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## AAFA launches HEAL Innovation to continue addressing asthma disparities identified in 2020 report

### New program will focus on community-based asthma programs for adults and teens

#### Causes of asthma disparities

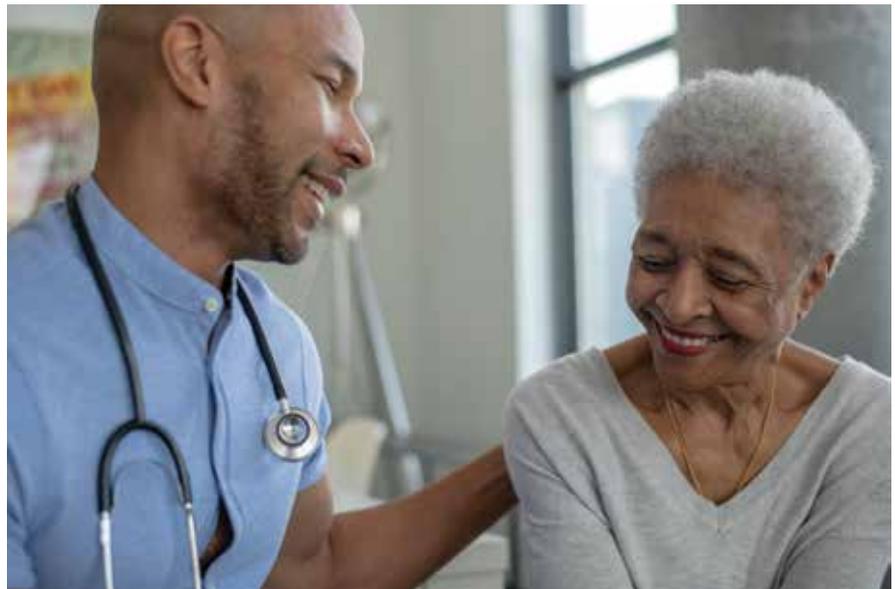
According to The Allergy and Asthma Foundation of America (AAFA), “In the US, the burden of asthma falls disproportionately on low-income or racial and ethnic minority populations. Decades of research and public health data have extensively identified disparities in asthma prevalence, mortality and healthcare utilization along racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines.”

AAFA’s website states that health disparities in asthma and allergy are due to:

- Systemic racism (including bias in healthcare, segregation, discrimination and historical trauma)
- Social determinants (such as socioeconomic status, education, neighborhood and physical environment, employment, social support networks and access to healthcare)

#### AAFA’s report and call to action

In 2020, AAFA, the world’s oldest and largest non-profit patient organization for people with asthma, allergies and related conditions, published a 15-year update to its report, “Asthma Disparities in America: A Roadmap to Reducing Burden on Racial and Ethnic Minorities.” Outlining nearly 70 strategies to improve asthma health in underserved populations, it was intended “to



serve as a national call to action to fix the social inequities caused by structural racism that continue to plague vulnerable, at-risk patients and families with asthma.”

#### New AAFA initiatives

At the same time, AAFA began new collaborations to address asthma disparities. In 2020, in San Diego, CA, with support from Sanofi Genzyme and Regeneron, AAFA provided Rady Children’s Hospital with a \$200,000 grant to expand their AAFA Severe Asthma Program and their Community Approach to Severe Asthma (CASA) program. CASA connects high-risk, low-income children and their families with trained community health workers who help families find and reduce asthma triggers in the home. The health workers also provide free resources

and allergen-control products to help reduce these triggers, in turn helping children gain control of their asthma and reduce emergency visits and hospitalizations.

In 2021, AAFA formed two new collaborations in New York State. The first was with the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) to support the state’s \$30 million Building Better Homes and \$40 million Buildings of Excellence Competition initiatives. These programs work to provide carbon-neutral homes with better air quality in disadvantaged communities. The AAFA collaboration also aims to raise awareness about the importance of indoor air quality and the ways it affects people with asthma and allergies throughout New York State.

In the same year, AAFA funded a pilot program from AIRnyc, which leads partnerships and pilot programs with a variety of organizations to improve health outcomes and reduce disparities throughout New York City. The AAFA-funded program is designed to connect 50 households that manage asthma with health education, healthcare and social programs.

## Launching HEAL and HEAL Innovation

In May 2022, AAFA launched the Health Equity Advancement and Leadership (HEAL) program to address findings from its report. The HEAL program is designed to “reinforce AAFA’s commitment to drastically reducing the burden of asthma in communities that bear the heaviest burden of asthma.”

As part of the HEAL program, AAFA announced HEAL Innovation, whose overall goal is to reduce mortality and morbidity among high-risk populations by partnering with and strengthening local community programs. Because AAFA believes that “all asthma is local” [i.e., influenced by and experienced under local conditions], they recognize and support the importance of combining national leadership with community-driven action.

“We know how to address disparities and improve asthma outcomes at the local level,” explained Sanaz Eftekhari, Vice President of Corporate Affairs and Research for AAFA. “Community-based asthma interventions have been proven effective and HEAL will generate momentum to sustain critical programs across the nation.”

## A focus on adults and teens

Each year, HEAL Innovation will award funding and resources to four local, pilot, community-based asthma programs tailored to at-risk populations most impacted by asthma. The focus of these

four pilot programs will be on adults and teens who have asthma. While AAFA recognizes there are many proven and effective community-based asthma programs for children, they have found very few programs that serve adults. Through the HEAL Innovation awards, they hope to utilize best practices from pediatric programs to build successful programs for adults and teens.

## A vision of sustainability

During the first year of HEAL Innovation, AAFA will work with local partners to collect and analyze data in the four selected cities to measure the success of the programs. The long-term vision is that AAFA’s investment in these pilot programs will allow our local partners to seek sustainable funding from payors and other healthcare stakeholders in the future.

## The first four cities

The first year of HEAL Innovation, which runs through mid-2023, is supported exclusively by Amgen through a \$1 million sponsorship. It will fund programs in Detroit, Chicago, Los Angeles and St. Louis.

- In Detroit, AAFA will partner with its Michigan Chapter to improve asthma control through general health and wellness, access to specialty care, assessment of home environments and asthma self-management education. The pilot program is designed to serve 50 or more families in the greater Detroit area.
- Working with the American Lung Association in Greater Chicago, AAFA will launch a pilot program for adults and adolescents with asthma. It will include asthma education and home visits. Both AAFA and the Lung Association are members of the Chicago Asthma Consortium.
- AAFA will work in partnership with Breathe Southern California (Breathe SoCal) to launch

a pilot program in Los Angeles that will address the needs of adults with asthma in underserved communities of Southeast Los Angeles County.

- In partnership with the AAFA St. Louis Chapter and Oasis St. Louis, AAFA will launch a new home visit program for older adults with asthma. The program will include routine check-ins, coordinate care with an asthma specialist, and provide AAFA-certified asthma & allergy friendly® products for the home.

## “The right thing to do”

“AAFA is eager to invest in communities and local partners to improve asthma care and outcomes,” said Kenneth Mendez, AAFA’s CEO and President. “While the costs of asthma and health disparities total billions of dollars every year for Americans, we know that we can significantly improve asthma outcomes and reduce costs through investments in the community. In addition to saving money, it’s simply the right thing to do on behalf of those who have experienced stark inequities in health.”

## About AAFA

Founded in 1953, AAFA is the world’s oldest and largest non-profit patient organization for people with asthma, allergies and related conditions. AAFA offers support for individuals and families through its online patient support communities, network of local chapters and affiliated support groups, providing practical, evidence-based information, community programs and services. In addition, AAFA supports and works with local community organizations and groups including hospital systems, state asthma control programs and housing advocates across the US. These programs serve disadvantaged populations who are at highest risk of having asthma, needing

emergency medical care and dying from asthma.

## References

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