

**Policy Brief
Spring 2007**

Strategies to Address AAPI Needs from Welfare to Work

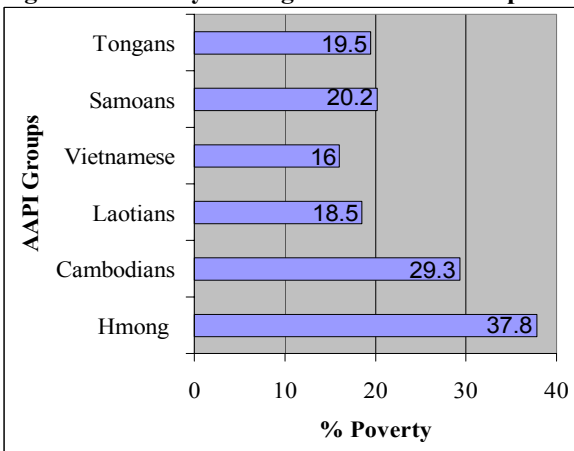
by

Julian Chow, Grace Yoo, Catherine Vu

Background

The passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (PRA) of 1996 has major implications for low-income Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) populations. As an aggregate, AAPIs have a lower per capita income and higher poverty rates than Whites¹. The AAPI population in the United States is heterogeneous with certain sub-groups facing high poverty rates. The figure below illustrates the poverty rates of specific AAPI groups based on 2000 Census data.

Figure 1. Poverty Among Select AAPI Groups



Source: U.S Department of Commerce, 2004 & 2005

California, home to the largest immigrant population in the country, has a significant number of AAPI living below the poverty line. The 2000 census reported that about 13% of Asians and 15% of Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders live below poverty level in California². The majority of AAPI living

¹ Reeves, Terrance and Claudette Bennett. (2003). *The Asian and Pacific Islander population in the United States: March 2002*. Washington, DC: US Department of Commerce.

² The Asian and Pacific Islander Health Forum. (2006). Health insurance coverage: Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders Fact Sheet. Retrieved June 19, 2007 from http://www.apiahf.org/resources/pdf/AAPI_Insurance_coverag

below the poverty line have participated in the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program, which provides cash aid, welfare-to-work services, and other benefits to needy families.

Before CalWORKs began, 21.7% of low-income legal permanent residents with children received public assistance in California in 1994³. As California began implementing its welfare reform, general immigrant participation in welfare declined steeply. In 1999, welfare use by the same group of low-income legal permanent residents with children declined to 11.7%, a 46% decrease. This decline is associated with a variety of factors known as “chilling effects” where immigrants’ confusion, fear, or stigma of welfare use discouraged them from seeking assistance.⁴

AAPI Timing-Out

There is a 60 month lifetime limit for adults to receive cash benefits on CalWORKs. The first cohort of welfare recipients timed-out of welfare in California in January 2003. Of the 5,573 cases who had reached their time-limit⁵, a high proportion of them were AAPI. While AAPI make up 8% of the population on public assistance in California, 37% have reached the five year time-limit⁶. Figure 2 illustrates the

[e Fact Sheet.pdf](#)

³ Fix, Michael & Jeffrey Passel. (2003). The scope and impact of welfare reform’s immigrant provisions. *The Urban Institute*. Retrieved January 23, 2007 From http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/410412_discussion02-03.pdf.

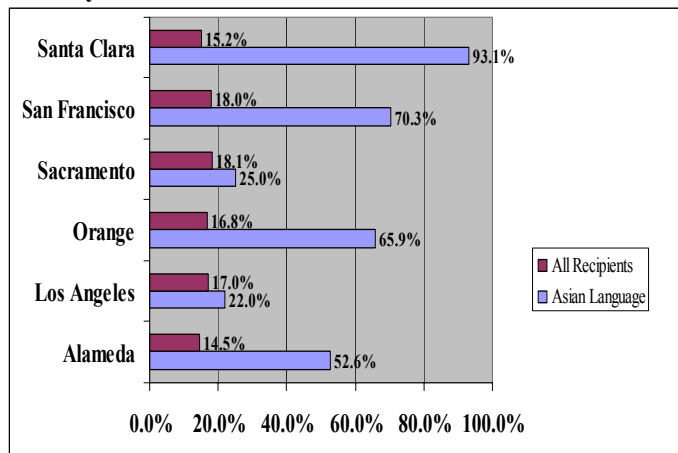
⁴ Tumlin, Karen C. & Wendy Zimmerman. (2003). Immigrants and TANF: A look at immigrant welfare recipients in three cities. *The Urban Institute*. Retrieved January 12, 2007 from <http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=310874>.

⁵ Graves, Scott. (2003). Welfare reform: Early impact of CalWORKs 60-month time limit. *California Budget Project*. Retrieved December 29, 2006 from <http://www.cbp.org/pdfs/2003/030627FactSheet.pdf>.

⁶ Nakano, Dana. (2006). Out of time: Asian Americans, time

percentage of welfare recipients who have reached the five-year time limit in six California counties.

Figure 2. Timing-out Rates in Select California Counties: January 2003



Source: Graves, 2002

Barriers to transition to work

The reasons that AAPIs are at risk of timing out are complex. Immigrants from Asia and Pacific Islanders face a variety of barriers that prevent them from obtaining job services that could help them obtain and maintain employment. The literature identifies several types of barriers to transition to work that are common to AAPI:

- *Institutional/Structural Barriers:* Social services can be difficult to navigate for AAPI who may not understand the system. Access to these services may also be limited due to lack of outreach and education. Other barriers of this type include poorly run resettlement programs, unsuccessful implementation of welfare reform, and weak community organizations which may have implications on transportation, housing, and child care.
- *Language Barriers:* Many AAPI immigrants speak little or no English, categorizing them as limited English proficient (LEP). Being LEP can limit the opportunities for employment, the types of employment obtained, or force AAPI to take lower paying jobs.
- *Personal Barriers:* Immigrants who left their native countries or refugees who were forced to flee war torn areas may experience depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, alcohol and drug use, domestic violence, and poor health conditions.

Many AAPI experience at least one or more of these types of challenges, making it difficult to achieve self-sufficiency. These barriers place AAPI welfare recipients at a higher risk for timing out. Because of barriers and challenges that the AAPI population may experience from transitioning from welfare to work, alternative models need to be examined that might provide

limits, and welfare reform in California. *Asian American Policy Review*. Retrieved December 12, 2006 from <http://www.aaprjournal.com/article/view/417/355>

specific supportive services for a limited English-speaking population.

Welfare-to-Work and Employment Services: Four Program Models

The literature offers some programs that have been implemented by state and local level agencies. The majority of these programs, however, are aimed towards assisting the general immigrant population, not specifically towards AAPI welfare recipients. The strategies and programs described below are based on the components of the four program models identified by a Mathematica Policy Research study⁷. While these strategies can be used to help AAPI overcome some of their barriers, it should be noted that more specific programs need to be developed to address the unique needs of AAPI in order to alleviate their high risk for timing-out.

- *“One-stop shops”* incorporate language training and job-skills development. These programs include mixed strategies which combines a work focus with opportunities for job skills training and education⁸. One-stop shops can improve access by providing child care, transportation and housing assistance, and job skills training and education, including English language courses, for employment.
- *Transitional job programs* combine time-limited subsidized employment with complete job-training services to overcome barriers and build skills⁹. These programs can facilitate employment by providing subsidized employment with support services (child care, transportation, etc.) and goal planning to obtain meaningful job experiences.
- *Welfare-to-work programs must be comprehensive and family focused in nature.* In addition to employment related programs, community-based organizations must provide culturally competent support services to clients. Additionally, practitioners must establish credibility and rapport with clients by including the participants’ families, rather than just the individuals themselves, particularly when addressing mental health needs.
- *Additional research and evaluation* are needed to continue identifying participation patterns, needs, and obstacles, as well as effective programs that assist AAPI recipients to transition from welfare to work.

⁷ Pavetti, LaDonna and Debra Strong. (2001). Work-based strategies for hard-to-employ TANF recipients: A preliminary assessment of program models and dimensions. *Mathematica Policy Research*. Retrieved February 18, 2007 from http://www.jcpr.org/wpfiles/pavetti_strong_SRI2001.pdf?CFID=7795201&CFTOKEN=38274476

⁸ Fremstad, Shawn. (2003). Immigrants, persons with limited proficiency in English, and the TANF program: What do we know? *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*.

⁹ Baider, Allegra and Abbey Frank. (2006). Transitional jobs: Helping TANF recipients with barriers to employment succeed in the labor market. *Center for Law and Social Policy*.

Julian Chow is an associate professor and Catherine Vu is a graduate student researcher of Social Welfare, UC Berkeley; Grace Yoo is an associate professor of Asian American Studies at San Francisco State University.

The UC AAPI Policy Multicampus Research Program promotes and coordinates applied and policy research on topics relevant to California's growing Asian American and Pacific Islander population. The MRP serves as a bridge linking UC researchers to community organizations, the media, and elected officials and their staff. These activities help the University of California to integrate research, teaching, and community outreach in ways that inform and enlighten public discourse on important public policy issues. The MRP and the publication of policy briefs are supported through funds from the UC Office of the President, UCLA's Asian American Studies Center, and other academic units from throughout the UC system.