

THE ASIAN AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES RESOURCE GUIDE

A guide created to combat ableism within the disabled Asian American community through first-person testimonials, comprehensive peer-reviewed research, and briefs from AADI events.



ASIAN AMERICANS WITH
DISABILITIES INITIATIVE

PUBLISHED
2022

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LETTER FROM THE FOUNDER

Welcome to the Asian Americans with Disabilities Initiative (AADI)'s Resource Guide! **This resource guide is the real-life manifestation of AADI's mission: to equip the next generation of disabled Asian leaders with the tools to combat ableism and anti-Asian hate.** This has been the culmination of grueling research by our dedicated research team, a creation that has been months in the making. Our team could not be prouder to introduce this guide to the world.

I would be remiss not to acknowledge that this resource guide is specifically tailored for disabled Asian Americans, although I'm of the camp that everyone has something to learn from our community. Our team firmly believes that this guide has wide-reaching implications for the disability community at large, shedding light on racial and ethnic disparities within the disability advocacy sphere. Our content is applicable to caretakers, family members of disabled Asian Americans, allies of both the disabled and Asian American community, businesses and organizations striving for greater accessibility, and so many more. Notably, fighting for visibility and awareness on behalf of the Asian American community does not come at the expense of other marginalized communities; AADI is committed to working together with Black, Latinx, and Indigenous organizations to advance diversity within disability.

The conviction I have in our mission and vision is unparalleled: from the bottom of my heart, I know that the work we are doing has the potential to reach those that need it the most.

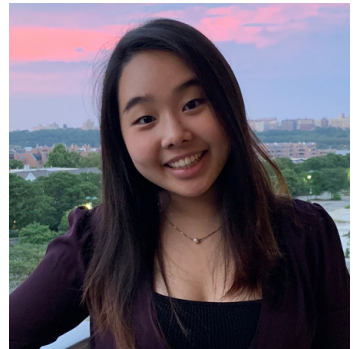
Over the past few months, AADI has grown in ways we never could have imagined: I can't express how grateful I am to our executive team and community partners. I'd like to extend a most heartfelt thanks to Justin Tsang, AADI's Director of Research, as well as Zandy Wong, Kelly Moh, and Chris Ra. To Marisa Hamamoto and Mathew McCollough: thank you for the kind and honest commentary on the multiple drafts of this guide — your feedback proved invaluable. A huge thank you to our community partners, as well as our Board of Directors for guiding our strategy: Elizabeth Kim, Christine Liao, Xuan Truong, and Jiya Pandya. And of course, I am forever indebted to our most devoted Core team: Megan Liang, Ikshu Pandey, and Jiyoun Roh. Thank you for believing in our mission, but more importantly, thank you for believing in me when AADI was just a dream.

Thank you for being here, but more importantly, thank you for being a part of this community with me. Through AADI, I intend to champion intersectionality in any and all avenues of advocacy, proving that it is indeed possible to care about both disability and Asian American issues. As the saying goes, nothing about us without us.

In Solidarity,



Jennifer Lee
Founder & Executive Director



Jennifer, an Asian American woman, is shown smiling with a maroon jacket and black shirt standing in front of a dusk sky.

PREFACE

Welcome to the Asian Americans With Disabilities (AADI) Resource Guide! This resource guide was designed for Asian American youth with disabilities, allies and the general community in mind. First, I would like to give a huge thanks to our research committee team members Kelly Moh, Chris Ra, and Zandy Wong for their incredible talent and contributions in creating the guide. I also want to thank Jennifer Lee, the Founder and Executive Director of AADI, as well as AADI's Community Partners for making this resource guide possible and for empowering Asian American youth with disabilities.

Our team created this resource guide to acknowledge the significant information gap about Asian Americans with disabilities. We at AADI aim to fill this gap with this resource guide that informs the challenging issues Asian American youth with disabilities face, provides essential resources to help disabled Asian Americans, and shares additional opportunities you can be involved with AADI.

We used numerous high-quality sources including academic articles and journals to ensure what you read is accurate. While much of the original content is not always accessible for the public to read, our team summarized and analyzed the content to highlight the big picture split across various sections listed in the table of contents. By providing the broader picture, you will be well-informed about the current issues facing disabled Asian Americans today and equipped with resources to become a better ally.

This resource guide was designed to be 100% accessible, made possible by working with our remarkable accessibility experts to ensure all people can access this guide without barriers. All colors, designs, fonts, and layouts were carefully selected in the development of this guide.

While this guide will continuously change throughout the future, I believe in someone who can make an impact on present and future Asian American youth with disabilities, this may be a family member, a friend, your organization, or even yourself.

As someone who identifies as an Asian American with a disability, I feel grateful for my identity and proud of it. I encourage you to be inspired by this guide, feel part of our disabled Asian American community, get involved with AADI, and become a changemaker for Asian Americans with disabilities.

In Community,



Justin Tsang

Director of Research



Justin, an Asian American man, is shown smiling with a black jacket in front of the Golden Gate Bridge.

INTRODUCTION



*Graphic ID –
A person in a wheelchair
is talking to person
standing with their
prosthetic leg.*

***What does it mean to have a disability?
To be a person with a disability?
To be a disabled person?***

We use different types of language to refer to people with disabilities. There are two types of language: people-first and identity-first. Person-First language is where the person isn't the condition/disability, rather, the person has the condition/disability. For example: John Smith has a disability. Identity-First language is where the person identifies with the condition/disability, i.e. deaf John Smith. It is ultimately up to each individual which terminology they prefer. For this resource guide, both languages are used.

According to the Americans with Disabilities Act, the term disability is defined as "a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more life activity. This includes people who have a record of impairment, even if they do not currently have a disability." There are various types of disabilities.

Individuals may need more support than others in helping them live their daily activities, including school, work, at home, and anywhere in public.

For example, a wheelchair user may need physical support, such as an elevator on-site in a building or removing barriers that may block a wheelchair's path. Some disabilities are less visible or "invisible disabilities," which means they may not have any visible signs they have a disability. These can include medical conditions, especially mental health conditions such as Autism or Depression. They may need support with daily living tasks, including people who can come to the home and provide assistance.

A disability can occur at birth, be sudden, or be gradual. Some disabilities may only last for a few months and years, while others can be lifelong. For a person with a disability, this can bring strong emotional feelings, including fear. These feelings exist, especially for the Asian American community, where stigma exists in many families. In addition, having a disability in the Asian American culture may bring shame, fear, and lack of concern because it is not recognized among others in the Asian community. Family members and others may refuse to acknowledge disabilities, causing them to feel invalidated and unseen for who they are and what they experienced within their home environment and community. They might not get the needed support, are hesitant to find support, or are unaware of knowing where to look.

What does it mean to be Asian American?

Asian Americans are often considered a monolithic group, when, in fact, they are far from it. The term itself, “Asian American” can be traced back to the 1960s as a way to promote a political agenda of equality and anti-racism. As people of Asian descent in the United States have grown in number and diversity, the term has raised the question of who is Asian American and what it means to be Asian American. To many, the term “Asian American” mainly centers East Asians, when the term actually covers more than 50 ethnic groups. The monolithic view of Asian Americans has led to the largest income gap within ethnic groups and extreme disparities in access to economic, educational, and healthcare opportunities.

Asian Americans fall outside of the Black-White binary and experience racism along two dimensions: a degree of cultural and social valorization and a degree of civic inclusion. A significant portion of this racism stems from the model minority myth, which perpetuates a harmful narrative that Asian Americans are the “ideal” racial and ethnic minority and that they excel in academic and professional settings. Because of this myth, however, Asian Americans are then viewed as invisible, and they receive less support and aid through policies.

Why does this intersection matter?

The intersectional identities of race and disability are inevitably intertwined with one another, warranting a larger conversation of why being Asian American and disabled has not garnered more attention. Over 1.3 million Asian Americans are estimated to be living with some form of physical, sensory, cognitive, or other disability. With 1 in 10 Asians identifying as disabled in the United States, there exists a significant population of Asian Americans with disabilities that lack the proper professional and cultural support necessary to navigate their dual identities. This intersection matters because of the ways in which the characteristics of Asian American identity and disability interact with each other in their respective communities. Within the Asian American community, there unfortunately remains a stigma against the disability community. This is particularly prevalent for enclaves, such as Chinatown. Additionally, within the disability community, there is still a massive gap in Asian American representation, both in the professional and advocacy spaces.

Furthermore, disabled Asian Americans face a disadvantage in the workplace. The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that among those with a disability, the jobless rates for Asians (15.7 percent) were higher than the rate for Caucasians (11.6 percent) in 2020. Worth noting, additionally, is the overwhelming lack of research conducted on Asian Americans with disabilities.

In regards to advocacy and resources, **disabled Asian Americans have consistently been overlooked in the conversation regarding the intersection between race and disability.**

While various organizations have been launched for disabled Black and Latinx communities, very few programs serve to actively uplift the voices of Asian Americans with disabilities on a national level.



AADI was founded to raise awareness of this crucial intersection between Asian American and disability identities, creating space for disabled Asian professionals and advocates to share their stories. The mission of our organization is to foster a more nuanced understanding of how multiple marginalized identities can inform and shape one another, particularly for disabled Asian Americans.

What it means to be Asian American and disabled is incredibly diverse, neither of which can be fully captured in this one document. AADI seeks to be an *inclusive* community for those of all identities, which extends to our resource guide and all the information we hope to compile and provide to our community.

ADVOCACY 101



*Graphic ID –
A teacher is guiding
a student as they use
their laptop.*

UNDERSTANDING THE ISSUE: RACISM, ABLEISM, AND MORE

Racism affecting Asian Americans

Asian Americans have historically been impacted by racism since the founding of the United States in the 1700s. For example, the [Yellow Peril](#) promoted fear about the invasion and disruption of American values caused by Asians. In addition, white people viewed Asians as hostile and undesirable, negatively discriminating against foreign Asians and Asian Americans. The [Model Minority Myth](#), too, demonstrates how the AAPI community faces discrimination through misinterpretation. “Asian” was considered a homogenous identity, when the AAPI community is actually composed of many different ethnicities and backgrounds. Additionally, many non-AAPI ethnic groups consider members of the AAPI community successful in their jobs and overall lifestyle, often discrediting their success by attributing it to their AAPI identity.

NOTE

Different vocabulary is used to identify Asian Americans and others of Asian origin. We use the term [Asian American](#) to identify all Asian groups in the US. [AAPI](#) stands for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, which includes all people who trace their origins to geographic regions, countries, states, or communities within Asian, Asian American, or Pacific Islander ancestry. [APIDA](#), or Asian Pacific Islander Desi American, is separate from AAPI as they identify South Asians as part of the community.

With the Yellow Peril and the Model Minority Myth, the COVID-19 pandemic has increased hatred towards Asian Americans, a result of the belief that Asians were the primary cause of spreading the virus. The pandemic heavily impacted AAPI businesses and increased fear caused by [xenophobia](#), a hatred of foreigners including the AAPI community. Xenophobia caused intense discrimination against the AAPI community because of blame and scare tactics. As increased violence and fear targeted the AAPI community, they took on acts of solidarity, starting by spreading stories and awareness of how the AAPI community was targeted during the coronavirus pandemic. Through this growing awareness, AAPI communities started to bring allyship within other ethnic groups. With communities organizing through multi-racial solidarity, strong acts of advocacy helped protect the AAPI communities nationally and internationally. Notable organization groups that brought allyship and advocacy include [Stop AAPI Hate](#), [Stand Against Hatred](#), [Organization of Chinese Americans \(OCA\) - Asian Pacific American Advocates](#), and [Asian Americans Advancing Justice](#). Note that this is not a comprehensive review of Asian American history, but rather a brief introduction. We urge readers to inform themselves and explore further [resources](#) about racism affecting Asian Americans.

Ableism in the Disability Community and its Effects on Asian Americans

Ableism is a set of stereotypes and practices that look down and discriminate specifically against people with disabilities. Ableism views members of the disability community as not valuable or worthy based on characteristics such as their appearance or ability to be successful in society. While abled folks may display ableism, the disabled community may make mistakes in doing so as well. For example, a wheelchair user in an organization may not hire someone who has a chronic illness, fearing that the person may not be reliable enough for the job.

able·ism

/ˈābəlɪzəm/ noun

A system of assigning value to people's bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, productivity, desirability, intelligence, excellence, and fitness. These constructed ideas are deeply rooted in eugenics, anti-Blackness, misogyny, colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism.

This systemic oppression that leads to people and society determining people's value based on their culture, age, language, appearance, religion, birth or living place, "health/wellness", and/or their ability to satisfactorily re/produce, "excel" and "behave."

You do not have to be disabled to experience ableism.

[working definition by @TalilaLewis, updated January 2022, developed in community with disabled Black/negatively radicalized folk, especially @NotThreeFifths. Read more: bit.ly/ableism2022](#)

Ableism exists outside of work and in the community as well, including popular culture. Universities and nonprofit organizations such as Simmons University and Access Living have various guides and resources that show what ableism looks like, how it promotes stigma, and how we can advocate against ableism. Disabled advocates, including [Youtuber Jessica Kellgren-Fozard](#), further explains what ableism is and how it affected them in society.

The impact of ableism on people with disabilities is amplified within the disabled Asian American community. Historically, the disability rights movement has left out minority groups from being involved in the movement. In order to continue the fight for equal housing, pay, jobs, representation, and education for disabled individuals, we must take an intersectional approach to our identities. All disabled people, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, and ability, should work together to share their experiences and further the rights of all people with disabilities.

People with disabilities have had a long history with ableism. Ableism was reinforced through the usage of the word handicap to describe people with disabilities. The word [handicap](#) existed in the 1600s but did not apply to disability until the early 20th century. In the 1600s, the word referred to a lottery game emphasizing differences of worth between two objects where one person has to sacrifice their own money. In the early 20th century, handicapped was used to refer to physically disabled children, which eventually extended to adults and those with mental disabilities.

There is a split perspective that people with disabilities would eventually consider the word "handicapped" as a form of ableist language. The word handicap is now defined as "a disadvantage that makes achievement unusually difficult". People with disabilities may find this term as derogatory language, making it seem as if they are incapable of success. We often see ableism impacting people who have invisible disabilities, especially if they use a handicap placard for driving. In this way, the symbol for the word handicap has occasionally created intentional hatred against those with disabilities. Perhaps we can reduce hatred associated with language via alternative words, such as "accessibility placards" or "accessible parking spaces."

Organizations have fought against these stigmas beginning in the mid 1900s. For example, Disabled in Action (DIA) was one of many disability organizations that started a movement advocating for disability rights. Founded in 1970 by Judith E. Heumann and friends, this non-profit organization started a lawsuit against the New York City Board of Education, who rejected Heumann's application for a teaching license. From 1972 to 1973, President Nixon vetoed early versions of the Rehabilitation Act. DIA members protested Nixon's veto through demonstrations. DIA allied with organizations such as Paralyzed Veterans of America, the National Paraplegia Foundation, and others to join the movement in DC. The disabled community owes many thanks to DIA for their support. Without them, the disabled community would not be where we are today, as for accommodations and legislation.

Disability advocates recognize that ableism exists within the community and popular culture. However, for disabled Asian Americans, ableism is amplified by stereotypes associated with Asian culture, including the model minority myth. On August 13, 2021, Miso Kwak, Lydia X. Z. Brown, and Mia Ives Rublee joined [AADI's inaugural virtual speaker panel](#) to reflect on their experiences of having both disability and Asian American identities.

I am trying to think about portraying myself in a positive light and also not giving into pressure about what a disabled person should be like or what an Asian person or woman should be like. I think these things are something I'm still figuring out for myself. Certainly, I think all of these identities that I hold influence both my personal way of thinking, as well as how I navigate professional spaces.

Miso Kwak

Disability justice is concerned with radically transforming the way that we think about our bodyminds and what bodyminds are and what it means to be well or healthy — what it means to be human in ways that the world we live in tells us is not possible or should not be the case because of ableism, because of white supremacy because of capitalism, and the many ways that we are taught that we are not all human and that we do not all deserve access, justice, or freedom.

Lydia X. Z. Brown

Disabled Asian Americans — We don't fit the model minority myth. There's no way we can fit that stereotype. And so, I often say I proudly break that myth because it's time for us to understand that our community is so different ... and that's a good thing.

Mia Ives-Rublee

DISABLED ASIAN AMERICAN CHANGEMAKERS LEADING THE FIGHT

Here is a non-exhaustive list of some of the brilliant disabled Asian American activists, advocates, and community organizers who are doing the hard work to tackle ableism and racism in their communities. Take a moment to read about them and their stories!



A photo collage of changemakers who will appear in the following pages with their corresponding ID text.



ALICE WONG

(she/her)

Alice, an Asian American woman, is shown smiling with a blue decorated sweater and a mask over her nose attached to a gray tube.

Alice Wong is a disabled activist, media maker, and consultant. She is the Founder and Director of the Disability Visibility Project, a community partnership with StoryCorps and an online community dedicated to creating, sharing and amplifying disability media and culture created in 2014. Alice is also a co-partner in four projects: DisabledWriters.com, a resource to help editors connect with disabled writers and journalists, #CripLit, a series of Twitter chats for disabled writers with novelist Nicola Griffith, #CripTheVote, a nonpartisan online movement encouraging the political participation of disabled people with co-partners Andrew Pulrang and Gregg Beratan, and Access Is Love with co-partners Mia Mingus and Sandy Ho, a campaign that aims to help build a world where accessibility is understood as an act of love instead of a burden or an afterthought.

Disability Visibility Project

<https://disabilityvisibilityproject.com/about/>

Instagram

[@alicatesamurai](https://www.instagram.com/alicatesamurai)

Twitter

[@SFdirewolf](https://twitter.com/SFdirewolf)



CHELLA MAN

(he/him)

Chella, a half jewish and half Chinese transgender man, is shown wearing a brown jacket.

Chella Man is an artist, author, and director who identifies as Deaf, genderqueer, trans-masculine, Chinese, and Jewish. He has given talks all over the country on the intersections of art, disability, queerness, race, and healing. Furthermore, he has published a book, *Continuum*, participated in numerous gallery shows and artist residencies internationally, worked as a columnist for Condé Naste's first queer publication, *Them*, launched a radically inclusive clothing line in collaboration with Opening Ceremony, signed as the first Deaf and trans-masculine model with IMG Models, and was casted as a superhero within Warner Brother's DC Universe, *Titan's*. He hopes to continue pushing the boundaries of what it means to be accessible, inclusive, and equal in this world.

Some of Chella's projects

<https://chellaman.com/>

Instagram
[@chellaman](https://www.instagram.com/chellaman)

Twitter
[@chellamanart](https://twitter.com/chellamanart)



ESMÉ WEIJUN WANG

(she/her)

Esmé, a Taiwanese American woman, is shown smiling with an unbuttoned, blue flowered jacket.

Esmé Weijun Wang is an award-winning novelist and essayist known for the New York Times bestselling essay collection, "The Collected Schizophrenia" and "The Border of Paradise." She started her writing career focusing on disability after being diagnosed with late-stage Lyme disease in 2015. She is the founder of "The Unexpected Shape" Community for writers living with illness and disability. She holds various awards, including the Best of Young American Novelist list of 21 authors under 40 by Granta and the prestigious Whiting Award.

The Unexpected Shape Community

<https://www.unexpectedshapecommunity.com>

Instagram

[@esmewwang](https://www.instagram.com/esmewwang)

Twitter

[@esmewwang](https://twitter.com/esmewwang)



LYDIA X. Z. BROWN

(they/them)

Lydia, a East Asian person, is shown smiling with glasses, blue blazer, shirt and tie.

Lydia X. Z. Brown is an advocate, organizer, educator, attorney, strategist, and writer. Their work focuses on addressing state and interpersonal violence targeting disabled people living at the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, faith, language, and nation. They are Policy Counsel for Disability Rights and Algorithmic Fairness for the Privacy and Data Project at the Center for Democracy and Technology, and Director of Policy, Advocacy, and External Affairs for the Autistic Women and Nonbinary Network. They also founded the Fund for Community Reparations for Autistic People of Color's Interdependence, Survival, and Empowerment.

Resources that Lydia created

<https://autistichoya.net/resources/>

Instagram
[@autistichoya](https://www.instagram.com/autistichoya)

Twitter
[.@autistichoya](https://twitter.com/autistichoya)



MARISA HAMAMOTO

(she/her)

Marisa, a Japanese American woman, is shown smiling with a red dress.

Marisa Hamamoto is a spinal stroke survivor, speaker, ballroom dancer, change maker and founder of Infinite Flow, a professional dance company composing of people with and without disabilities. Her passion for starting Infinite Flow was based on dismantling stereotypes and promoting inclusion. She is a 4th generation Japanese American woman, based in Los Angeles. She was recently named 1 of 13 People Magazine "Women Changing the World 2021", 1 of 9 women leaders "reimagining sport" for the adidas International Women's Day Campaign 2020, and listed on InStyle Magazine Badass 50 2021.

Infinite Flow Dance

<https://www.infiniteflowdance.org>

Instagram

[@marisahamamoto](https://www.instagram.com/marisahamamoto)

Twitter

[@MarisaHamamoto](https://twitter.com/MarisaHamamoto)



MIA IVES-RUBLEE

(she/her)

Mia, an Asian woman, is shown with short black hair, a black blazer and maroon shirt.

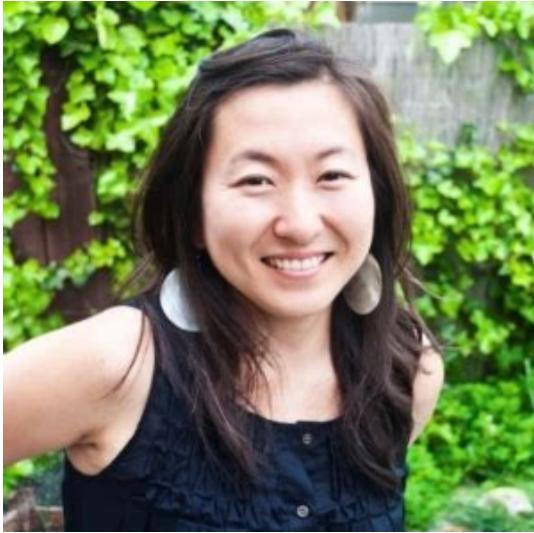
Mia Ives-Rublelee is the director for the Disability Justice Initiative at American Progress. She advocates for disability justice and inclusion at nonprofit organizations and businesses across the United States. She has worked with Women's March, Families Belong Together, DC Action Lab, Adoptees for Justice, Fair Fight, People's Collective for Justice and Liberation, and numerous other progressive organizations. Importantly, Mia has pushed for better access to disability accommodations at progressive events and more policy platforms inclusive of the disability community.

Disability Justice Initiative

<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/disability/view/>

Instagram
[@seemiaroll](https://www.instagram.com/seemiaroll)

Twitter
[@SeeMiaRoll](https://twitter.com/SeeMiaRoll)



MIA MINGUS

(she/her)

Mia, a Korean woman, is shown smiling with round earrings and a black shirt.

Mia Mingus is a writer, educator and trainer for transformative justice and disability justice. She is a queer physically disabled Korean transracial and transnational adoptee raised in the Caribbean. She works for community, interdependence and home for all of us, not just some of us, and longs for a world where disabled children can live free of violence, with dignity and love. As her work for liberation evolves and deepens, her roots remain firmly planted in ending sexual violence.

SOIL: A Transformative Justice Project

<https://www.soiltjp.org>

Atlanta Transformative Justice Collaborative

<https://projectsouth.org/atlanta-transformative-justice-collaborative/>

Instagram
[@mia.mingus](https://www.instagram.com/mia.mingus)

Twitter
[@miamingus](https://twitter.com/miamingus)



MISO KWAK

(she/her)

Miso, an Asian American woman, is shown smiling with bobbed black hair and red and white flannel.

Miso Kwak is a policy analyst whose work is driven by a passion for social justice. She is particularly interested in improving supports and services for people with disabilities. Miso currently serves as a project coordinator for the National Center on Advancing Person-Centered Practices and Systems (NCAPPS), an initiative from the Administration for Community Living and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. She oversees the day-to-day activities of NCAPPS and contributes to all aspects of the work. In the past, she played an instrumental role in starting Disability Disclosed, an inaugural student publication on disability at Harvard University.

Human Services Research Institute

<https://www.hsri.org/services>



SANDY HO

(she/her)

Sandy, an Asian American woman, is shown wearing a red and black argyle sweater.

Sandy Ho is a queer, disabled, Asian American activist, organizer, and researcher. She is the founder of the Disability & Intersectionality Summit, a biennial national conference that centers the multiple oppressions that shape the lived experiences of disabled individuals, as told by disabled people, to create dialogue on how our society must address systemic oppressions using an intersectional approach. She is also a research project manager at the Community Living Policy Center at the Lurie Institute for Disability Policy at Brandeis University, as well as a community organizer in the Boston area focused on disability justice and intersectionality.

Disability and Intersectionality Summit

<https://www.disabilityintersectionalitysummit.com/>

Twitter

[@NotYourAvgHo101](https://twitter.com/NotYourAvgHo101)



SHAINA GHURAYA

(she/her)

Shaina, a Punjabi woman, is shown smiling to the side with dark hair and glasses.

Shaina Ghuraya is a female Punjabi writer/director and wheelchair-user. She is a fierce activist for people with disabilities and recognizes the importance of media in shifting public perception. Shaina is also a graduate of the University of Southern California's Master of Fine Arts program in Film and Television Production. During her time at USC, she discovered her love of comedy, and began working with quirky and bold films that embrace diversity and explore intersectionality.

One of her movies, AGG

<https://www.shainaghuraya.com/home/agg>

Instagram

[@disabled_desi](#)

Twitter

[@Disabled_Desi](#)



SNEHA DAVE

(she/her)

Sneha, an Asian American woman, is shown smiling with a light blue blazer and white shirt.

Sneha Dave graduated from Indiana University in May 2020, where she majored in chronic illness advocacy as well as journalism. She founded Generation Patient and the Crohn's and Colitis Young Adults Network (CCYAN), with support from the Helmsley Charitable Trust and Arnold Ventures, to create support systems for adolescents and young adults with chronic conditions both across the country and internationally. She is proud to work with a team composed entirely of young adults with chronic medical disabilities. Generation Patient and CCYAN are both transparent and independent from the pharmaceutical and insurance industry.

For her work across disability, policy and medicine, Sneha was selected as one of the most influential teenagers in 2018 by the We Are Family Foundation and has been recognized as an American Association of People with Disabilities Emerging Leader in 2020.

Generation Patient

<https://www.generationpatient.org/>

Instagram

[@snehadave98](https://www.instagram.com/snehadave98)

Twitter

[@snehadave98](https://twitter.com/snehadave98)



STEVE LEE

(he/him)

Steve, a Chinese American man, is shown with black glasses, hat, and shirt against a dark background.

Steve Lee is a Chinese American, disabled stand-up comedian, actor, producer, and writer. His comedy is centered around his experiences growing up in Hong Kong and the U.S. dealing with racism and living with disabilities. He uses humor to convey his belief that everyone is equal and to get people to laugh about our own shortcomings and problems in our daily lives. He is a staple at comedy clubs in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, and has opened for headliners like Tom Rhodes, Tom Cotter, Brad Williams and Brent Weinbach.

Access to his comedy

<http://www.steveleecomedy.com/>

Instagram

[.@steveleecomedy](https://www.instagram.com/steveleecomedy)

Twitter

[.@SteveLeeComedy](https://twitter.com/SteveLeeComedy)



TAMMY DUCKWORTH

(she/her)

Tammy, an Asian American woman, is shown smiling with a black shirt sitting in front of the American flag.

Tammy Duckworth is a U.S. Senator from Illinois, an Iraq War Veteran, Purple Heart recipient and former Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs who was among the first handful of Army women to fly combat missions during Operation Iraqi Freedom. She served in the Reserve Forces for 23 years before retiring at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in 2014. She was elected to the U.S. Senate in 2016 after representing Illinois's Eighth Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives for two terms. Unofficially, Senator Duckworth serves as role model to those with disabilities, as she relies on the use of a wheelchair.

Her legislation

<https://www.duckworth.senate.gov/about-tammy/legislation>

Instagram

[@senduckworth](#)

Twitter

[@SenDuckworth](#)



TIFFANY YU

(she/her)

Tiffany, an Asian American woman, is shown smiling with round earrings, wearing a tan-colored shawl.

Tiffany Yu is a disability advocate, podcaster, and CEO of Diversability, a social enterprise. She first became disabled at age 9 with a physical disability. With her lived experiences as someone with a disability, she has delivered various TEDx speeches about disability and Asian American identity. The Diversability network has helped expand disability pride for thousands of people with disabilities. Her podcast, Tiffany & Yu, features conversations about wellness, impact, and leadership with others who bring social change. Tiffany currently serves on the San Francisco Mayor's Disability Council.

Diversability

<https://mydiversability.com>

<https://www.facebook.com/diversability/>

Instagram
[@imtiffanyyu](https://www.instagram.com/imtiffanyyu)

Twitter
[@ImTiffanyYu](https://twitter.com/ImTiffanyYu)



YUH-LINE NOH

(she/her)

Yuh-Line, a Taiwanese American woman, is shown smiling with a black blazer and orange shirt.

Yuh-Line Niou is an autistic Taiwanese American policymaker serving in the New York State Assembly for the 65th District, a region that is over 40% Asian. She began working on state policy issues while in college, eventually accepting a position with the Washington State House Health Committee Chair. While there, she helped develop policies to expand senior access to prescription medication, improve women's health care, and expand health coverage for low-income families. Yuh-Line then went on to work as an advocate and organizer on anti-poverty issues, where she helped build a broad coalition to fight predatory lending and assist low-income families build financial assets.

Her legislation

<https://nyassembly.gov/mem/Yuh-Line-Niou/sponsor/>

Instagram
[@yuhline_niou](https://www.instagram.com/yuhline_niou)

Twitter
[@yuhline](https://twitter.com/yuhline)

ACCESSIBILITY



*Graphic ID –
A team of three
people (two are
standing, one is
sitting with crutches
next to them) are
working on a large
display of a mobile
phone screen.*

DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY

Digital accessibility is ensuring that all digital tools (websites, mobile apps, and other digital technologies) are fully accessible to everyone. One example of making media accessible is "alt" text, also known as alternative text. Alt text is used to describe images or figures so that people who are blind or who use screen readers can have a text description of what's going on in the picture and know that there is a picture there.

What are some challenges schools have faced in ensuring digital accessibility?

Many schools faced challenges in ensuring digital accessibility for all students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Before the pandemic, support staff or heads of accessibility departments had clear goals of what they wanted to ensure for their students in the upcoming year. With the onset of the pandemic, many of these staff members ran into issues trying to keep up. These staff members had trouble checking if software and technologies purchased by administration for students was fully accessible. Schools also had trouble keeping up with the number of videos that needed captions. Many special education departments and assistive technology staff also trained teachers and staff on ensuring accessibility standards are met.



*Graphic ID –
A team of three people
(two are standing, one is
sitting) are working on a
large screen with graphs
and gears.*

Tips for Digital Accessibility

How can you make YOUR content more accessible?

There are many ways to make your websites, documents, audio, video, and other social media content more accessible for all. Here are a few tips below:

Use Alternative (Alt) Text and Image Descriptions on all images

- **What is alt text?** Alt text is defined by [Web Accessibility in Mind](#) as a textual substitute for non-text content.
- **Ways it is used:**
 - Screen readers announce alternative text in place of images, helping users with visual or certain cognitive disabilities perceive the content and function of the images.
 - If an image fails to load or the user has blocked images, the browser will present the alternative text visually in place of the image.
 - Search engines use alternative text and factor it into their assessment of the page purpose and content.
- **What is an image description?** Image descriptions provide the “same or equivalent information that a sighted reader would get when they look at a picture, to someone with a print disability such as those who are blind or visually impaired. Image descriptions can be included in digital content in two forms: alt-text and Long Description,” as defined by [Accessible Publishing](#).

Provide captions for videos and transcripts of audio with time stamps

Add alt text to PDFs to make them screen-reader friendly

Use large text size and legible fonts

Be mindful of color combos! Don't use red/green to show contrast. Use red/blue instead

Consider replacing words in italics with words in bold

Avoid fast-flashing content for any videos

Speak clearly and slowly, and use plain speech

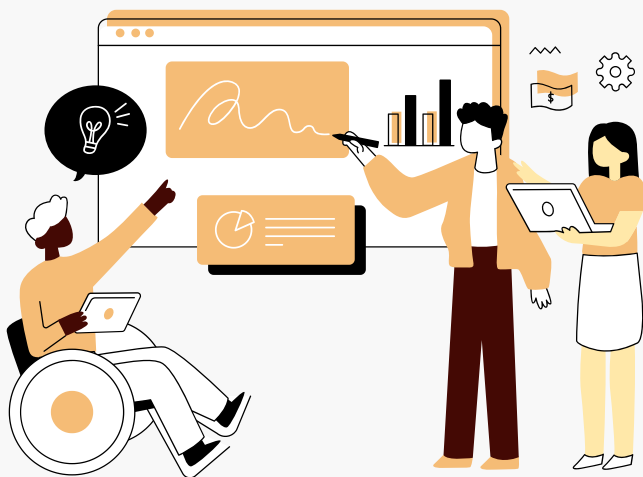
Use low background music

If adding sign language, plan ahead so your video recording or live video includes it

PHYSICAL ACCESSIBILITY

What does it mean to make public and private settings accessible?

When we think of accessible spaces in our community, we also think about the environment around us. Accessible spaces are spaces that follow certain rules set by the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA). This includes how we get into buildings, board public transportation, or how we interact with everyday objects. Older buildings built before the passing of the ADA in 1990 are not always accessible. For example, many older buildings lack ramps, elevators, and flashing doorbells that are important for people with disabilities. Even today, buildings built after the ADA often are constructed to meet minimum requirements for accessibility for mobility and sensory disabilities. By only meeting minimum requirements, various people with disabilities cannot access or utilize these spaces efficiently and safely. There have been [legal cases](#) where the bare minimum of meeting ADA requirements has increased cases of discrimination, exclusion, and safety hazards for people with disabilities.



*Graphic ID –
A team of three people
(two are standing, one is
with a wheelchair) are
working on a large
computer window display of
charts and text.*

Recently, in planning the construction of new buildings there has been a shift towards a new trend of universal design. According to the [National Disability Authority](#), universal design ensures that the environment around us is accessed, understood, and used by all people, including those with disabilities. [The Ed Roberts Campus in Berkeley, CA](#), is an example of using universal design. This building and the nearby subway station across the street were designed to ensure all people could navigate and fully utilize everything the building offered. Some of the features of universal design include paths that have bumpy patterns, ramps that do not need an elevator, adjustable objects that anyone can reach, and rooms that are wide enough for anyone to enter. When a building or space is universally designed, people from all ages can easily access and use the space.



*Graphic ID –
A red background with a
female in wheelchair
looking at a blueprint.*

CULTURE



*Graphic ID –
Red and yellow leaves
are behind a mother in a
wheelchair with a child
reading on their lap.*

Family and Stigma

There is a common stigma of disability within Asian families. Because of the model minority myth, people with disabilities are often seen as a weakness that needs to be “fixed” in Asian households in Asian households. Also, Asian families are often unwilling to talk or acknowledge disability outside of the home unit because of past feelings of shamefulness. As a result, people with disabilities feel excluded from their families and culture because they cannot conform to the standards of success in their culture. It is necessary to have these difficult conversations about disability with friends and families to undo the patterns of disability stigma.

The Use of Language

The use of language, especially describing disabilities, is not the same across cultures. This is quite true for Asian Americans, where the language can be disrespectful in its translation to English. Within that translation are misunderstandings of how the general community understands disability across various countries and generational differences within Asian culture. In a section from *Disability Visibility*, edited by Alice Wong, Sandy Ho describes cultural values as varying geographically, “Whether in East Asia or the United States, cultural values validate the narrative of worthy versus unworthy bodies. But the entire discussion needs to be rewritten as marginalized creators and activists repeatedly point out that there are no unworthy bodies” (Ho 115). Ho describes her lived experiences with disability and how the translated language of being disabled in her family shifted from labeling her from useless to ill.



*Graphic ID —
A father is holding
their child's hand as
they smile and listen
to the child speak.*

For example, Ho believes that older family members were more ashamed of her being born than her parents. Ho thinks that voices and presence in the Asian American disability community need to be loud and clear to families and the public. There needs to be a push for more understanding and acceptance in the Asian culture across all age groups. According to the book *Cultures. Conflict - Analysis - Dialogue* from Hans Rott, there is a need to ensure that translations keep the true meanings of words, especially in the Asian culture where lack of trust is common within different family generations. It is important to evaluate the meanings of words related to disability and communicate translations in ways that do not harm or anger individuals.

ALLYSHIP



*Graphic ID –
A group of people (three
standing, one in a
wheelchair) marching
together with unmarked
flags*

Merriam Webster defines “allyship” as a “supportive association with another person or group ... such association with members of a marginalized or mistreated group to which one does not belong.”

Within AADI, our organization prioritizes allyship in our executive team structure, understanding that while disabled and Asian American voices deserve to be centered in our narratives, we can also create an environment that welcomes and informs allies that may want to learn more. Allyship in juxtaposition to the disabled Asian American community, one of dual marginalized identities, can come in several different forms and encompass a multitude of identities.

Although an ally cannot fully experience what it is like to live as a disabled Asian American, they can strive to understand, and through self-education, *support*. Thus, the team at AADI would like to share the realities of being disabled, in order to form a better picture of our intersectional experiences. Here are our stories:

Justin Tsang

DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH

I had my own struggles in tackling disability in both educational and medical settings. I was born very early with a brain disorder that existed since birth and my height never caught up to others. When I was in elementary school, I was segregated into special education classrooms for students with disabilities several times a day. When I was in a general education classroom, other students questioned why I had to leave to a different classroom every day, even within earshot as I left the classroom. As the only Asian American in my special education classroom, this was clearly noticeable to my peers. In addition, I encountered ableist micro-aggression statements in medical settings such as “I don’t think you are disabled.” These statements came from medical doctors who believed I was making things up because my disability was not visible and being a minority. Through the model minority myth, I was perceived as someone who should not need medical help because of being Asian American.

We need to expand awareness and support tools to all communities to ensure they can be a strong ally in supporting disabled Asian Americans.

Zandy Wong

RESEARCH COMMITTEE MEMBER

I am hard-of-hearing and wear a Baha Attract, a hearing aid implant. Throughout my life, I've endured a lot of ableism. I've had to fight to get accommodations because it wasn't obvious that I am disabled. I've had people laugh at me because I misheard something. People have told me that it's great that there are special opportunities to do STEM research for hard-of-hearing/Deaf students but that there should be more opportunities for white students to do that.

So many microaggressions have been flung at me, and while I don't believe people are intentionally ableist, it's hard to get people, especially those in the Asian American community, who are so unaware, to understand what it means to be disabled. Impact matters.

Because my disability is invisible, it is hard to get people to understand that I am disabled. I hope that my work and allyship with AADI can help other people become better allies with the disabled Asian-American community so we can create a more inclusive society.

Chris Ra

RESEARCH COMMITTEE MEMBER

I'm hard of hearing and I have a cochlear implant with a nucleus processor. Growing up was very difficult for me. I attended a private school for the deaf, from age 3 to 9. At this time, I didn't realize the difficulties that came with getting accommodations until I was mainstreamed into public schools in 4th grade. I was excluded a lot from general education classes because I had to take specialized classes and speech therapy. My parents went along with people who thought they knew best for a hearing impaired kid.

Because of my being pulled out of classes, I didn't truly make bonds with classmates. I felt very lonely for many years. Many classmates would tease and bully me because I spoke in a "deaf accent" or didn't quite grasp or hear what they were talking about. I would stay quiet because I did not want to be made fun of for my stutter or mispronouncing words. People would comment on how smart I am because they did not expect someone with a disability to be above average or exceeding expectations. This would anger me because people thought that my hearing loss prevented me from learning.

Because my hard of hearing disability may not be visible, people are always surprised to learn that I am disabled because they expect me to be that model minority. Ableism is not always intentional but people need to recognize and learn to support everyone, regardless of the visibility of the disability.

Inclusivity and understanding are also key to supporting everyone in Asian American communities.

ALLYSHIP RESOURCES

[How to be an ally of the disability community](#)

To be an ally, you can 1) watch your language 2) avoid sensationalizing day-to-day lives 3) recognize that disability is not who we are but a part of our identities 4) be a part of the movement.

[Ways disability allyship can go off track](#)

Your allyship can go off track when you 1) listen to disability seminars instead of disabled people 2) assume that you have a new and essential idea without first finding out if it's either new or essential 3) approaching disabled people like a missionary.

[Guide to practicing effective allyship](#)

You can begin with educating yourself, then continue the journey by supporting others, being a role model, and recognizing that words matter.

[Ableism 101](#)

Ableism is the “discrimination of and social prejudice against other people with disabilities based on the belief that typical abilities are superior.” This resource encourages you to recognize ableist behavior and in turn combat it

[How to be an anti-racist ally](#)

This link will take you to a list of various ways to take action, either through signing petitions, donating, or sharing on social media.

Tackling Asian American Racism

To dismantle Anti-Asian racism we must understand its roots

We can dismantle Anti-Asian racism by first recognizing its roots, then moving onto understanding the model minority myth and the pan-Asian movement, and finally learning about the splintering of the movement.

Be an Ally: How to Help Fight Anti-Asian Racism and Xenophobia

You can 1) build awareness through education and conversations 2) find your people and keep them close 3) cope with stress in difficult times 4) take action and be vocal.

Putting in the work to be anti-racist

This resource presents various tips to be anti-racist, which is different from not being racist. Among these suggestions are recognizing that white supremacy is real and uplifting the voices of POC's.

Airbnb list of resources

Airbnb offers advice on combating Anti-Asian racism, as well as organizations that the general public can donate to/look into in their efforts to be a great ally.

ACADEMIC RESEARCH



*Graphic ID –
A person using a
wheelchair is presenting
a display of graphs to
another person.*

In this section, our team has compiled nearly every single relevant research article or publication that has been published to date on the intersection of disability and Asian American identity.

The "\$" symbol indicates that this link is not available for the public, but an abstract is available. See [page 63](#) for more information about obtaining access.

The topics covered are listed below and linked directly to its page:

INTERSECTIONALITY

ACCESS TO DISABILITY SERVICES

REPRESENTATION OF ASIAN AMERICANS IN RESEARCH

DISABILITY IDENTITY

MENTAL ILLNESS

DISABILITY AWARENESS

DISABILITY AND ASIAN AMERICAN CHILDREN

INTERSECTIONALITY

Cultural interpretations among Asian views of disability

The author of this paper explores the concept of intersectionality, specifically how it impacts the disabled experience as a person of Asian descent. They find that perspectives on disability differ greatly, including what people consider qualifies as a disability. Often mental illness is not classified as a disability, making it harder for individuals to gain the appropriate accommodations they need to succeed. There is also a general stigma towards people with disabilities, and a need to demonstrate cultural values such as hard work and merit.

"The Ontology of Disability in Chang-rae Lee's *The Surrendered*" (2013) — \$

The Surrendered, a novel by Chang-Rae, emphasizes that the Asian American's quest to obtain American citizenship perpetuates the model minority stereotype and the ableist nature of trying to work towards such a high standard. The article concludes that this novel is a good example of using intersectionality to explore both Asian and disabled identities.

The intersectional invisibility of race and disability status: an exploratory study of health and discrimination facing Asian Americans with disabilities — \$

A researcher ran a study that used an intersectionality approach to compare the AAPI community with a disability to AAPI's without a disability. He wanted to compare findings between discrimination, mental health, physical health, and overall health between the two groups. The study's findings suggest that AAPI with a disability reported more discrimination, worsening physical distress, and lower overall health rankings.

"The demography of disability and the effects of immigrant history: Older Asians in the United States" (2007)

A research study was done to discover any connections between disability, immigration status, immigration timing, and origin among three groups, including Asians born outside the U.S., Asian Americans, and Caucasians aged 65 and over. Results show that U.S.-born Asians have the lowest rates of disability. However, Asian immigrants are also more likely to have a disability than Caucasians. In addition, despite that Asian Americans have the lowest rates of disabilities, those from low-income families are much more likely to have a disability, impacting daily tasks such as taking care of oneself.

"Chapter 11: Cross-Cultural Counseling Issues of Males Who Sustain a Disability" (2012) — \$

This chapter covered various cultural differences of males among Asian Americans and other ethnic groups. Asian Americans, specifically, view family as more important than the needs of oneself. If one is disabled, there is a belief of cultural wrongdoing within the household, and everyone is shamed. When it comes to mental health, Asian Americans will often complain of physical symptoms to cover their actual thinking. It is important to tackle the cultural differences impacting Asian Americans with disabilities.

*Graphic ID —
A person is communicating
through sign language to the
person who is to the left of them.*



ACCESS TO DISABILITY SERVICES

Asian Pacific Americans with Disabilities: Our Stories, Our Lives

Disabled members of the Asian Americans Pacific Islanders (AAPI) community shared how shame, lack of representation, and the model minority myth have impacted how they receive services, including seeing a doctor. People that are part of the AAPI community also feel racially threatened by other members of the disability community. When asked for recommendations by disabled members of the AAPI community, they suggested a smaller community of Asian Pacific Islanders (APAs), hiring more qualified disabled APAs, recognizing unfair opportunities at work, and using language that their community can feel comfortable.

Acculturative stress, disability, and health treatment utilization among Asian and Latin American immigrants in the United States - Waldman et al. 2019 — \$

Acculturation stress, the stress associated with assimilating to a new culture, was significantly associated with self-reported disability domains of self-care, cognition, mobility, time out of role, and social interaction for Asian American and Hispanic American disabled immigrants. Additionally, all disability domains are impacted by the assimilation process. The researchers found that immigrants with disabilities did not significantly make use of mental health or general healthcare resources. They instead relied on non-healthcare services such as church groups or community-based assistance.

Disabled Asians Aren't Using Public Services : Survey: 83% of adults in the county remain sheltered with their families because of cultural barriers, a study finds. Community leaders say more group homes are needed, especially for Chinese and Japanese Americans.

Many disabled Asians in the US live at home because of their close family ties, or sometimes are sheltered from the outside because of shame felt by their parents. Many also do not benefit from public services as a result of cultural and language barriers. For group homes in particular, Asian parents are most concerned with differences in language and food for their children, along with the lack of resources for transitioning their child from living with their family to a group home.

Developing Culturally Responsive Approaches With Southeast Asian American Families Experiencing Developmental Disabilities
— \$

People with developmental disabilities, specifically the Southeast Asian American population, have a hard time getting health and educational services. Many do not get the proper care they need because of family or do not know about it. To discover why Southeast Asian Americans lacked getting services, researchers did a study to determine these difficulties. The study reported that incorrect information, language barriers, lack of transportation, cost, and trust were among some barriers that did not improve access and services. By talking with disabled Southeast Asian Americans, many preferred that education, advocacy, and support related to their culture helped them receive services.

“The Asian American Experience and Disability” (2015)

An issue brief discusses the unfair actions taken against Asian Americans with disabilities. For example, having a disability brings cultural tension with families and outside majority through the model minority myth. In addition, many Asian American families are not reaching out to their communities for aid, causing services to be unused by disabled Asian Americans. For disabled Asian Americans, they are not well represented in special education classes; they also experience language barriers and are unaware of services available to them. More Asian language-based disability services should be provided in addition to broader community awareness.

State Vocational Rehabilitation Services and Employment Outcomes for Asian Americans with Psychiatric Disabilities (2020)

— \$

With an increase in Asian Americans with psychiatric disabilities, a growing concern is the rarely used services for state vocational services that support employment for those with disabilities. A study from 2020 discovered that the racial differences in vocational resources were visible for Asian Americans, with European Americans receiving more support in career counseling, guidance, and assessment for services. In addition, disabled Asian Americans with psychiatric disabilities receiving SSI/SSDI (Supplemental Security Income/Social Security Disability Income) benefits were significantly less likely to find employment than those without benefits. However, Asian Americans with psychiatric disabilities with college degrees were associated with success in finding employment.

REPRESENTATION OF ASIAN AMERICANS IN RESEARCH

Asian Pacific Americans with Disabilities: Our Stories, Our Lives

Although the number of Asian Americans with disabilities has increased over the past few years, there is still very little research on the lived experiences of Asian Americans with disabilities and/or mental health conditions. This paper finds that previous research has grouped Asian ethnicities together, disregarding the diversity in language, world views and culture. Additionally, there have been sampling issues as many studies lack culturally appropriate methods in their research.

"Asian Pacific Americans: The Need for Ethnicity-Specific Disability and Rehabilitation Data" (1996) — \$

Despite the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992 mandating that Asian Pacific American disabled persons need to be included in data collection about disabled people, this has not happened in the present day. This article also suggests that Asian Pacific American disabled persons data also needs to be disaggregated.

Ethnicity and the Stigma of Disabilities — \$

A study found that Asian American participants were more likely to stigmatize disability compared to their African American, Latin American, and European American participants. Asians born outside of the US also more commonly stigmatized disability than their counterparts who were born in the United States. Mental illnesses, in particular, were seen as worse than physical disabilities, possibly attributed to collectivist values and ideals seen in many Asian cultures.

Asian American Communities and Health: Context, Research, Policy, and Action - Emerging Health Issues and Research Priorities

For many Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, many Asian health services function through the medical model. Unfortunately, this means that professionals prioritize treatment and isolation for disabled Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders rather than ensuring independence. A recommendation suggests that society must accept that disabled Asian Americans and Pacific islanders need independence and meaningful participation through jobs. In order to do this, research must be done on disabled Asian Americans and employment, where obtaining employment can be a struggle due to barriers.

“Disability and American Families: 2000”

A study that analyzed the 2000 US Census reported that those who reported disability in the household for Asian Americans were below the US average at 26%. In addition, Asian families were consistent with a lower poverty rate than other racial groups, including Black or Hispanic. However, the process of surveying Asian Americans from the US Census remains a problem. The survey data combined all Asian ethnic groups into one race, which does not consider that certain Asian ethnic groups are more likely to have significant poverty and possible disability.

Asian Americans with Disabilities: Influence of the Disability Rights Movement on Culturally Competent Social Work Practice — \$

In general, little research has been done regarding social work practice specific to Asian Americans with disabilities. Social workers should be more aware of cultural values and beliefs specific to Asian Americans', such as interdependence and family when practicing. Additionally, they need more knowledge on how to meet the needs of people with disabilities and issues the community faces, along with the fact that disabled people do not hold the same values, opinions, or experiences.

“Korean American Female Perspectives on Disability” (1999) — \$

Korean American women tended to rely on medical advice for treatment and prevention of physical disabilities. Some older Korean American women also tended to use religion as a reasoning for disability. Korean American women also had knowledge and trust in herbal or spiritual medicine cures for disability. For learning disabilities, Korean women tended not to think their child was working hard enough and did not request accommodations or seek medical treatment for their children with learning disabilities.

Learning Disabilities Researcher Brings Attention to Overlooked Asian American Students

Dr. Luisa Lo started teaching elementary school students in Oakland, California in the 1990s. During her first year of teaching, she learned that one-fourth of her 30 students had some disability. Lo decided to pursue graduate studies in special education while continuing to teach in urban schools. She quickly discovered a lack of coverage in research surrounding Asian American special education students and their families. Dr. Lo now contributes to such research as an assistant professor of curriculum and instruction at the University of Massachusetts-Boston. She has found that Chinese Americans have been much slower in seeking special ed services for their children than their white counterparts because their parents believe that their child can simply study harder to catch up and they fear losing reputation if they reach out for help.

Cultural factors influencing the mental health of Asian Americans

Many different factors impact Asian American’s mental health, including language, level of acculturation, age, gender, and spirituality. Social stigmas and shame are also common in many Asian cultures and families, driving mental health issues. Family structures, such as traditional gender roles and positions within a family, also impact how Asian Americans view themselves in regards to seeking mental health support.

Racial discrimination and disability among Asian and Latinx populations in the United States — \$

Few studies have examined how racial discrimination and disability are linked in certain populations in the US. The researchers concluded that racial discrimination is associated with disability in both Asian and Latinx populations. The social context where people live should be taken into account when finding adequate rehabilitation services, and professionals need to take into account the stressed on mental health caused by experiencing discrimination.

“Disability and the Asian Culture”

A study was completed to provide information about the Asian culture relating to people with disabilities and providing tools to rehabilitation specialists about working with the Asian American community. Rehabilitation services can include physical, occupational, speech, and staff from independent living service providers. However, in Asian culture, language barriers, housing, and employment prevent many with disabilities from understanding and accessing rehabilitation services. In addition, traditional views of disabilities in Asian culture do not encourage people to get new information as word of mouth is the norm. Rehabilitation specialists should consider Asian culture, Asian beliefs, and talking with family when working with the disabled Asian community.

Exploring Undergraduate Student Attitudes Toward Persons with Disabilities — \$

The authors explored undergraduate students’ perceptions of people with disabilities in terms of three domains: dating, marriage, and work. They found that students were most comfortable working with disabled people in the workplace, followed by in marriage and lastly in dating/relationships. Overall, female students reported having more positive attitudes towards people with disabilities compared to males. This could possibly be attributed to females being more empathetic and males being more concerned with how they are perceived.

DISABILITY IDENTITY

What It's Like Being Disabled And Asian In America

Being Asian adds to the complexity of living with a disability in the United States. Expectations of what is deemed a successful life, varying perceptions of having a disability and standards of work and family culture all contribute to the unique experiences of being a disabled Asian individual. Feeling like you have to prove yourself and showcase your work ethic also permeates Asian identity.

"First Person Political: Musings from an Angry Asian American Disabled Girl" by Alice Wong — \$

Since childhood, Alice Wong, who was born with Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA), struggled to fit into school in public. Her physical disability made her concerned about the reactions and attitudes coming from other people. She believes that there is a cultural trend among Asian Americans to exclude and shame about disability. Despite her difficulties, she finds disability as her social, political, and cultural identity, in addition to identifying as a Chinese American female.

"Disability status differentials across fifteen Asian and Pacific Islander groups and the effect of nativity and duration of residence in the U.S." (2010) — \$

This study outlined that Japanese Americans were the least likely to have a disability and that Southeast Asians, Vietnamese Americans, and Pacific Islanders were the most likely to have a disability. The reasons for these differences were attributed to SES and demographic characteristics. They also discovered that Asian American immigrants with a shorter duration in the US had better health than U.S.-born Asian Americans and longer-term immigrants.

Disability: Keywords for Asian American Studies by Cynthia Wu

Disability was not a concept until the mid-1500s, where the practice of disability has transitioned from the integration of everyday life to a form of control and intervention. This transition caused negative effects of segregation, abuse, and erasing the culture of individuals with a disability, which activists and scholars are trying to correct today. Scholars have typically seen disability studies through the perspectives of Caucasians, creating a challenge to not looking beyond other ethnic groups such as Asian Americans.

Illness, Disability, and the Beautiful Life by James Kyung-Jin Lee

Lee describes the connection between storytelling and its connection to Asian Americans with chronic illness. He states a deep shared connection of stories where he finds that disability is neither separate nor avoided but a part of human connection. When he discusses Asian American and disability studies, he connects the two believing it is more than a community group and not a multicultural addition. He questions what it would mean for Asian American studies to have a disability at its center. He believes that there is a lack of stories not because of shame but the gap that promotes a lack of questioning from Asian Americans.

The Cultural Dynamics of Being Asian and Disabled by Tiffany Yu

Tiffany Yu describes her experience of being an Asian American and one with a disability. Tiffany considered her disability as a source of shame and kept it hidden. For both mental health and physical disability, she had to keep it hidden because fearing that it would bring shame to herself and her family if people found out. In her time at Georgetown, Tiffany started a movement called Diversability to celebrate the diversity of those who live with disabilities. She embraces her disability advocacy with pride, even if her parents disagree.

“Exploratory and spatial analysis of disability among older Asian Indians” (2018) — \$

In disability studies research, Asian Indians are often understudied despite being a fast-growing group in the United States. This study revealed that it is more likely for older Asian Indians to be disabled and that married Asian-Indian men with health insurance were least likely to have a disability. This study also demonstrated differences in chances of having a disability in California vs the Chicago Metropolitan area for Asian Indians.



*Graphic ID —
A person using a
wheelchair is in front of
a family member who is
holding the wheelchair's
handles.*

MENTAL ILLNESS

[The Stigma of Mental Illness in Asian Cultures - Chee Hong Ng — \\$](#)

Mental illness is viewed differently in non-Western societies, which includes many Asian countries. Culture can change how someone lives with a mental illness, such as how they should get treatment, how it is accepted, and how they are viewed across family and society. Mental illness is a disability, and Asian culture can negatively impact care due to fears of negative shamefulness. More research needs to be done to determine how Asian societies and cultures respond to mental illness to improve mental health services in Asian American cultures.

[Cultural Norms and Subjective Disability as Predictors of Symptom Reports among Asian Americans and White Americans-Sumie Okazaki and Diya Kallivayalil — \\$](#)

Two researchers did a study to determine if Asian Americans' cultural norms would change how they observe their own mental health symptoms. The study showed that cultural norms impacted symptoms among Asian Americans but not white Americans. The study concluded that Asian Americans were more likely to share their feelings about being depressed than White Americans.

[Distress under Duress: The Relationship between Campus Climate and Depression in Asian American College Students - Cress and Ikeda \(2003\) — \\$](#)

Asian American college students' depression levels were predictive of student perceptions of a negative campus culture in all types of colleges (private, public, etc.). These findings were also consistent within the racial group and for the whole college community. As a result, higher education institutions that are perceived to have a negative campus climate and discriminatory practices by its students may have a higher chance of putting Asian-American students at risk of mental health issues.

DISABILITY AWARENESS

Respectability

Every May is Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month. There are currently more than 18 million Asian Americans in the US, but over 1 million have a form of disability. Although over half a million Asian Americans with disabilities are working, 18% of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders live in poverty. In addition, hate crimes have risen significantly since the COVID-19 pandemic, negatively impacting Asian American businesses. Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders need more access and opportunities for success, which will require changes in our society, the economy, and training.

Disability Studies and Asian-American Literature - Kristina Chew (2019) — \$

In the 1800s, Asian identity also symbolized the negative connotations of disability with “oriental” or “yellow peril” indicating someone to have disease and need to be quarantined or excluded. The model minority myth has also typecasted Asian Americans to have high, almost freakish, intelligence. Chew concludes that focusing on disability in Asian American literature would help expand what it means to be Asian American and break away from the common tropes of Asian American literature.

"Enabling Conversations: Critical Pedagogy and the Intersections of Race and Disability Studies" — \$

Both Asian American studies and Disability studies have various perspectives on "otherness" and rules of behavior. One researcher suggests we need to bring political engagement and action to an interactive and social community to question the power and social dynamics impacting Asian Americans and disability. Another researcher mentions that we need to remember that groups are diverse and that marginalized groups may not always agree. We need to question these different histories without blending them and take action to counter the shame that makes both Asian Americans and those with disabilities seem disqualified.



*Graphic ID —
Two people are giving each other a high-five
while the person in the middle is smiling.*

DISABILITY AND ASIAN AMERICAN CHILDREN

Underrepresented and Overlooked: A Review of Asian American Children with Disabilities - Cooc and Yan (2017) — \$

In research centered around disabled Asian American youth, most of the qualitative results were reported from parents. Some studies also garnered perspectives of caregivers and Asian American youth themselves. Cooc and Yan also discovered that the backgrounds of Asian American parents and youth surveyed for studies were relatively diverse in religion, education level, and income level.

Asian Parents' Perceptions of Child Disability and School Contact for Services - Nayoung Kim (2010)

This study concluded that Asian parents were less likely to believe or realize that their child has a disability than their European counterparts. This study also concluded that Asian parents were less likely to seek out help from special education programs based in schools. They did, however, seek help with non-school based systems once realizing their child has a disability.

Beyond Underrepresentation: Constructing Disability with Young Asian American Children to Preserve the "Model Minority" Stereotype - Soyoung Park (2019) — \$

Park summarizes that educators often internalized the "model minority" stereotype of young Asian American students. As a result, when educators internalized this stereotype, they also hastily concluded that any Asian American student who didn't fulfill the "model minority" role had some sort of disability. She concludes that this social construction of disability among Asian American youth perpetuates racial hierarchies and the "model minority" stereotype.

Perceptions of siblings with autism and relationships with them: European American and Asian American siblings draw and tell — \$

Two researchers ran a study to know how non-disabled children observe their siblings who are autistic and from either European American and Asian American families. They concluded that their relationship is different between European American and Asian American ethnic groups. In addition, there is a difference when parents are involved with providing their children knowledge about autism based on ethnicity. Based on different ethnic groups, the ability of non-disabled siblings impact their relationship with siblings who are autistic.

Disability, Ethnicity and Childhood: a critical review of research by Zoebia Ali, et al. — \$

According to the chapter in Disability, Ethnicity, and Childhood, not much is known about the experiences of children with disabilities. According to Bryony Beresford, children's opinions, especially from minority groups, have been ignored by researchers, and services have been implemented without children being informed. In addition, Disablism and institutional racism have been shown to negatively affect the identity and self-image of those from minority groups. Even specialized schools for the deaf and the blind, disabled Asian American children have experienced racial harassment, including physical violence.

Thank you for reading through our literature review! Due to current academic regulations, some resources are not available to the general public. However, if you would like to access some of these publications, please email us at aadisabilities@gmail.com and we will be in touch with you!

RESOURCES

Based on the research-based literature review compiled in the earlier section, the AADI team compiled a brief and non-exhaustive list of resources that may help disabled Asian Americans (and allies!) in all areas of life, whether it be access to mental health resources, further information on advocacy, professional networks for disabled and/or Asian American folks, and so much more! This list is alive and ever-growing, so check back often for updates.

The Asian Mental Health Collective (AMHC)

has compiled a directory of Asian-identifying therapists

<https://www.asianmhc.org/apisaa>

Asians for Mental Health Therapist Directory

<https://asiansformentalhealth.com>

Asian and Pacific Islanders with Disabilities of California

<https://apidisabilities.org>

Ayana Therapy

<https://www.ayanatherapy.com>

Chinatown Community Development Center (San Francisco)

<https://www.chinatowncdc.org>

Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community (Chicago)

<https://cbcacchicago.org>

Disability EmpowHER Network

<https://www.disabilityempowhernetwork.org>

Disability Rights California

<https://asianmentalhealthproject.com>

Diversability

<https://mydiversability.com>

Inclusive Therapists

<https://www.inclusivetherapists.com>

Lime Connect

<https://www.limeconnect.com>

The Mighty

<https://themighty.com>

Pacific and Asian Affairs Council

<https://www.paachawaii.org>

RespectAbility

<https://www.respectability.org>

Working with Disabilities Facebook Group

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/wwdisabilities>

REDDIT COMMUNITIES

r/adhdwomen

<https://www.reddit.com/r/adhdwomen/>

r/amputee

<https://www.reddit.com/r/amputee/>

r/Blind

<https://www.reddit.com/r/Blind/>

r/cfs

<https://www.reddit.com/r/cfs/>

r/ChronicPain

<https://www.reddit.com/r/ChronicPain/>

r/disability

<https://www.reddit.com/r/disability/>

r/ehlersdanlos

<https://www.reddit.com/r/ehlersdanlos/>

r/neurodiversity

<https://www.reddit.com/r/neurodiversity/>

For more links, check out

www.aadinitiative.org/resources

UPDATED REGULARLY

Here is a space to reflect and work on your own journey!

JOURNAL PROMPTS

10 Questions to Get to Know You

Feel free to fill out this Google Form with your answers and we will feature them! bit.ly/aadijournalresponse

What does being Asian American mean to YOU?

In what ways do you connect with your culture?

How might you want to reconnect with being Asian American?

What parts of your identity are you still confused about?

Can you think of a moment where you felt really in touch with your identity? Out of touch?

Do you have people around you that you connect with about your identity and your shared experience?
If not, who could you reach out to in order to find that community?

What internal biases are you still struggling with?

In what ways can you be a better ally to other marginalized communities?

How have you grown in the past year?

What are your goals for the next year?

How can you include identity-based growth as part of your journey?



COMMUNITY PARTNERS

AAPI YOUTH RISING

AAPI Youth Rising is an organization composed primarily of middle-schoolers. Our mission is to take small actions to make positive change in our communities. In March 2021, AAPI Youth Rising organized a 1,200+ person rally to bring awareness to the increase in xenophobia against Asians in America.

ASIAN AMERICAN GIRL CLUB

Asian American Girl Club is an apparel company set to redefine what it means to be a modern Asian American woman. Whether it be through flooding your timeline with powerful images of rad women, creating content -from interviews to skincare to straight up real talk, or designing goodies with you specifically in mind, we're dedicated to the normalization of the next generation of AAPI gals and boss babes. To give voice and celebrate.

THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES (AAPD)

The American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) is a convener, connector, and catalyst for change, increasing the political and economic power of people with disabilities.

As a national cross-disability rights organization, AAPD advocates for full civil rights for the over 60 million Americans with disabilities by promoting equal opportunity, economic power, independent living, and political participation.

ASIAN MENTAL HEALTH PROJECT

The Asian Mental Health Project is here to dispel this belief and provide resources that are accessible to all, that will fall under Educational Programming, Community Events, and Partnerships. There is a pervasive cultural stigma that often discourages members of our community from receiving the help they need. In many Asian American communities, and in the greater American population, there exists a general lack of knowledge about mental health and mental illnesses. Because many of the symptoms of suffering are "invisible," it is often harder for mental illnesses to be acknowledged. There is a misconception that struggling with mental health is a choice or a sign of weakness.

ASIAN SISTERS PARTICIPATING IN REACHING EXCELLENCE (ASPIRE)

ASPIRE builds and empowers a community of Asian American women leaders through identity development, mentorship, and education.

AUTISTIC SELF ADVOCACY NETWORK

The Autistic Self Advocacy Network seeks to advance the principles of the disability rights movement with regard to autism.

AWESOME FOUNDATION

The Awesome Foundation is a global community advancing the interest of awesome in the universe, \$1000 at a time.

Each fully autonomous chapter supports awesome projects through micro-grants, usually given out monthly. These micro-grants, \$1000 or the local equivalent, come out of pockets of the chapter's "trustees" and are given on a no-strings-attached basis to people and groups working on awesome projects.

CLINTON GLOBAL INITIATIVE UNIVERSITY

The Clinton Global Initiative University (CGI U), the higher education program of the Foundation, activates this next generation through year-round programming that includes access to topic experts and change agents, mentorship networks, financial resources, and community events including the annual CGI U meeting. We are dedicated to supporting students who are committed to take action and address the world's most pressing challenges.

COLLEGE DEMS

The College Democrats of America is a nationwide organization dedicated to electing Democrats across the country using the power of the student voice. All over America, College Democrats chapters are putting in the work to register students to vote, mobilize activists, and engage in their local and state governments.

CROHN'S AND COALITIS YOUNG ADULTS NETWORK (CCYAN)

The Crohn's and Colitis Young Adults Network facilitates (CCYAN) a fellowship program, resources and a supportive space for young adults with Inflammatory Bowel Diseases around the world. The CCYAN is led entirely by young adults with IBD and is a program through the Health Advocacy Summit.

DISABILITY EMPOWHER NETWORK

Disability EmpowHER Network works towards empowering disabled young women to take control of their lives and have the confidence to lead.

DIVERSABILITY

Diversability is an award-winning social enterprise to rebrand disability through the power of community.

HEALTH ADVOCACY SUMMIT

The Health Advocacy Summit works to connect and empower young adults with chronic and rare conditions through events, meetings, and programs.

INFINITE FLOW DANCE

Infinite Flow Dance creates inclusion one dance at a time.

LIMECONNECT

LimeConnect is a global not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization that's rebranding disability through achievement. We do that by attracting, preparing, and connecting these high potential university students and professionals - including veterans - who happen to have all types of disabilities for careers, scholarships, internships, The Lime Connect Fellowship Program, The Lime Connect Foundations Program, and full-time careers with corporate partners.

MAKE US VISIBLE

Make Us Visible advocates for thoughtful and comprehensive inclusion of AAPI studies into K-12 curriculum for New Jersey Public Schools.

MOTT STREET GIRLS

Mott Street Girls celebrates the people, small businesses, and stories of Chinatown and beyond.

PRINCETON CARL A. FIELD CENTER

The Princeton Carl A. Field Center works to empower, engage, and educate individuals and institutions within the University community to develop, implement and support systems of inclusion.

PRINCETON ODS

The Office of Disability Services facilitates reasonable academic accommodations to support Princeton students with disabilities.

UNION OF PAN ASIAN COMMUNITIES (UPAC)

The mission of the Union of Pan Asian Communities is to improve the general well-being and education of the Asian, Pacific Islander and other ethnic communities of San Diego County. UPAC recognizes the diverse ethnic and cultural identities and strengths of these communities and their need for self-sufficiency.

If you are interested in collaborating with us or becoming a community partner with AADI, please feel free to reach out to aadinitiative@gmail.com to introduce yourself and your organization!

CONCLUSION

And with that, you've reached the end of the AADI resource guide! Whether it be through our Advocacy 101 guide, our section on allyship, the extensive literature review of scholarly research on disabled Asian Americans, or even just the testimonials of AADI members scattered throughout, we hope that you've learned about the disabled Asian American experience.

In the spirit of full transparency, this resource guide is not the end-all-be-all mecca of information on the disabled Asian American experience. In fact, we hope that it is only the beginning of your advocacy journey, whether you identify as an able-bodied ally, a caretaker, or a disabled Asian American yourself. We hope that our compiled knowledge can serve as a launchpad for your own growth as a budding activist, a more informed ally, and a kinder human being.

However, no amount of articles or journal publications can replace the authentic, messy, and real lived experiences of disabled Asian Americans. Beyond this guide, start conversations with those around you who may identify as disabled and/or Asian American. Follow and support the disabled Asian activists in our Advocacy 101 section, incorporate Asian American history and disability justice into your daily reading digest. Take a moment to reflect on your own presence in the workplace and on social media: whose voices are being heard — and whose voices are being silenced — at the table?

To those who do identify as disabled and Asian American: know that you are not alone. In fact, the Asian Americans with Disabilities Initiative was founded for that very reason — to show that disabled Asian Americans matter, that our voices deserve to be heard, and that we deserve to take up space.

For a list of all links referenced in this guide, please view our [APPENDIX](https://tinyurl.com/AADI-resourceguide-appendix) (<https://tinyurl.com/AADI-resourceguide-appendix>)

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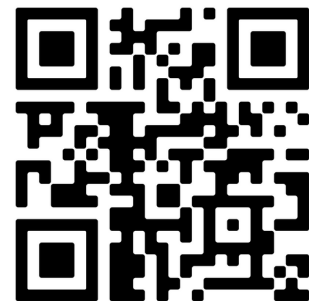
FEEDBACK

AADI is committed to accepting feedback on our resource guide, whether it is in regards to revised research abstracts or misquoted/missing information. Whatever it is, we would love to hear from you!



FEEDBACK FORM

<https://qrco.de/bcgKqH>



GET INVOLVED WITH AADI

If what you read in this resource guide resonated with you in any shape or form, we ask that you get connected and stay connected with us. The Asian Americans with Disabilities Initiative is committed to growing our community of disabled and able-bodied allies alike —



READ MORE ABOUT US

www.aadinitiative.org



CONNECT WITH US ON INSTAGRAM

[@AADInitiative](https://www.instagram.com/AADInitiative)



EMAIL US

aadisabilities@gmail.com



JOIN OUR LISTSERV TO GET ACCESS TO OUR NEWSLETTER AND DIRECTORY

www.tinyurl.com/AADI-newsletter