

ASIAN MENTAL HEALTH PROJECT

MENTAL HEALTH TOOLKIT

CREATED FOR ASIAN PACIFIC
ISLANDER AMERICAN SCHOLARS



Asian Mental Health Project provides educational resources and community care initiatives that help make mental health care more accessible and approachable for the Pan-Asian community. Today, we create multimedia resources, host community events and provide mental health assistance grants.

OUR MISSION



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WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?



Everyone has a state of mental health just like a state of physical health. Mental health is our emotional, social, behavioral and social wellbeing that affect our functioning with daily activities. Several factors contribute to mental health including life experiences, genetics, family, social situations and culture. Having a poorer state of mental health does not necessarily mean a person has a mental illness (e.g., grief)

Mental Health vs. Mental Illness

Everyone has mental health, but not everyone has a mental illness. Mental illness are:

- Diagnosed conditions by a healthcare provider
- Affects a person's ability to function over a long period of time
- Can impact how we see ourselves, how we perceive the world, and how we interact with others
- Health conditions that involve significant changes in our emotions, thinking, behavior, or a combination

Some statistics about mental illness (source CDC):

- 1 in 5 U.S. adults experience mental illness each year
- 1 in 20 US adults experience serious mental illness each year
- 16.4% of non-hispanic asians experience mental illness each year

Although mental health and mental illness can seem daunting, it is important to remember that mental illnesses are treatable and improvement is possible. The vast majority of individuals with mental illness continue to function in their daily lives.

SIGNS OF MENTAL HEALTH DISTRESS

There are multitudes of mental illnesses, with each illness having their own set of symptoms. However, there are still common guidelines of symptoms to be aware of such as:

- Excessive worrying or fear
- Feeling excessively sad or low
- Extreme mood changes – ex: uncontrollable highs or feelings of euphoria
- Avoiding friends and social activities
- Changes in sleeping habits or feeling tired or low energy
- Changes in eating habits – increased hunger or lack of appetite
- Inability to carry out daily activities or handle daily problems and stress
- Excessive smoking, drinking, or use of drugs
- Feeling helpless or hopeless
- Worrying a lot of the time
- Thinking about suicide

If you or someone you know is experiencing any of these symptoms, don't be afraid to reach out for help. Learning about mental health and identifying symptoms are some of the important first steps to seeking assistance. Reach out to your primary physician, health insurance, or state/county health authority for more resources.

Sources

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<https://www.mcleanhospital.org/essential/mental-health-mental-illness>

<https://www.nami.org/mhstats>

<https://nami.org/about-mental-illness/warning-signs-and-symptoms>

<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline/warning-signs-risk-factors>

<https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/learn/index.htm#:~:text=Mental%20illnesses%20are%20among%20the,a%20seriously%20debilitating%20mental%20illness.>

CONNECTING CULTURE & MENTAL HEALTH

The way we grow up, the people, and culture we are surrounded by affects our mental health and how we process it. Oftentimes, there is cultural stigma - disapproval or discrimination against even talking about mental health.

Experiences such as racism, systemic oppression, complex trauma and collective trauma inform our mental health as well. Beyond stigma, race, gender, sexuality and identity also affect mental health care.

For example, studies show that:

- 34.9% of male U.S. adults with mental illness whereas 48.6% of female U.S. adults with mental illness seek treatment.
- Asian Americans are three times less likely to seek mental health services than White Americans.
- 35.1% of Hispanic/Latinx adults with mental illness receive treatment each year compared to the U.S. average of 46.2%.
- Black adults in the U.S. are more likely than white adults to report persistent symptoms of emotional distress

Sources

<https://www.nami.org/mhstats>

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<https://www.mhanational.org/issues/black-and-african-american-communities-and-mental-health>



ASIAN AMERICAN, NATIVE HAWAIIAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDERS (AANHPI) CULTURE & MENTAL HEALTH

Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders (AANHPI) face unique challenges and stressors when it comes to addressing mental health. Cultural factors include acculturation, assimilation, cultural identity, cultural expectations, stigma, generational/cultural gap, language barriers, and intergenerational trauma are just a few that can impact mental health.

In this section, we will further dive into providing more information on each factor to gain a better understanding as to how mental health is affected and provide resources to help address these features.

ACCULTURATION & ASSIMILATION

Acculturation is the process by which a person begins to adopt the culture, language, customs, and mannerisms of a new environment or culture. When thinking of acculturation, the topic of assimilation is brought to light as it is one of many forms of acculturation.

Assimilation is when immigrant groups are encouraged to adopt the culture, values, and social behaviors of their host nation. Cultural assimilation is often perceived as shedding aspects of one's culture – ex: language, foods, clothing, religion – that the host nation is unfamiliar with. Oftentimes, when an individual assimilates to a new culture, their original cultural identity often becomes erased or suppressed. By assimilating to a new culture, individuals could then face mental health issues of questioning their cultural identity.

CULTURAL IDENTITY & EXPECTATIONS

Cultural Identity

Culture is the shared characteristic of a group of people, which encompasses place of birth, religion, language, cuisine, social behaviors, art, literature, and music. Cultural identity refers to the identification with, or sense of belonging to, a particular group based on various cultural categories which include nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, and religion. Cultural identity is multifaceted and complex, as individuals can identify with more than one cultural group.

Cultural Expectations

Cultural expectations (also could be identified as cultural norms) can be defined as the standards we live by. They are the shared expectations and rules that guide the behavior of people within social groups. Cultural expectations can differ across multiple ethnic groups, as every culture has their own set of values and standards to which they operate within. Within the AANHPI community, collectivist values are emphasized such as the importance of harmony, saving “face,” respect for elders, conformity to norms, emotional self-control, and interdependence.



GENERATIONAL/CULTURAL GAP



Generational gap is defined as differences in the outlook or opinion between people of different generations. For the AANHPI communities, the generational gap and acculturation can greatly contribute to stress and negative mental health issues. For example, the younger generation of AANHPI communities usually adapt the U.S. cultures at an easier rate compared to their immigrant parents. This could then lead to conflict between these two generations as the older generation could desire for the younger generation to adapt to their own cultural practices, while the younger generation may prefer to adopt the U.S. culture instead. These generational gaps can cause miscommunication and misunderstanding between generations, adding stress to both groups.

STIGMA

AANHPI members are the least likely racial group to take actions on their mental health to receive professional help, but more likely to reach out to friends and family for assistance. Not all AANHPI individuals have a strong support system which could lead to them experiencing difficulty expressing their challenges due to guilt or shame. Therefore, battling the stigmas that surround the AANHPI experience is a factor to consider when reaching out for help or trying to assist others who need help with their mental health.

INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA

Intergenerational trauma occurs when the trauma of an earlier generation gets passed down to the next generations. Intergenerational trauma can negatively affect your health in numerous ways. Some long term effects from intergenerational trauma include: shame, guilt, anxiety, feeling helpless or vulnerable, low self esteem, depression, relationship troubles, extreme reactions to stress, and damaged cultural identity. Traumatic distressing events often affect your relatives' relationship skills, personal behaviors, and attitudes or beliefs. These changes can then be passed down from generation to generation, allowing a cycle of trauma to prevail.



IMMIGRATION EXPERIENCE

More than 22 million Asian Americans can trace their heritage to over 20 countries across Asia as well as the Indian subcontinent, each with its distinct histories and cultures. The Asian immigrant community has experienced consistent growth over time, contributing to the United State's cultural, economic, and social diversity. Common challenges faced by Asian immigrants include the migration process, violence in country of origin, language barriers, cultural adjustment, poverty, limitations to healthcare, legal and immigration issues, and family separations.

SYSTEMS OF OPPRESSION

The complex and interconnected social structures, practices, and institutions that systematically disadvantage and discriminate against minoritized groups of people based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, religion, or socioeconomic status. Systems are deeply ingrained in society and can manifest in various forms, perpetuating inequities, discrimination, biases, stereotypes, microaggressions, as well as issues of power and privilege. Within the AANHPI community, systems of oppression include White Supremacy, xenophobia, misogyny, cultural appropriation, anti-Asian racism and violence.

MODEL MINORITY MYTH (MMM)

A stereotype that suggests that Asian Americans, are inherently more successful, well-behaved, as well as academically and economically accomplished than other minoritized groups. They are “compliments” on the surface (e.g., AAPIs being seen as good in math and science), but lead to harmful effects such as being used to generalize the experiences of all people of Asian descent. MMM disregards the diversity within the AANHPI community and overlooks the challenges, barriers, and discrimination that many face. It perpetuates the idea that discrimination and systemic racism does not affect AANHPIs, leading to the erasure of their historical struggles. It is used as a comparative tool to pit communities of color against each other by justifying or dismissing the challenges faced by other minoritized groups.

LANGUAGE BARRIERS

Language barriers are defined as a barrier to communication between people who are unable to speak a common language. Language barriers can negatively affect the mental health of AANHPI communities, as some individuals may not be able to locate the proper resources needed. These resources may not be delivered in the languages spoken by these individuals, leading to barriers in access for these communities, causing further harm and prevention of treatment. Additionally, as there are a variety of cultures and languages, different needs could be presented. Communication challenges can arise when there are language barriers between individuals requiring assistance and those who are offering the appropriate resources and support to them.



Sources

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<https://centerforinterculturaldialogue.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/key-concept-cultural-identity.pdf>
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<https://www.apa.org/pi/oema/resources/ethnicity-health/asian-american>
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<https://www.uclahealth.org/news/mental-health-barriers-asian-americans>
<https://www.nami.org/Your-Journey/Identity-and-Cultural-Dimensions/Asian-American-and-Pacific-Islander/Expectations-and-Family-Pressure>
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/administration/eop/aapi/data/critical-issues>
<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/04/29/key-facts-about-asian-americans/>

BACK-TO-SCHOOL PLAN

High School Mental Health Edition

According to the CDC, 37% of high school students reported mental health issues through COVID-19. The US surgeon general has also reported this period of time as a youth mental health crisis, with heightened rates of teen distress. Students, your health and well-being absolutely matter.

Going back to school, can be both exciting and nerve-racking. Common feelings students may have about going back to school may include fear, anxiety, stress, isolation, and grief.

HOW CAN WE HELP OURSELVES AND THOSE AROUND US?

1

Identify a Trusted Adult

Talking to a parent, teacher, social worker, therapist, or counselor can help you process your emotions and cope with stress

2

Create a Routine

Creating and sticking to a routine can help you feel calmer and more prepared for the day. Implement healthy habits such as sleeping 8 hours a night, exercise, taking breaks, and etc.

3

Get Involved

School clubs and activities are great ways to connect with your peers, make new friends, and discover new interests.

4

Evaluate your needs and seek accommodations

504 plans are formal plans developed by schools to support students with disabilities, including any condition that limits daily activities in a major way

Sources

<https://www.jcfs.org/blog/self-care-tips-going-back-school>

<https://www.thecheckingproject.org/post/mental-health-tips-for-back-to-school-stress>

<https://www.understood.org/en/articles/what-is-a-504-plan>

[https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2022/p0331-youth-mental-health-covid-](https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2022/p0331-youth-mental-health-covid-19.html#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20new%20data,hopeless%20during%20the%20past%20year.)

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COLLEGE MENTAL HEALTH

Back to school season can be a difficult time for many college students. College students face new challenges every day. Living alone, making new friends, and exploring new academic opportunities, while exciting, can also be overwhelming.

60%

More than 60% surveyed during the 2020-2021 academic year met the criteria for at least one mental health issue

Up to 75% of college student struggling with anxiety and/or depression are reluctant to get help, which increases the risk of poor academic performance, dropping out of school, substance abuse, and suicide

75%

How can we help ourselves and improve our college experience?

Implement a self-care plan

- Make time for hobbies and social activities
- Get enough sleep, maintain good nutrition, exercise regularly

Develop a care plan

- A clear plan for managing your mental health will allow you to prioritize your well-being
- If you know that you will require regular visits with a therapist or clinician to maintain your care, discuss this with your current provider
- Get familiar with on-campus healthcare services



COLLEGE MENTAL HEALTH

Develop a Crisis Plan

- Mental health symptoms can be unpredictable - consider how you might deal with problems/crisis
- Elements may include
 - Contact information for current mental health providers
 - Medications and dosages
 - Pharmacy contact information
 - Medical history
 - Emergency contacts

Evaluate your needs

- The law requires colleges to provide reasonable accommodations to any student who has a condition that impacts their ability to function at school
- Requests for accommodations are typically manage by your school's disability or accessibility office



Sources

<https://www.jcfs.org/blog/self-care-tips-going-back-school>

<https://collegeguide.nami.org/>

<https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/speaking-of-health/college-students-and-depression>

<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2022/10/mental-health-campus-care>

COMMUNITY CARE

We believe that community care is a crucial part of mental healthcare. Asian Mental Health Project offers a series of free virtual wellness groups for community healing.



Mondays Bi-Weekly

Queer Asian Mental Health Club &
Asian Adoptee Empowerment Circle



Tuesdays Bi-weekly

Proud Asian Men &
Asian Women and Femmes



Wednesdays Weekly

Stay in, Check in: A Community Wellness Circle



Thursdays Bi-Weekly

The Strong Ones: A Wellness Circle
for Caregivers & Community
Leaders



Click below to sign up for our current groups or to stay connected with us to receive updates on our new groups coming soon!

<https://linktr.ee/asianmentalhealthproject>

TYPES OF THERAPY

Service Type

Individual Therapy
Couples Therapy
Family Therapy
Group Therapy
Psychological Testing

Goals

Skill-Building
Process-Oriented Work
Symptom Reduction
Medication Management

Modality

In-Person
Virtual/Teletherapy
Home Visit

Settings

University/College Counseling Center
Community Mental Health
Outpatient Clinic
Medical Inpatient Clinic
Private Practice

Sources

https://www.instagram.com/p/CuiNDnAPs7F/?img_index=1



THERAPIST OUTREACH TEMPLATE

Not sure of what to say in reaching out to a therapist for the first time? Here's an email template you can use:

SUBJECT LINE: Seeking Consultation

BODY:

Hello –

I am [INSERT YOUR NAME HERE]. I am seeking mental health support. I am struggling with [INSERT CONCERNS HERE]. Are you accepting new patients? If so, what are your payment options?

- If you have insurance, ask: Do you accept [INSERT INSURANCE PLAN NAME]?)
- If no insurance, ask: Do you offer sliding scales or other payment alternatives?

Thank you,

[INSERT NAME, PRONOUNS, AND YOUR CONTACT INFO HERE]

Optional Questions to Include:

- Are you equipped to provide culturally competent care, unpacking racial trauma?
- What experience do you have working with [INSERT COMMUNITY]?
Example: Do you have experience working with Hmong-Americans and their families?
- Are you familiar with working with issues of a structural nature, like racism, ableism, and misogyny?
- Do you understand the issues that are facing my community in this political environment?
- Would it be possible to meet weekly/biweekly/etc?
- Am I able to speak with you between sessions (i.e. via email or text)?
- What are your thoughts on medication in the therapeutic process?
- What kind of treatment styles do you use?
- Can I book a free consultation with you?



Your health insurance may have mental health benefits depending on the type of plan and coverage you have. Oftentimes, there are limits to the frequency of visits in a week, differences in inpatient and outpatient benefits, length of treatment or sessions, or type of therapy. For example, PPO plans often cover a part of the session fees, but claims need to be filed by the patient/client and not the provider or organization. Because every health insurance is different, you can call your insurance company and ask them questions to clarify what benefits you have. Common questions include:

- Does my plan cover mental health benefits?
- What are my out of pocket costs?
- Is there a limit to the number of sessions my insurance covers?
- Does my insurance cover inpatient or outpatient treatment?
- Am I limited in which provider can see me?
- What are my out of network providers?
- If out of network providers are covered, what percentage is covered?



Sources

<https://www.nami.org/Your-Journey/Individuals-with-Mental-Illness/Understanding-Health-Insurance/Types-of-Health-Insurance>

<https://www.nami.org/Your-Journey/Individuals-with-Mental-Illness/Understanding-Health-Insurance>

FINANCING THERAPY SERVICES

There are many ways to access affordable mental health care, even out of my pocket. Ways of financing therapy include:

- Private Pay
- Private Pay - Sliding Scale (reduced costs)
- Insurance
- Third Party Payer

To find lower-cost therapy options, you can try:

- Searching locally for student training clinics which often offer therapy for as low as \$20/session depending on the training level of the student trainee. All trainees are required to be supervised by a licensed mental health professional.
- Searching for therapy mutual aid funds/grants. Examples of possible community funds are hosted by: Inclusive Therapists, Asian Mental Health Collective, Asian Mental Health Project.
- Many providers in private practice also offer a limited number of sliding scale slots. This information will often be listed on their website, or you can inquire directly with the provider.
- If a provider does not take insurance, some insurance plans include out of network benefits and clients can submit claims directly to their insurance to be reimbursed for a portion of the session fees.

Sources

<https://mhanational.org/paying-care>

MEDICATIONS

Depending on the severity of a mental health condition, being prescribed psychiatric medications may be a part of a person's care plan. Medical providers who can prescribe psychiatric medications include psychiatrists, psychiatric/mental health nurse practitioners, primary care physicians (PCP), and physician assistants.

Medications and coping skills can be important tools that can lessen the impact of symptoms and support your mental health. These tools can play a significant role in your path toward healing and improvement.

If prescribed, how can medications help with my symptoms?

- A person's mental illness may be a chemical imbalance issue. Taking prescribed medications can work to restore that balance. For example, Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) are commonly prescribed for individuals with clinical depression to assist with serotonin imbalance.
- By taking your medications regularly, you can lower the severity of many symptoms and, in particular, enhance your focus, mood, and ability to reach your goals. Over time can decrease your symptoms, prevent relapses and hospital stays, and improve the quality of your life.



Sources

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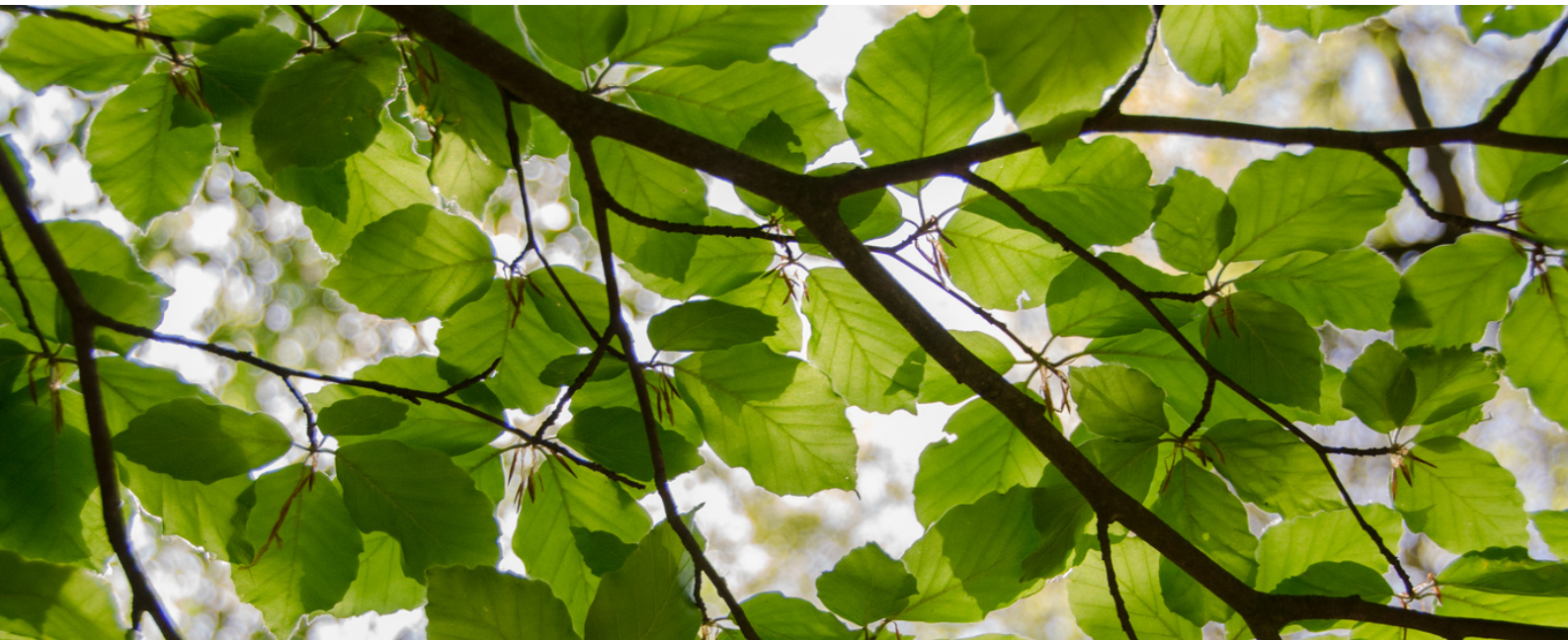
<https://centerforinterculturaldialogue.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/key-concept-cultural-identity.pdf>

MEDICATIONS - SIDE EFFECTS

Side effects are undesired effects of a medication. Most side effects are temporary and improve as your body adjusts to the medication. Some side effects are very uncomfortable, but often you must decide whether or not the benefit of the medication outweighs the discomfort of the side effect.

If you are experiencing any medication side effects, it is important to inform your prescriber. Monitor your symptoms and side effects by keep a chart of your medications and how you're feeling. Based on the severity of the side effects, your provider may need to adjust your prescription (e.g., reducing dosage, additional medication to lessen the side effect, or a medication change).

Be honest with your provider. Tell them about your symptoms. Also make sure to tell the provider about any drugs, alcohol, over-the-counter or prescription medicines, and herbal supplements you've been taking. That way you'll get the most appropriate treatment and support.



Sources

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/depression/in-depth/ssris/art-20044825>

<https://www.med.umich.edu/1libr/psych/9C/MedicationManagement.pdf>

<https://www.mhanational.org/medication>

JOURNALING PROMPTS

1. What are the dominant emotions I am feeling right now?
2. What would it take for me to be kinder to myself in this very moment?
3. One small step I can take this week to intentionally practice and honor my feelings would be...
4. When I honor my own story, I feel...
5. Today, I give myself permission to feel...
6. When I slow down and honor my body, I can nourish it by...
7. Honoring the power within me gives me the strength to...

A large rectangular area with a light beige border, containing a white space with horizontal dashed lines for journaling. The dashed lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the white area, providing a guide for writing.

RESOURCES

No matter what you are facing, you are not alone. If you or a loved one are in need of immediate help, the confidential helplines below are available 24/7.

Crisis Text Line: Text EMPOWER to 741741

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 988

Disaster Distress Helpline: 1-800-985-5990

The Trevor Project: 866-488-7386

Trans Lifeline: 877-565-8860

National Domestic Violence Hotline: 800-799-7233

Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network: 800-656-4673

National Child Abuse Hotline: 800-422-4453

Call "Center for The Pacific Asian Family" confidential helpline, available for free, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and speak to a counselor who can help with issues of domestic violence and sexual assault. 24/7 Multilingual hotline for 1-800-339-3940

THERAPIST DIRECTORIES

Align Therapy

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

<https://www.instagram.com/alignonlinetherapy/>

Asian American Psychological Association (AAPA) Provider Directory

<https://directory.aapaonline.org/>

<https://www.instagram.com/aapaonline/>

Asian Mental Health Collective

<https://www.asianmhc.org/therapists-us/>

<https://www.instagram.com/asianmentalhealthcollective/>

Asians for Mental Health Directory

<https://asiansformentalhealth.com/>

Entwine Community

<https://entwinecommunity.org/>

<https://www.instagram.com/entwinecommunity/>

Hawai'i Psychological Association Provider Directory

<https://www.hawaiipsychology.org/page-1828511>

Healing in Colour

<https://www.healingincolour.com/directory>

https://www.instagram.com/healing_in_colour/

Inclusive Therapists

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

<https://www.instagram.com/inclusivetherapists/>

Indian Health Service Directory

<https://www.ihs.gov/findhealthcare/>

Innopsych

<https://www.innopsych.com/findatherapist>

<https://www.instagram.com/innopsych/>

THERAPIST DIRECTORIES

Melanin & Mental Health

<https://www.melaninandmentalhealth.com/directory-therapists/>

<https://www.instagram.com/melaninandmentalhealth/?hl=en>

National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health Association
Service Provider Directory

<https://www.naapimha.org/aanhpi-service-providers>

National Queer and Trans Therapists of Color Network

<https://nqttcn.com/en/mental-health-directory/>

<https://www.instagram.com/nqttcn/>

Open Path Psychotherapy Collective

<https://openpathcollective.org/>

<https://www.instagram.com/openpathpsychotherapy/>

South Asian Therapist Network

<https://southasiantherapists.org/>

<https://www.instagram.com/southasiantherapists/>

South Asian Mental Health Initiative & Network

<https://samhin.org/mental-health-provider-network/>

Therapin*y

https://therapinay.com/directory_

<https://www.instagram.com/therapinxxy/?hl=en>

Therapy for Queer People of Color

[https://therapyforqpoc.com/https://providerstherapyforqpoccom#!direct
ory_](https://therapyforqpoc.com/https://providerstherapyforqpoccom#!directory_)

https://www.instagram.com/therapyforqpoc_/

Yellow Chair Collective

<https://yellowchaircollective.com/>

<https://www.instagram.com/yellowchaircollective/>

EXPANSIVE RESOURCES

Asian American Psychological Association (AAPA) Fact Sheets

<https://aapaonline.org/publications/fact-sheets/>

Asian and Pacific Islander American Health Forum COVID Community Care Package

<https://actnow.io/vrZMk5C>

Eating Recovery Center

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

<https://www.instagram.com/eatingrecovery/>

Queer Asian Social Club

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

<https://www.instagram.com/queerasiansocialclub/>

Shimmer ADHD Coaching

<https://www.shimmer.care/>

<https://www.instagram.com/shimmer.care/>

The Asian Americans with Disabilities Initiative & Resource Guide

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

<https://www.aadinitiative.org/resources>

<https://www.instagram.com/aadinitiative/>

The JED Foundation

<https://jedfoundation.org/mental-health-resource-center/>

<https://www.instagram.com/jedfoundation/>

The Mental Health Coalition AAPI Mental Health Resources

[https://www.thementalhealthcoalition.org/wp-](https://www.thementalhealthcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/AAPI-MH-Resources_MHC-1.pdf)

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<https://www.instagram.com/mentalhealthcoalition/>

Minnesota State University Counseling Center - How to Cope with Racial Trauma and Racial Battle Fatigue

<https://www.mnsu.edu/globalassets/counseling-center/media/racial-battle-fatigue.pdf>

