Overview

Founded in 1998, AYPAL is a leadership development, community organizing and coalition building organization that seeks to create healthy, safe, and thriving communities. It serves the Asian and Pacific Islander Immigrant community of Oakland, CA. Today, AYPAL is a leader in the education justice movement and the only organization in the state of California that organizes low-income immigrant and refugee API families around reforms in public education.

Mission

AYPAL’s mission is to empower Oakland’s low-income Asian & Pacific Islander immigrant and refugee families to be leaders for school reform and neighborhood change. –AYPAL website

Constituency

- Youth (13-17) and adults (18-25)
- African American
- Asian (Pan Asian, Southeast Asian)
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- LGBTQ
- Foster children
- Immigrant
- Undocumented

Local Conditions & Critical Issues Impacting 0-5 Childhood Health in Oakland, CA

Adultism

“All the youth that we work with, all the youth in society, are not really viewed as full human, and their thinking is not validated…and they’re just not taken in the same seriousness of capacity that adults are. And it’s very normalized and rarely ever questioned. But at least for us, it’s part of why we work with young people not only because it’s the right thing to do…but we think that young people are the creative, hopeful, and courageous leaders in our society that we need to follow.” –Joshua Fisher Lee, Project Director

Intergenerational trauma experienced by immigrant refugee families

“I think [the youth] have trouble connecting generationally, with the adults (parents and grandparents) in their lives. There’s this intergenerational trauma that gets passed down from them which is PTSD from escaping from genocide and war in South East Asia and not being able to connect; we find there’s a lot of substance abuse from these families. That has become somewhat the coping mechanism from the traumatic experience of being refugees.

Limited childcare options for working parents

“I do think that folks in our community lean on the fact that oftentimes families do stay close to each other and live close to each other and have immigrant communities that are connected, but that sometimes [means] busy parents are having to leave children with other busy people.”

Loss of cultural identity

“[It] goes back to the unhealed intergenerational trauma associated with being refugee, but also the harmfulness of the pressures of assimilation in our community and the fact that our Asian community has basically been asked to give up their cultures of our homeland, and that disconnection from our culture is traumatic and painful.”

Mistrust of Western healthcare system

“In our community [there is general] distrust of the medical and health system here, partly because of language, and partly because of culture, particularly for groups that maybe practice different types of health, like shamanism or something like that, and there’s nothing of that that’s resembled in hospitals and medical systems [here]…so that could definitely setup issues of people not taking their kids to doctors and things like that.”
#wehere campaign

"#wehere refers to ‘we here’ as people in Oakland, fighting against displacement, and also ‘we here’ as API youth that are less visible in the community, because of the model minority myth."

Youth leadership development programming that is culturally relevant

“We're teaching people about their cultures and their histories and how they got here, and that is putting them in the place to reflect and understand themselves better, which we noticed lead to positive decision making from young people when they're grounded in their culture and they know who they are it's harder to get stuck into some of the potential negative coping mechanisms that exist for young people like substance abuse or violence and gangs and things like that.”

Health disparities organizing—fighting gentrification and displacement through advocacy and direct action

AYPAL’s Accomplishments in Wellness & Safety

• Implemented changes in Oakland Unified School District (ethnic studies curriculum; disaggregate API data)

“[With disaggregated data] we are able to see what was happening with the Cambodian community, so you could see what was happening with the Vietnamese, Chinese communities as opposed to seeing all of those communities as just Asian from a statistics point of view…we know that data plays a big role in scoping out which communities are in need of increased resources around health, and so by disaggregating data I think it will be more accurate assessments of which communities could benefit from increased resources. And that will help contribute to different health outcomes for underrepresented APIs.”

• Giving young people a voice

“As far as victories with displacement, we've actually had a bunch of losses, most of the stuff that we've advocated for the city has not paid attention to us. By giving young people a voice to fight, I think let's [them] know their voice does matter, regardless of outcome, it’s that they share their voice and people listen to them and they're able to still affect the narrative.”

Key Indicators of Childhood Health in Oakland, CA

- 34.7% of children grades 5, 7, and 9 are overweight or obese.
- 31.3% of Alameda County children aged 2 to 11 consume one or more sugary drinks per day.
- East and West Oakland have some of the highest emergency department and hospitalization rates for causes that are linked to air pollution, including childhood asthma.
- 69% of Oakland 3rd graders have experienced some form of dental disease, including 31% with untreated cavities.

Current Wellness & Safety Efforts

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1. **Youth-centered practices**

“When our youth are teaching other youth, or guiding other youth through curriculum about their own cultures, it’s proving to be strong in building youth’s own power. Youth decision making, around campaign work, has also been a strong practice. I’ll say sometimes the youth will choose campaigns that maybe the adults don’t think are as viable or as useful at the time, but what’s most important about youth decision making is also the ability to make mistakes and have it be okay and to learn from it.”

2. **Connect the work to culture**

“We also do two events per year, that are connected to youth learning cultural dances or cultural practices and performing them with the community and having them see a lot of these young people that maybe we think don’t know their culture or maybe don’t care about their culture, they actually do feel connected to it, I think it’s also useful for everybody.”

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**Allies/Partnerships Working on Children’s Health**

- Asian Health Services – Oakland, CA [https://asianhealthservices.org/](https://asianhealthservices.org/)
- Community Health for Asian Americans CHAA – Oakland, CA [https://chaaweb.org/](https://chaaweb.org/)
- East Bay Asian Youth Center– Oakland, CA [https://ebayc.org/](https://ebayc.org/)

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**Website:** aypal.org  
**Address:** 1238 Harrison Street Oakland, CA 94612  
**Telephone:** 510-879-7492  
**Facebook:** [https://www.facebook.com/AYPAL](https://www.facebook.com/AYPAL)  
**Twitter:** [https://twitter.com/aypal](https://twitter.com/aypal)  
**Tumblr:** [http://aypal.tumblr.com/](http://aypal.tumblr.com/)  
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