programs and resources available to Asian seniors have failed to keep pace with this growth. When it comes to New York City's social service funding for seniors, only 2.7 percent went to senior programs focused on Asians.<sup>1</sup> The funding gap can be traced to two major factors. The consolidation of many social service grants into fewer, larger grant opportunities has led to the exclusion of Asian-led social service providers from the competitive process. Asian-led organizations are often smaller and have less capacity to take on larger grants, despite being in the best position to serve Asian seniors because of the trust and deep roots they have developed in their communities. Secondly, the model minority myth disguises the fact that Asian seniors in New York City are among the poorest seniors in the country. The goal of this report is to dispel these myths and to highlight the great need among Asian seniors.

Key findings of this report include:

- Growth in the Asian senior population in New York City is driven by Asian seniors immigrating late in life and by Asian immigrants aging into senior status,
- Major shifts in demographics are changing the ethnic mix of the Asian senior population in New York City. South Asian and Other Asian groups have senior populations that more than tripled in size from 2000 to 2014,
- Asian seniors are more likely to live in multigenerational households than other seniors,
- Asian seniors are less likely to live in large housing complexes, making Neighborhood Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORC), based in neighborhoods with less dense housing, a better policy fit for Asian seniors,
- The high rates of limited English ability among Asian seniors increase social isolation,
- The diversity of languages spoken in the Asian community makes outreach and provision of services a challenge,
- Asian seniors in New York City are less well-educated than Asian seniors nationally and other seniors in NYC,
- As a consequence, Asian seniors are more likely to be poor and low income than Asian seniors nationally and other seniors in NYC,
- Asian seniors are less likely to have health insurance coverage and to receive Social Security benefits than other seniors.
- Asian seniors in our survey relied on social service organizations to meet social, nutritional and informational needs.

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<sup>1</sup>Asian American Federation (2015). Analysis of City Government Funding to Social Service Organizations Serving the Asian American Community in New York City. New York, NY. Available online at [http://www.aafederation.org/doc/City\\_Social\\_Services\\_Report\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.aafederation.org/doc/City_Social_Services_Report_FINAL.pdf)

# Executive Summary

In order to address the increasing needs among Asian seniors, the Federation recommends that the City:

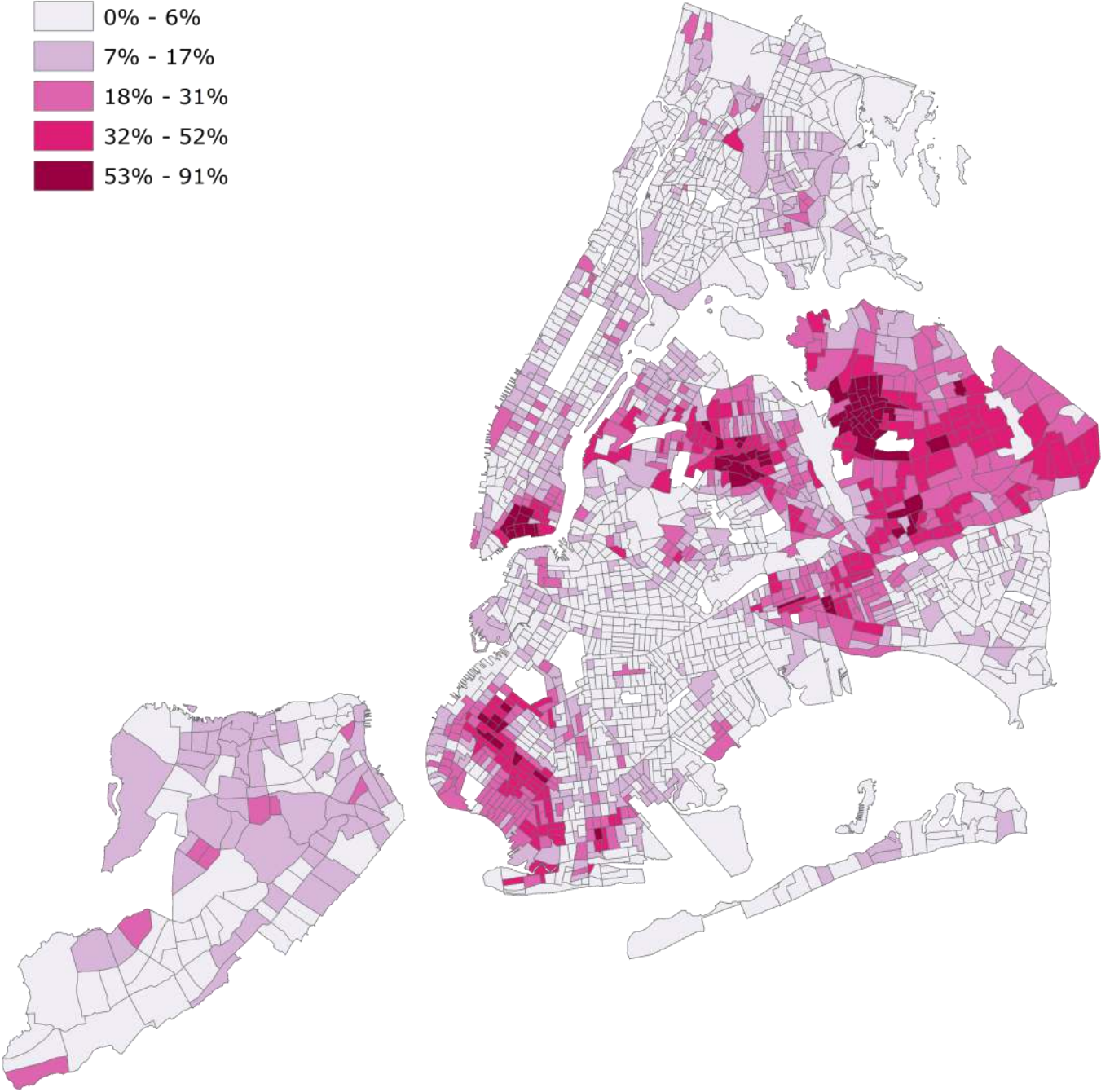
- Increase the resources available for programs addressing Asian seniors,
- Create smaller grant opportunities so that smaller social service providers can compete for City funding,
- Find opportunities to expand the NORC and Neighborhood-NORC programs to include areas with growing populations of Asian seniors,
- Build capacity in Asian-led senior programs which are more likely to provide the culturally and linguistically appropriate services for Asians seniors,
- Ensure outreach to Asian seniors is done in language and through trusted information sources for each community, including ethnic media and social service organizations,
- Improve and expand transportation options for seniors, especially immigrant seniors with limited English ability,
- Alleviate poverty by increasing access to social safety nets to include more recent arrivals,
- Increase access to adult literacy and job skills for low-income Asian seniors who are still active in the labor force,
- Offer employment and volunteer opportunities for Asian seniors to increase income and decrease social isolation,
- Create more affordable senior housing, including culturally appropriate assisted living facilities.

# Asian Senior Population in New York City, 2014

## Legend

### Asian Senior Population Percent of Seniors Who Are Asian

- 0% - 6%
- 7% - 17%
- 18% - 31%
- 32% - 52%
- 53% - 91%



Data Source: 2014 5-year American Community Survey



# Introduction

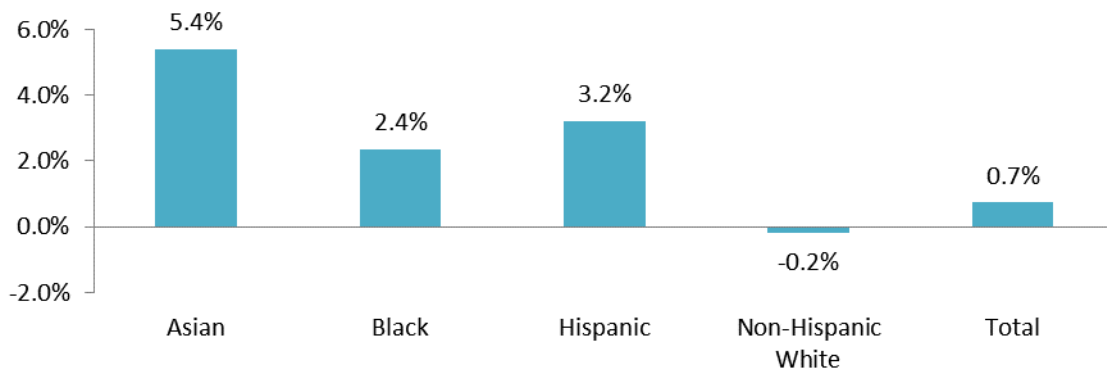
In 2003, Asian American Federation released a ground-breaking report, *Asian American Elders in New York City: A Study of Health, Social Needs, Quality of Life, and Quality of Care*, filling a gap in data on Asian seniors and their needs. The report's detailed findings, including high poverty rates, risk of social isolation, and health and mental health challenges, spurred advocates and policy makers to begin addressing the needs of Asian seniors. Since then, the Asian senior population has more than doubled, continuing the rapid growth in population seen in the original report. Demographic shifts in the ensuing years have made an updated report an urgent necessity.

Our objective for this report is to quantify the changes occurring in the Asian senior population in the city and to present a clearer picture of the needs and challenges faced by our seniors. This report builds on the foundation laid by the first report. With newly available data sources such as the American Community Survey, this report will cover a variety of social, economic and demographic measures to gauge the current state and needs of Asian seniors in New York City. Our report used the 2014 American Community Survey 5-year Public Use Microdata as the primary data source. We also conducted a short survey of 136 Asian seniors who attended senior centers to gain a sense of the issues not covered by the American Community Survey. Our survey covered food security, need for services, transportation, and news sources.

The report is divided into four main sections: demographics, social factors, economic status, and recommendations. Demographics cover the growth and changing ethnicities of Asian seniors in New York City. Social factors examine senior living arrangements, language abilities, and educational attainment. Economic status presents the statistics on poverty, Social Security benefits, housing, and health insurance coverage for Asian seniors. The final section on recommendations highlights some of the policy changes necessary to help support the community organizations providing services to Asian seniors and to address the needs of Asian seniors.

# Demographics

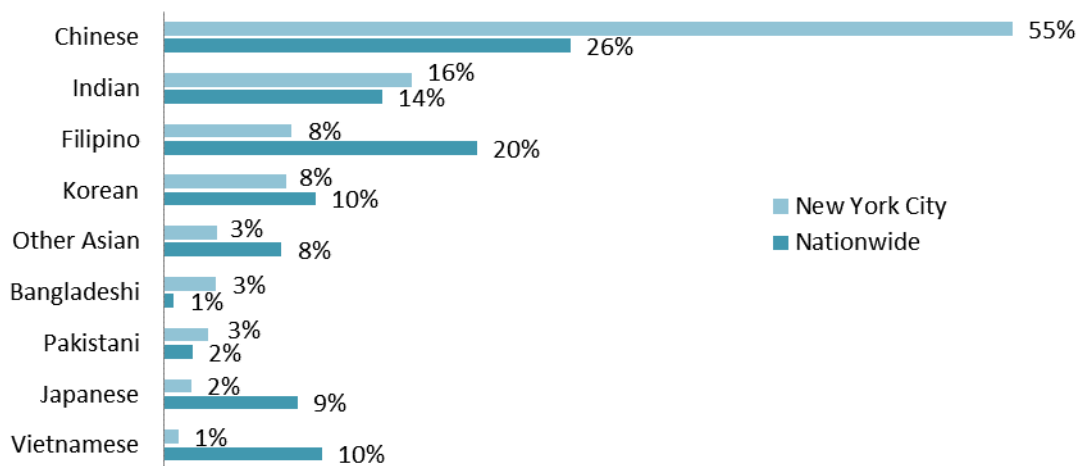
**Annual Population Growth Rates, 2000 to 2014**



**Asians were the fastest growing segment of the senior population in New York City.**

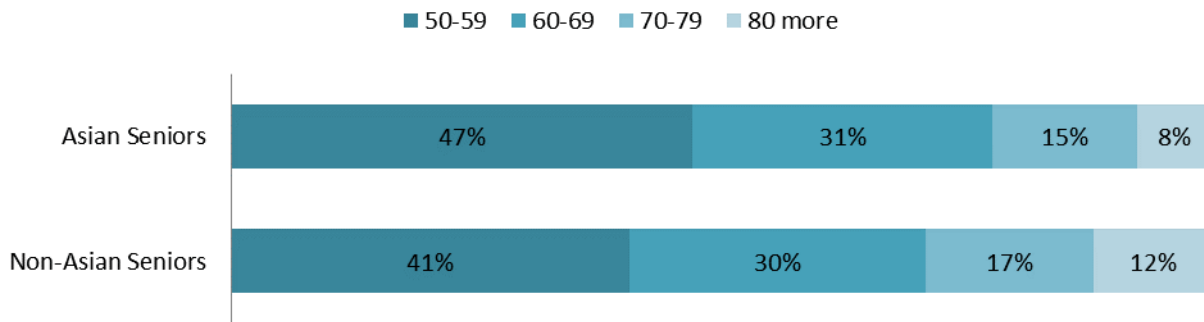
- Asian seniors represented 16 percent of all residents age 50 years and older.
- Asian seniors grew from just over 178,000 residents in 2000 to almost 372,000 residents in 2014.
- The mix of ethnicities for Asian seniors in New York City differs from Asian seniors nationally.
  - Chinese seniors make up more than half of Asian seniors in New York City.
  - South Asian seniors were a larger portion of New York City’s Asian senior population compared to nationally.
- Major shifts in ethnic mix are underway.
  - Bangladeshi were the fastest growing senior group, up more than 600% from 2000 to 2014. Pakistani and Other Asian seniors more than tripled over the same time period.

**Ethnicities of Asian Seniors**



<sup>2</sup> In New York City, the predominant ethnic groups included in the Other Asian category include Burmese, Cambodian, Indonesian, Malaysian, Nepalese, Sri Lankan, Thai, and Vietnamese. Of these groups, Vietnamese and Thai have the largest senior populations as of the 2010 Census when more detailed data was last available.

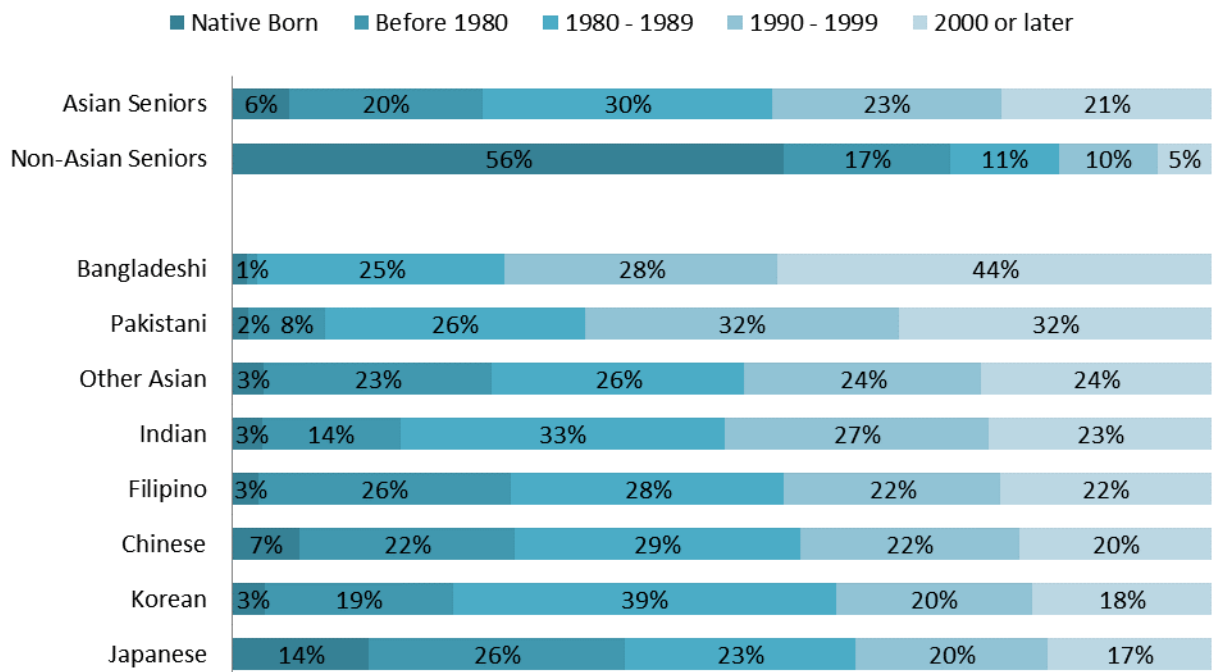
## Seniors in New York City by Age Group



- In New York City, Asian seniors as a group were much younger than non-Asian seniors.
- The immigration reforms of the 1960's resulted in a wave of immigration from Asia during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. More than 50 years later, these immigrants are now entering their retirement years.
- In addition to Asians aging into the senior population, immigration continues to add directly to the Asian senior population, with more than 1 in 5 Asian seniors arriving in 2000 or later.
- Bangladeshi and Pakistani seniors were even more likely to be recent arrivals than seniors from the other Asian groups.

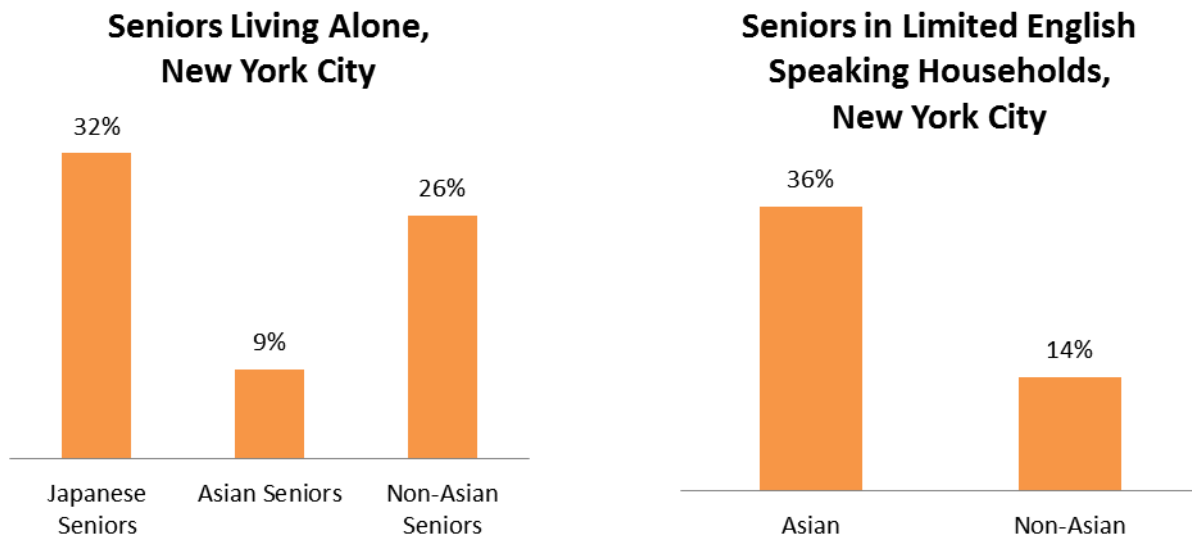
**About half of Asian seniors were less than 60 years old.**

## Nativity and Decade of Entry, New York City



## Social Factors

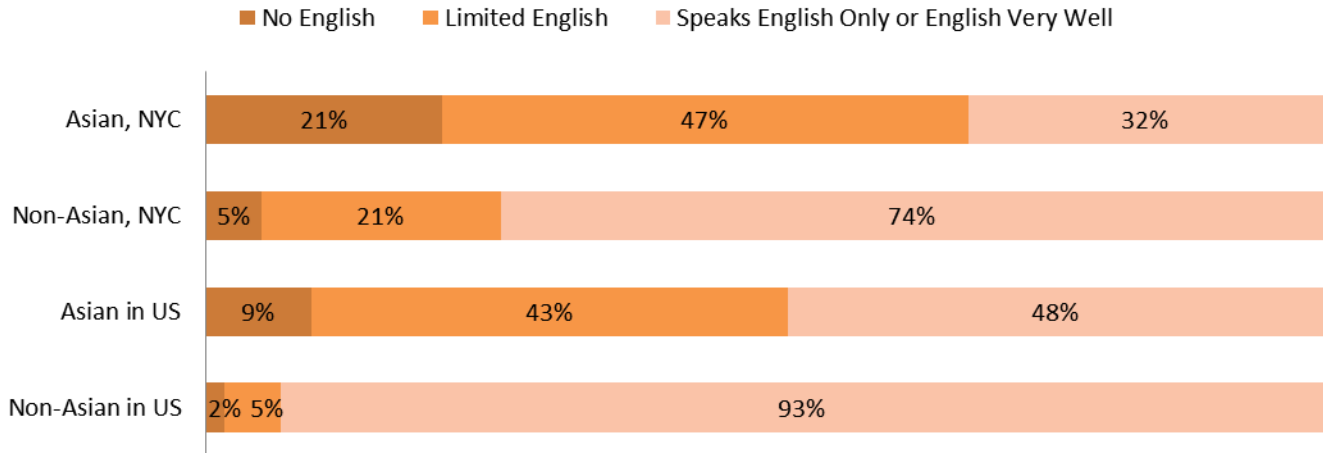
- Japanese seniors stand out as much more likely to live alone than even non-Asian seniors, putting them at risk for social isolation.
- Even though many Asian seniors do not live alone, Asian seniors can still be isolated by language. More than 1 in 3 Asian seniors live in a limited English speaking household, where no one in the household ages 14 years or older speaks English very well. These households often rely on younger children to translate when interacting with the mainstream.



- Our survey of Asian seniors also found additional risk factors for social isolation among those surveyed.
  - The majority (76%) had a small circle of friends (1-5 close friends).
  - Among those living alone or in senior housing, only 3 in 5 had family living close by.
  - 55 percent expressed some symptoms of loneliness or depression.
- Almost 60% of the seniors surveyed cited social activities as one of the services they used most at senior centers.
- Ethnic media was the most cited source of information for seniors surveyed.
  - Senior center staff also were cited as important sources of information for seniors in the Chinese, Korean and Pakistani communities, largely due to the establishment of stable, physical senior centers in those communities.
  - Family remained an important source of information for Indian, Japanese, and Pakistani communities.
  - Places of worship were an important source of information for Indian seniors, filling a void in a community left without a permanent physical senior center.

**Risk factors for social isolation were high among Asian seniors.**

## English Proficiency Among Seniors, Age 50 and Older



- More than 2 in 3 Asian seniors in New York City were limited English proficient (LEP).
- The more than 231,000 Asian seniors who were LEP in New York City represent 29% of the senior LEP population in the entire city.

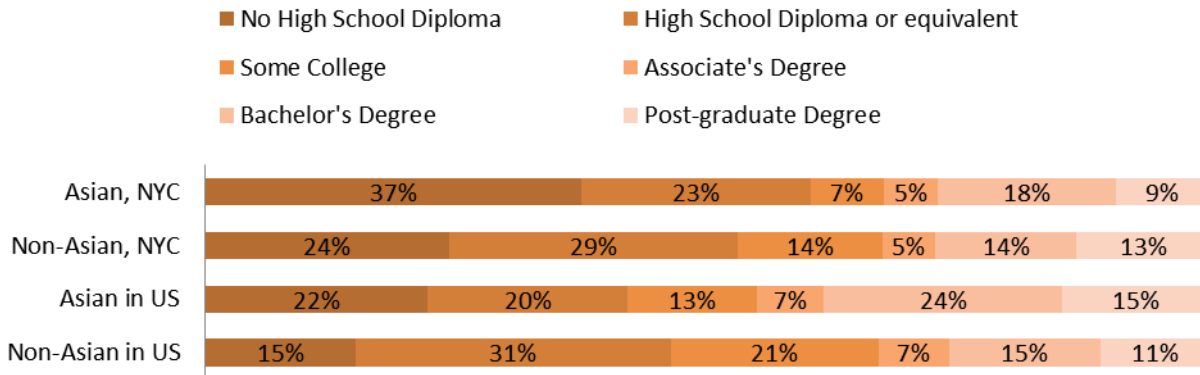
**One in five Asian seniors in NYC spoke no English.**

- For almost all the languages spoken at home by Asian seniors, half or more of those seniors were limited English proficient.
  - The only exceptions were Hindi speakers, who were just under half at a 49% LEP rate, Tagalog speakers with a 35% LEP rate, and Tamil speakers with a 25% LEP rate.
  - LEP rates for Asian seniors were around 9 in 10 for Chinese (including Cantonese, Mandarin, Taiwanese), Korean, Vietnamese, Burmese and Cambodian speakers.

Language Spoken	Speakers	LEP Rate
Chinese	167,071	90%
English Only	47,403	N/A
Korean	24,471	91%
Tagalog	23,680	35%
Bengali	17,365	77%
Urdu	9,751	66%
Hindi	8,195	49%
Punjabi	7,891	75%
Japanese	4,300	63%
Spanish	3,119	50%
Malayalam	2,934	52%
Gujarati	2,882	57%
Vietnamese	2,735	91%
Thai	2,001	77%
Tamil	1,128	25%
Burmese	1,052	90%
Arabic	1,015	77%
Mon-Khmer, Cambodian	842	93%
Persian	765	71%
Indonesian	763	67%
Sinhalese	659	54%
Nepali	645	74%
Other Asian Languages	5,073	62%
Other Languages	3,235	52%

# Social Factors

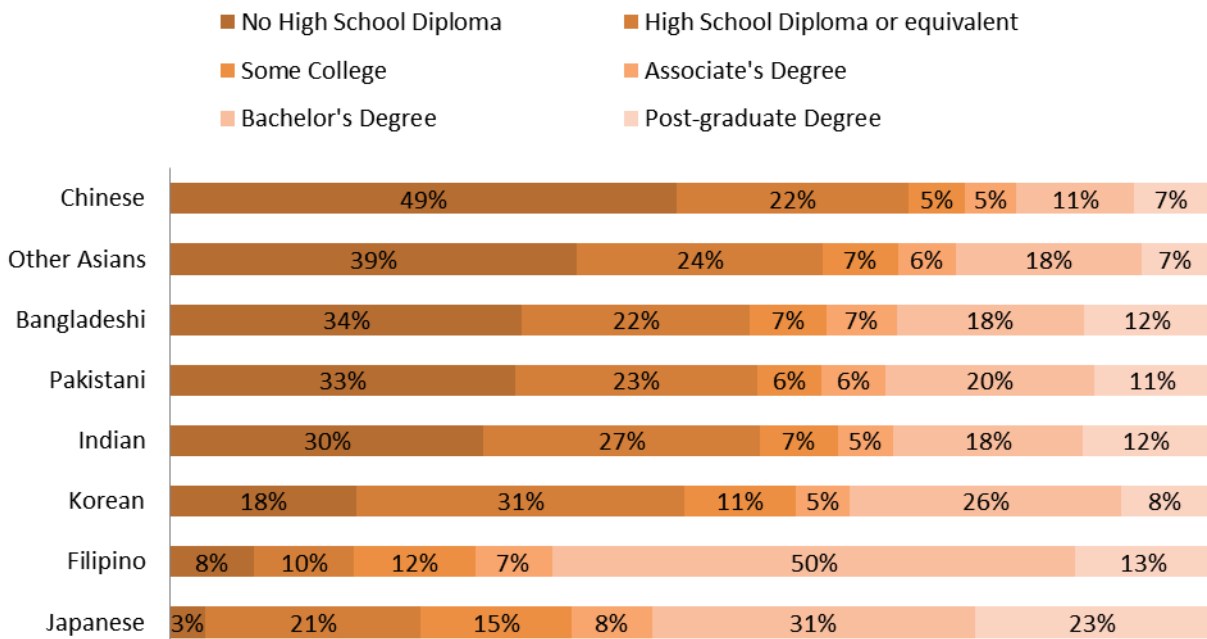
## Educational Attainment of Seniors, Age 50 and Older



**Asian seniors in NYC were much more likely to never have completed high school.**

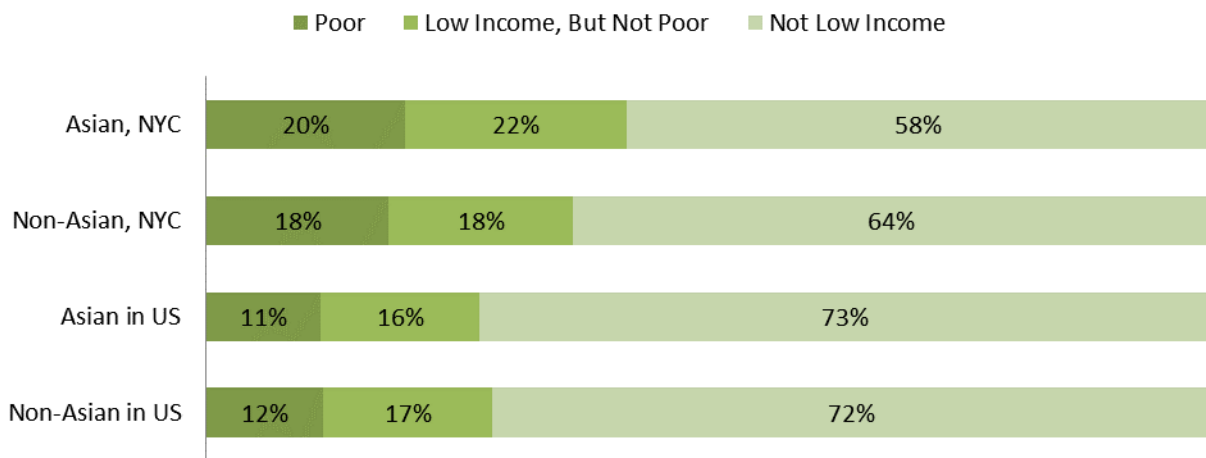
- Asian seniors in New York City were also less educated than Asian seniors nationally and non-Asian seniors in New York City.
  - More than 1 in 3 Asian seniors in New York City never completed high school.
  - Asian seniors in New York City were less likely to complete college than Asian seniors nationally.
- Almost half of Chinese seniors never completed high school. By contrast, more than half of Filipino and Japanese seniors had completed a post-secondary degree.

## Educational Attainment of Asian Seniors by Ethnicity



# Economic Status

## Poverty Status for Seniors, Age 50 and Over



- Asian seniors in New York City were more likely to be low-income or poor than Asian seniors nationally.
- In New York City, Bangladeshi, Chinese, and Pakistani seniors had the highest poverty and low-income rates, with about 1 in 4 seniors living in poverty.
- As a consequence, almost half of seniors in our survey expressed some form of food insecurity. Most cited a reliance on food banks, senior center or homebound meal delivery services to meet their food needs. Almost half of seniors surveyed (45%) cited congregate meals as a reason for going to senior centers.
- Almost half of seniors surveyed (48%) went to senior centers for social services, including help to apply for benefits, access health and mental hygiene services, and dealing with housing issues.

**Asian seniors were among the poorest groups in NYC.**

Ethnicity	Seniors in Poverty	Senior Poverty Rate	Share of Seniors Who Are Low Income, But Not Poor
<b>Chinese</b>	39,374	22%	25%
<b>Indian</b>	7,586	15%	18%
<b>Korean</b>	4,383	17%	22%
<b>Bangladeshi</b>	3,001	27%	31%
<b>Filipino</b>	2,718	10%	10%
<b>Other Asians</b>	2,486	18%	21%
<b>Pakistani</b>	2,318	25%	22%
<b>Japanese</b>	535	9%	16%

# Economic Status

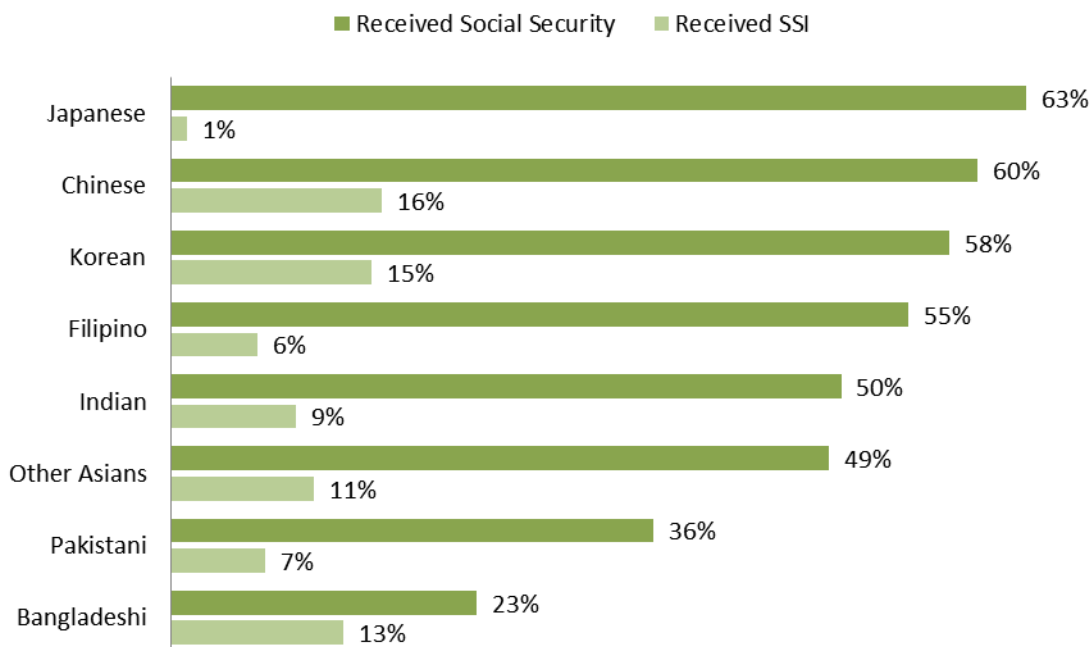
## Social Security and SSI for Seniors Age 62 and Older



- While Asian seniors in New York City were less likely to receive Social Security benefits compared to non-Asian seniors in the City, they were more likely to receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI).
- Bangladeshi and Pakistani seniors were much less likely to receive Social Security benefits largely due to a higher likelihood of being recent arrivals.

**Asian seniors were more likely to receive SSI benefits.**

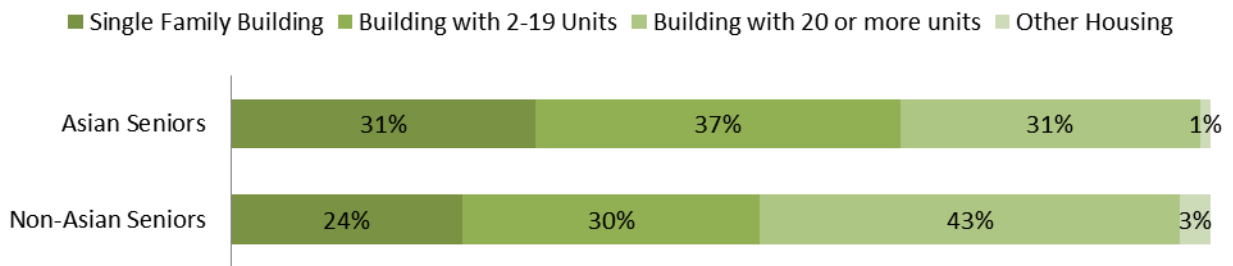
## Social Security and SSI Receipts by Ethnicity





# Economic Status

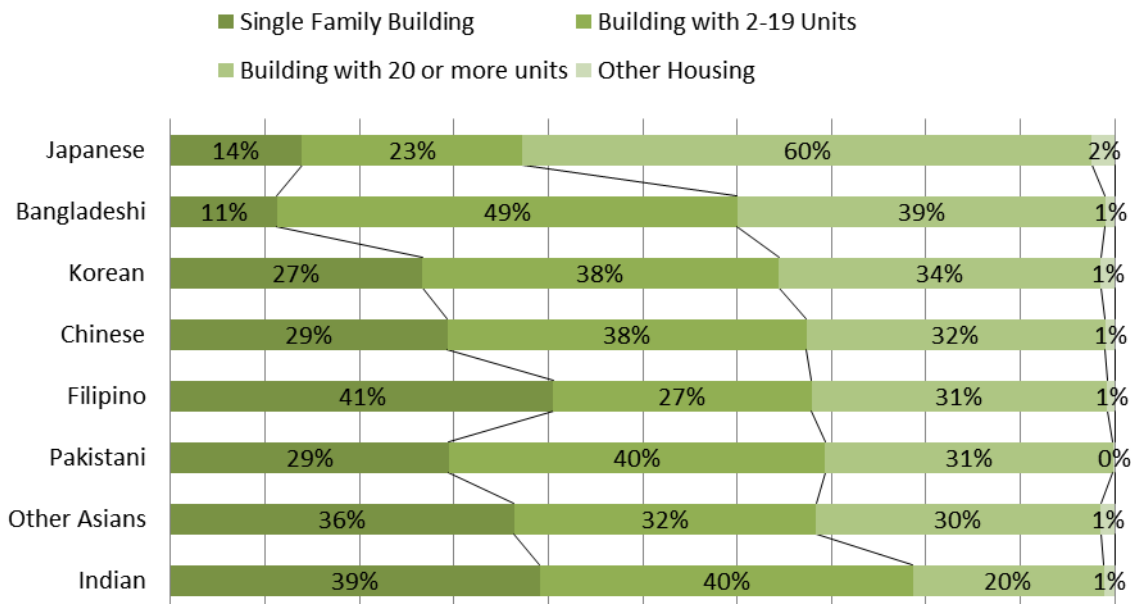
## Housing Type, New York City



**The Neighborhood NORC model may be a better fit for Asian seniors.**

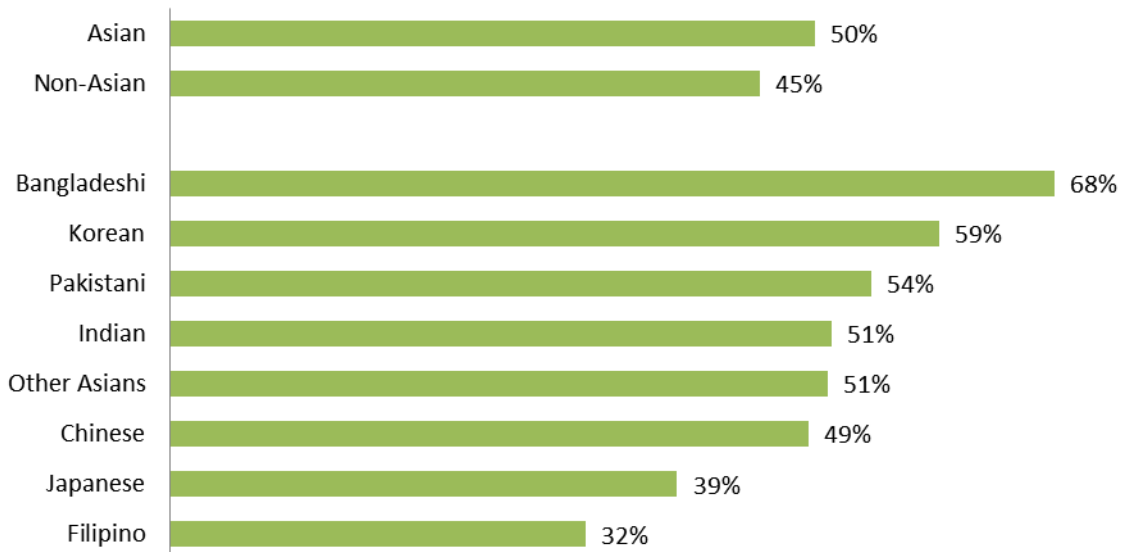
- With Asian seniors more likely to live in smaller buildings, the Neighborhood Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NNORC) model would cover more Asian seniors than the traditional NORC model. Traditional NORCs are based in large apartment buildings or development projects, while NNORCs encompass less densely built neighborhoods.
- Japanese seniors were more likely to live in larger housing complexes. However, the Japanese population is more spread out across the city than almost all other Asian seniors, making a Japanese-focused NORC difficult to create.
- Nearly half of Bangladeshi seniors were living in 2-19 unit buildings, the largest share for that type of housing among all Asian senior groups.

## Housing Type, Asian Ethnicities, New York City



# Economic Status

## Percent of Seniors Living in Housing Burdened Households

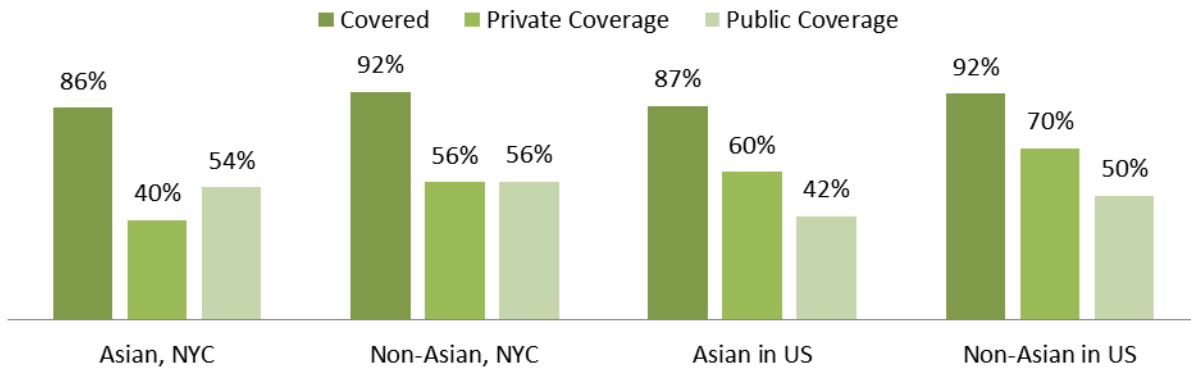


**Finding affordable housing is a challenge for Asian seniors.**

- Half of Asian seniors lived in households where housing costs were 30% or more of household income.
- More than half of Bangladeshi, Indian, Korean, Pakistani, and Vietnamese seniors lived in housing burdened households.
- Filipino and Japanese seniors were less likely to live in housing burdened households than non-Asian seniors.
- Not surprisingly, the lack of affordable housing for Asian seniors has led to overcrowding in households with Asian seniors. While 17% of Asian seniors were living in overcrowded households (households with more than 1 person per room), only 7% of non-Asian seniors were living under those conditions.
- Bangladeshi and Pakistani seniors were more than twice as likely to live in overcrowded housing than Asian seniors in general.
- Japanese and Korean seniors were more like non-Asian seniors, with only 3% of Japanese and 7% of Korean seniors living in overcrowded housing.
- Transportation to senior centers was a challenge for the seniors in our survey. Over 4 in 10 surveyed had to travel a half hour or more to reach the senior center. Almost 3 in 4 seniors using buses and subways to reach the senior center had to travel for 30 minutes or more.

# Economic Status

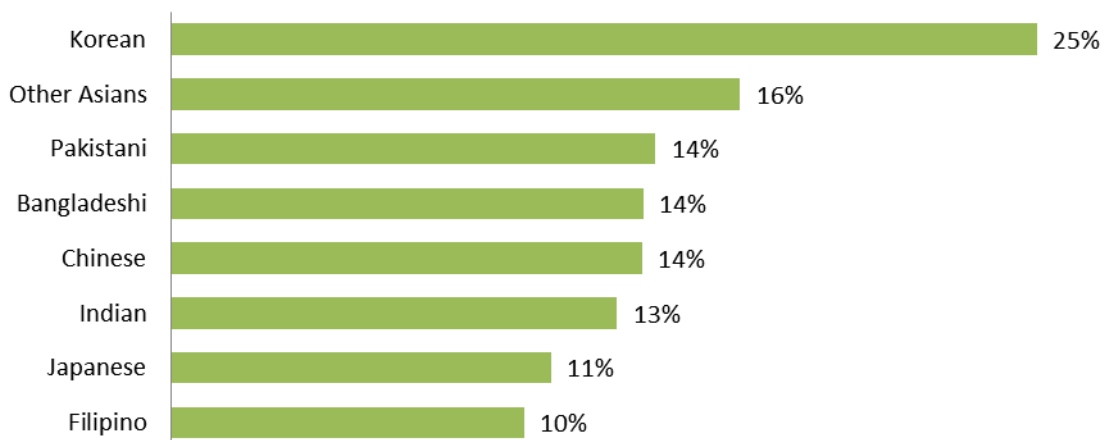
## Health Insurance Coverage for Seniors Age 50 and Older



- Asian seniors in New York City were far less likely to have private coverage than non-Asian seniors and Asian seniors nationally.
- Korean seniors in New York City were the most likely to not have health insurance coverage, followed by the “Other Asians” category.
- There are over 47,000 uninsured Asian seniors in New York City.

**Asian seniors in NYC were less likely to have health insurance than non-Asian seniors.**

## Percent of Seniors Uninsured by Ethnicity



# Recommendations

## **Address the growth and diversity in the Asian senior population.**

- Increase funding for programs that serve Asian seniors in order to match the rapid growth in the population. From FY 2002 to FY 2011, only 2.4% of Department for the Aging contract dollars went to Asian-led or Asian-focused social service organizations. This percentage has not substantially changed since the Federation's first analysis of city social service contracts covering FY 1991 to FY 2000. In the meantime, Asians grew to 16% of all seniors in New York City.
- Create opportunities for smaller Asian-servicing community-based organizations (CBOs) who target emerging Asian ethnic populations or neighborhoods through smaller grant opportunities, streamlining contracting requirements, and allowing for more funding protections for sub-contractors when they are part of larger coalitions. As the Asian senior population diversifies, smaller CBOs with roots in communities are more able to nimbly react to the changing needs of their communities. The City should seek to leverage their resources by investing in these smaller CBOs that are already doing innovative work addressing this emerging demand.

## **Enhance social services available to Asian seniors to alleviate social isolation and to connect immigrant seniors to a broader community.**

- Find opportunities to expand the NORC and Neighborhood-NORC programs to include areas with growing populations of Asian seniors. In particular, given that Asian seniors were more likely to live in lower density housing, Neighborhood-NORCs would be the preferred model to use when expanding to new Asian neighborhoods.
- Expand Asian-led senior programs which are more likely to provide the culturally and linguistically appropriate services for Asians seniors. By building community infrastructure, the City also benefits from their outreach capabilities. Investing in a wide range of Asian-led organizations will help create a lasting infrastructure to meet the growing diversity in the Asian community.
- Ensure outreach to Asian seniors is done in language and through trusted information sources for each community, including ethnic media and Asian-led social service organizations. Asian seniors are less aware of the benefits and services available to them largely due to language barriers and the lack of outreach by government and mainstream senior serving agencies.
- Improve and expand transportation options for seniors. New York City's public transit system is a critical resource for Asian seniors. However, Asian seniors are more likely to be found in the outer boroughs where access to public transit is more limited. Access-a-Ride, a program for residents with disabilities and used by many seniors, is hard to use for seniors in general, much less Asian seniors who were more likely to have language barriers as well. Access-A-Ride needs to be revamped, streamlined, and expanded to help all disabled seniors and especially Asian ones.

# Recommendations

## Improving economic conditions for Asian seniors

- Alleviate poverty by increasing social safety nets to include more recent arrivals. Targeted outreach efforts to increase low-income Asian seniors' awareness of assistance programs such as Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE), Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP), Social Security, Medicaid, and Supplemental Security Income (SSI).
- Increase access to adult literacy and job skills for low-income Asian seniors who are still active in the labor force. As the new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act is being implemented, an opportunity exists for city and state agencies to create provisions for trainings focused on low-income immigrant seniors during the creation of the new workforce training programs.
- Offer employment and volunteer opportunities for Asian seniors to increase income and decrease social isolation. Programs such as the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP), offered to all seniors, provides recently arriving Asian immigrant seniors the chance to build work history and job skills in their new homeland with part-time, minimum wage jobs at community organizations or government agencies. These programs will need increased funding to address growing demand.
- Create affordable senior housing, including culturally appropriate assisted living. The City's affordable housing plan when implemented should include measures to encourage multi-generational housing. With many Asian seniors living in multigenerational households, accommodating the needs of Asian seniors and their families is essential to maintain existing informal support systems for those seniors.
- Help Asian seniors stay in their homes and neighborhoods. Programs such as SCRIE need to create in-language outreach plans that build awareness of the assistance that is available for Asian seniors. In addition, SCRIE is only available to seniors in rent-regulated apartments. New programs need to be developed to address growing numbers of Asian seniors living in non-rent-regulated housing. Many Asian seniors are relatively recent arrivals to New York City and are not able to access rent-regulated apartments. Others are aging in place and facing challenges in meeting rent with their fixed incomes with interest rates at historic lows.



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Korean American Community Center of New York

Korean American Family Service Center

Korean American League for Civic Action

Korean American Senior Citizens Society of Greater NY

Korean American Voters' Council

Korean American Youth Foundation

Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York

Korean Family Counseling and Research Center

Lower East Side Family Union

MinKwon Center for Community Action

New York Asian Women's Center

Sakhi for South Asian Women

The Sikh Coalition

South Asian Council for Social Services

South Asian Youth Action

YWCA of Queens

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