



Press Release

Zoom-In on Health Equity: AAFA Asks Congress to Tackle Racial Disparities in Asthma and Allergy

AAFA takes annual advocacy efforts to Capitol Hill with virtual rounds



"It's essential to advocate, particularly with members of Congress, as policy changes have the potential to impact so many lives. Everyone deserves to live in an environment that's safe and equitable. While social and cultural change is vital, legislation is our best chance to fix systemic failures that put some Americans at greater risk than others."

- Anela Malik, Food & Travel Writer, Washington, D.C. Her father died from asthma at the age of 56.

 Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America 

Washington D.C., April 30th, 2021 — Each year, the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA) brings patient spokespeople and advocates from across the nation to Congress to help advance policies to improve the lives of the community it serves. Normally dubbed a “fly-in” because advocates typically travel from around the country to Washington, D.C., this year’s meetings were held via Zoom due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. With a focus on the dire need to fix the nation’s health disparities gap, AAFA appropriately themed this year’s meetings “Zoom-In on Health Equity.”

Community advocates and AAFA leadership shared the impact asthma and allergies have on all of our lives, including the devastating toll of racial and ethnic disparities with their representatives and senators. This year AAFA is asking Congress to support legislation that continues to improve research, prevention, treatment, and access to care to save lives and promote health equity.

AAFA provided a bi-partisan group of elected officials with 19 different public policy recommendations from its solutions-based [Asthma Disparities in America: A Roadmap to Reducing Burden on Racial and Ethnic Minorities](#) report. Community advocates and members of AAFA’s leadership team including staff, board members, and regional chapter representatives also encouraged Congressional members to support four specific legislative and FY22 funding priorities. These include:

- \$35 million appropriation for the National Asthma Control Program (NACP)
- The Elijah E. Cummings Family Asthma Act
- The Improving Social Determinants of Health Act (S. 104/H.R. 379)
- The Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act (S. 346/ H.R. 959)



"My husband, Jordan, managed chronic asthma since he was born. I have done my best to understand and help manage his asthma over the last 12 years. It's important for me to advocate, because unfortunately asthma took Jordan's life at the age of 30. I feel like I was ultimately unable to save him, but I hope through advocating, and sharing our story, we can save someone else."

- Valerie Vison, Minnesota

 Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America 



Black Americans remain 3 times more likely to die from asthma and 5 times more likely to be treated in emergency rooms compared to white Americans. The difference in rates among racial groups is similar for food allergies. Black children are 7% more likely to have food allergies overall compared to white children. Pacific Islander, Native Hawaiian and Asian children are 25% more likely to have food allergies. Black children with food allergies are also more likely to die from anaphylaxis than white children with food allergies.

As AAFA advocate Valerie Vison of Minnesota shared in meetings with staffers from her two Senate offices, “These statistics are and should be startling.” Valerie’s husband, Jordan Vison, died from asthma in July of 2020 at the age of 30. Learning he had a greater chance of death as a Black American, Valerie honors his life by joining other advocates in raising awareness.



“While I experience my own health issues with allergies and asthma, so do many of my family members, friends, and community members. Right now, there are prevalent racial and ethnic disparities in the treatment of asthma. That’s why I’m advocating for continued legislation like the CDC’s National Asthma Control Program which can also play a role in improving health equity for individuals who experience the burden of asthma and allergies at disproportionate rates.”

- Shreaya Madireddy, Student, Ohio

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“AAFA’s policy recommendations along with the funding and legislative action we’re urging Congress to take, play critical roles in unburdening Americans experiencing the worst health outcomes at a disproportionate rate. Promoting racial equity in asthma and allergy care requires rebuilding and creating new systems,” said Kenneth Mendez, CEO and president of AAFA. “We must include health considerations and equitable solutions in all policy-making decisions to make real and lasting change. When we’re able to make a difference in prioritizing equal access to prevention, treatment and cure across disease categories everyone benefits.”

“Making these policy moves and passing this legislation is the right thing to do. In addition to the painful human cost, structural racism also has a financial impact,” said Jenna Riemenschneider, AAFA’s director of advocacy. “Health disparities not only have an impact on affected groups but also limit the overall quality of health care for the entire

population, leading to avoidable costs to the health care system. Eliminating health disparities by 2050 would save the nation more than \$230 billion in direct and indirect costs.”

AAFA and its community coalition of advocates met with top legislators throughout the week of April 26th, 2021 wrapping its sessions with the office of Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer. AAFA is also working closely with Congressional members already leading the way on legislation designed to address the impact of structural and systemic racism to better protect people living with asthma and allergies. This series of virtual Capitol Hill meetings closed out National Minority Health Month and served as a kick-off to National Asthma and Allergy Awareness Month in May.

As part of National Asthma and Allergy Awareness Month AAFA is asking advocates to save this date on their calendars during its 31 Days of Action:

- May 6, 2021: Advocacy Day: Ask your elected officials to support our patient charter to protect the health and well-being of people with asthma and allergies.

To find out more about AAFA’s advocacy efforts during awareness month in May go to: [AAFA’s 31 Days of Action](#)



Asthma and Allergy
Foundation of America

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About AAFA

Founded in 1953, AAFA is the oldest and largest non-profit patient organization dedicated to saving lives and reducing the burden of disease for people with asthma, allergies and related conditions through research, education, advocacy and support. AAFA offers extensive support for individuals and families affected by asthma and allergic diseases, such as food allergies and atopic dermatitis (eczema). Through its online patient support communities, network of local chapters and affiliated support groups, AAFA empowers patients and their families by providing practical, evidence-based information and community programs and services. AAFA is the only asthma and allergy patient advocacy group that is certified to meet the standards of excellence set by the National Health Council. For more information, visit www.aafa.org.