As a congresswoman from East Los Angeles, California, and the San Gabriel Valley, I have the privilege of representing a district that is home to many diverse communities, including Latinos and African Americans, as well as Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders. As a policymaker I understand that the health challenges faced by each of our communities are unique and that solutions that work for one community may not be effective in others. Therefore, it is very important to have data and research that provides policy-makers, public health experts, local leaders, and service providers with relevant information to set priorities and allocate resources to address particular disparities in our communities.

As an Asian American, I am constantly aware that we as a community do face unique challenges. The pervasive “model minority” stereotype often presents challenges in addressing wide-ranging disparities in health coverage and health care services within our communities. We represent both ends of the educational and economic spectrum and have very distinct and differing cultural, social, and immigration histories. We exist in large numbers not only in New York and California, but also in Texas, Ohio, Arizona, Minnesota, Utah, and Arkansas.

One of the major challenges we face is a growing hepatitis B epidemic. We as a community remain woefully unaware of our vulnerability to this deadly disease. Though one in ten Asian American community members is chronically infected by hepatitis B, two of three of those who are infected are unaware of their status. Data shows that there is an identical lack of knowledge and awareness about how this disease affects our communities among health care providers and social service providers.

Federal support is necessary to increase knowledge and awareness of diseases like hepatitis B and to assist state and local prevention and control efforts in reducing the effects of these epidemics and the disparities in coverage and care that our communities face.

In our efforts to pass health care reform, the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, under the leadership of Representative Michael Honda (D, CA), understands that true reform means finding solutions that will reduce health disparities, with the ultimate goal of improving the health of all Americans.

We remain committed to working toward these goals with our colleagues in the Congressional Black Caucus, and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, with our colleagues in the US House of Representatives and the US Senate, and with federal agencies such as the Department of Health and Human Services, the Centers for Disease Control, and the National Institutes of Health.

This special issue demonstrates the important data and research work being done at the national and local levels and is a critical step in understanding and addressing the health challenges faced by our diverse communities. It is up to all of us, whether we be members of Congress, agency representatives, public health officials, or community leaders, to turn this research into action.

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United States House of Representatives

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