

November 18, 2021

Road Map Bulletin: Committee to Address Anti-Asian Bias and Racism

Happy Thursday, Mount Sinai Community –

Over the past two years, the pandemic has made the barriers to care faced by communities of color all the more apparent and undeniable. Structural racism has manifested in disproportionate infection and fatality rates amongst BIPOC populations. At the same time, around the world, Asian and Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities have experienced the worsening of another epidemic: a rise in anti-Asian sentiment and violence.

Stories of our friends, family, and community members enduring verbal and physical assaults have become more common over the past two years, including an offensive document targeting members of our Mount Sinai community that was recently posted on a Mount Sinai campus. These incidents have been exacerbated and tacitly approved by some government officials and others in positions of authority using racist rhetoric such as “China virus” and “Kung flu” to refer to COVID-19. The Mount Sinai community stands united against these incidents in keeping with our zero-tolerance policy against racism and bias.

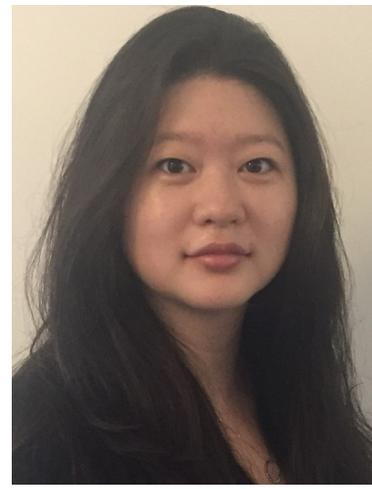
In response, Asian and AAPI Mount Sinai community members and their allies have come together to form the Committee to Address Anti-Asian Bias and Racism (CAABR). The multidisciplinary committee, co-chaired by **Amanda Rhee, MD**, and **James Tsai, MD, MBA**, was established to foster conversations and actions in response to anti-Asian racism. We caught up with CAABR members **Vida Jong, MPA**; **Hamel Vyas, Esq.**; and **Katherine Chen** to learn more.



Vida Jong, MPA



Hamel Vyas, Esq.



Katherine Chen

Vida, Hamel, and Katherine explained that while the circumstances that led to the committee’s creation were heartbreaking and appalling, the launch was meant to create positive change. CAABR provides a forum for Asian and AAPI Mount Sinai community members to address anti-Asian bias, racism, and discrimination—work that is aligned with the [Road Map for Action](#).

A driving theme of CAABR’s mission and work is visibility. Anti-Asian racism, like other forms of racial and ethnic oppression, is fundamentally structural—from the Chinese Exclusion Act to Japanese internment camps, post-9/11 attacks against Sikhs, and more recently, the Muslim travel ban and the [presidential proclamation](#) barring certain Chinese students and researchers. These historical instances have created and reinforced harmful stereotypes—like the “[model minority](#)” myth—that are directly tied to the racist scapegoating of Asians today. However, the history behind anti-Asian-American racism is not widely known, making the community’s challenges appear and feel invisible at times.

In Vida’s words, “**To understand our challenges, you need to understand our history and culture.** For our parents’ generation, the mindset is to keep our heads down, do our work, and not elicit attention.” The three said that their own generation had accepted this invisibility, because their parents believed this was the path to success. But Hamel noted that her generation is finding its voice and she is inspired by its tenacity and outspoken confidence built upon the foundation of strength from those who came before. One of the key ways to create that visibility and understanding is to acknowledge that the AAPI community comprises different cultures and ethnicities, all with different histories who face different challenges.

While CAABR’s central goal is facilitating understanding and visibility, the committee is also focused on generating tangible action through subcommittees:

- **Safety, Communications, and Education**—led by Vida, Hamel, and **Nolan Kagetsu, MD**, this committee aims to educate the Mount Sinai community on AAPI history and anti-Asian racism, while promoting the need for more research on AAPI populations. The committee is also working to incorporate

an awareness of the harmful assumptions embedded within the “Model Minority” myth into Icahn Mount Sinai’s curriculum and exploring ways to make Mount Sinai safer, through initiatives like a [personal alarm pilot program](#) and the [walking buddy program](#).

- **Professional Advancement**—led by **Brijen Shah, MD**, this committee is identifying barriers to professional development for Asian Americans at Mount Sinai and developing solutions.

Finally, Vida, Hamel, and Katherine encourage everyone at Mount Sinai to be an ally for the AAPI community. Being an ally requires all of us to make an active effort to not only **see** the Asian American community, but to **hear** their struggles and **understand** them through the lens of history and structural racism. To make progress towards becoming an anti-racist institution, we have to embrace the reality that doing nothing doesn’t avoid the problem—it supports the problem. In that same vein, we invite you to learn more at CAABR’s newly launched website [here](#).



Photos: Mount Sinai employees receive personal safety alarms from the CAABR in August.

We should also note that if you or someone you know is involved in an incident on a Mount Sinai campus that involves an employee, faculty member, or student, you should report it to your manager or Human Resources or submit a confidential report [here](#) or at 800-852-9212. If an incident occurs off campus and does not involve another Mount Sinai member, reach out to Mount Sinai Security for assistance at 212-241-6068. Please continue to be mindful of your personal security and the security of those around you when you commute, as recent assaults are not isolated incidents, but part of a pattern of violent attacks on AAPI people that have occurred across the country in recent months.

[Submit a Confidential Report](#)

One programming note: the Bulletin team will be skipping next Thursday, but we hope you enjoy a restful day with your family, friends, and communities. To those colleagues of ours who are working during the holiday, thank you for stepping up so the rest of us can recharge. We also wanted to point out that, as some of you may have seen, *Crain's New York* published a story this week titled "[How the legacy of racism lives on across New York City's highways](#)," which dives deeper into a topic we covered in our [fourth Bulletin](#).

As always, we invite everyone to join us at one of our upcoming events:

[Join Us for an Upcoming Event](#)

Chats for Change: Mass Incarceration as a Public Health Crisis—join facilitators Alla Barnes and Jay Johnson on **Tuesday, November 23, from noon to 1 pm**, to discuss how marginalized communities face increased rates of incarceration, with Black and Brown people representing almost 60% of the prison population in 2020. With their lives at risk prior to incarceration due to health inequities that cause lack of access, toxic stress from racism, and the impact of food deserts, lives in prison represent new and insidious challenges from subpar medical care and mentally destabilizing isolation that only continues through release. The event will cover the role the prison system plays on the health of individuals and communities, and how we can continue to advocate for equity to disrupt its impact. [Register on Zoom](#).

Chats for Change: The War on Drugs—join facilitators Jenn Meyer and Jay Johnson on **Tuesday, November 30, from noon to 1 pm**, to discuss how the term "War on Drugs" eventually became a dog whistle for criminalizing Black and Brown people. The treatment of drug use as a criminal issue rather than as a public health crisis has continued to take lives through the growth of the Opioid Crisis—and the event will cover the harms due to the tactics used in the War on Drugs and the need for preventative and restorative policies to address drug use. [Register on Zoom](#).

