Hepatitis, Liver Cancer Are Main Targets of New York's New AAPI Task Force

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The New York State Legislature recently instated the Asian Pacific American Task Force to work on issues affecting Asian-American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities. The first of its kind, the nonpartisan organization will tackle a range of issues, including hepatitis B virus (HBV) rates, liver cancer and poverty, NBC News reports.

The group includes New York's only Asian-American state lawmakers—Assemblyman Ron Kim and Assemblywoman Yuh-Line Niou (both from Queens)—and will also be open to assembly members and senators who represent districts with AAPI populations of 10 percent or more. Eventually, the group is expected to reach between 15 and 20 members.

Organizers say the task force's objective will be to review and promote laws and budget requests that have a direct impact on AAPI communities. It could, for instance, help in addressing mental health issues among AAPIs and increase awareness of and testing for hepatitis B. Currently, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that more than one in two people living with chronic hepatitis B in the United States is Asian American or Pacific Islander, rendering this group eight to 13 times more likely to develop liver cancer than the general population.

New York legislators also noted that Asian Americans are the fastest-growing racial group in New York, accounting for an estimated 9 percent of the state's 19.7 million people, according to the state comptroller's office and the census.

In addition to mental heath, hepatitis B and poverty, the group will raise awareness among state lawmakers about hate crimes against South Asians, including taxi drivers who have been assaulted on the job. Assemblyman Kim also says the task force plans to work with the New York State Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic & Asian Legislative Caucus (founded in 1966), since many issues affecting New York's minority communities overlap.

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