

MENTAL HEALTH FOR ASIAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER PROFESSIONALS:

# Understanding Our Diverse Needs

# Foreword

Ascend's mission to support and develop the Asian and Pacific Islander (API) business leaders of today and tomorrow has always been predicated on the foundation of belonging, inclusion, empowerment, and the overall wellbeing of APIs. For APIs to succeed, thrive, live our best lives to our full potential, and contribute to society in all the ways we are capable of, we have to pay attention and tend to all the different aspects of wellbeing<sup>1</sup> in the cultivation of a holistic, meaningful, and impactful life. This includes paying attention to mental and emotional health. As the World Health Organization notes, "mental health is a lot more than the absence of illness: it is an intrinsic part of our individual and collective health and well-being."<sup>2</sup> Yet, for a long time now, mental health has often been neglected in API communities.

The Covid-19 pandemic negatively impacted not just the physical health, but also mental wellbeing of individuals and communities across the globe. For APIs, the additional trauma of increased anti-Asian hate and violence further fueled a rise in depression, anxiety, and stress for our communities, bringing the topic of API mental and behavioral health much more to the fore.

Ascend has been supporting the API community and our allies with initiatives and programming that shine a spotlight on the unique and particular challenges for APIs around the topic of mental health, programs such as our AscendTogether Forums and our panels exploring API mental health.<sup>3</sup> Yet, although greater societal attention<sup>4</sup> is now being paid to API mental and behavioral health needs, there remains considerable work to be done, not only to destigmatize mental illness and talking about mental health within the community, but to actively protect and promote the mental health and wellbeing of API individuals and our community at large.

To complement and build on our work to date, Ascend is launching a series of reports on API Mental Health with a focus on the workplace. The importance of paying attention to workplaces as drivers of psychological health and wellbeing has been reinforced at the highest levels by the U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, MD who released the first-ever Surgeon General's "*Framework for Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being*" report in October 2022.<sup>5</sup>

Ascend's API Mental Health series starts with the following report which highlights findings from our recent Ascend API Mental Health Survey designed to gauge current API professionals' attitudes towards and behaviors around mental health, especially in the workplace. In subsequent installments, we will explore in more depth:

- The different issues, stressors, and cultural factors that can have an impact on API mental health and wellbeing, with an understanding of the potential impact of trauma on people's lives in ways large and small;
- All the barriers, including socio-historical-cultural challenges, to APIs seeking mental health support;
- How workplaces and leaders can better support the mental health and wellbeing of their API workforce.

Along the way, the series will also look at how socio-cultural-historical challenges notwithstanding, there is also much positivity, resources, and wisdom in the area of mental wellbeing that our unique and resilient API cultures can offer to the world today.

Our aspiration is that by focusing the lens on API mental health and wellbeing, we will all, in our workplaces, homes, and communities, come to have a better understanding of the importance of mental health for APIs, and be able to openly, compassionately, and without judgment or stigma, discuss, promote, and protect our individual and collective mental health. We can realize that tending to our mental health is not just about repairing, healing, and making whole (although that is a critical and foundational aspect), but it can actually be enriching in helping us get to know ourselves better so that we can live our lives more authentically and to our full potential, while being of service to our community and society at large. We can learn to transform any pain, suffering, or trauma into profound self-knowledge, self-actualization, and joy, and in so doing, create the space for others to do so as well. We welcome you to embark on this journey of healing and discovery with us.

Sincerely,



**Anna W. Mok**

President, Executive Board Chair & Co-Founder  
Ascend & Ascend Foundation  
January 2024

---

<sup>1</sup> Wellbeing commonly includes physical, emotional, social, intellectual, spiritual, occupational, financial, and environmental dimensions. See SAMHSA, "[Creating a Healthier Life: A Step-By-Step Guide to Wellness](#)."

<sup>2</sup> See World Health Organization, "[World mental health report: transforming mental health for all](#)."

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix for more information about Ascend's mental health programming.

<sup>4</sup> See HHS Press Office, "[Biden-Harris Administration Hosts Inaugural Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Mental Health Summit](#)."

<sup>5</sup> See Office of the U.S. Surgeon General, "[Current Priorities of the U.S. Surgeon General](#)."

# Table of *Contents*



<b>Executive Summary</b>	04
<hr/>	
<b>Introduction</b>	05
<hr/>	
<b>Survey Findings</b>	08
<hr/>	
<b>Conclusion</b>	21
<hr/>	
<b>Methodology</b>	22
<hr/>	
<b>Works Cited</b>	23
<hr/>	
<b>Appendix</b>	25
<hr/>	
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	27

# Executive Summary

To get a clearer picture of the latest attitudes and behaviors surrounding mental health among Asian and Pacific Islander (API)<sup>6</sup> professionals, Ascend conducted an API Mental Health Survey from May to July 2023 of API professionals in Ascend's network. While API mental health is complex and varies among individuals and communities within the diverse API populations, the survey revealed the following:

- Overall, APIs' reported mental health is worse than Americans' mental health as a whole, with **39%** of APIs reporting **fair to poor mental health** compared to **25%** of the general American population. API women reported worse mental health than men, with **8% of women** reporting excellent mental health compared to **19% of men**.
- **Stress is pervasive** in all aspects of API professionals' lives, with the top three stressors including societal (**U.S. racial climate**), work (**work-life balance**), and family (**personal/family health**) factors. API women were at least one-third more likely than API men to report greater stress from imposter syndrome, intergenerational trauma, and change in abortion laws.
- Although there remains stigma around API mental health (**55%** report having **experienced shame** or negativity surrounding mental health) and considerable barriers to seeking mental health support, there is also increasing engagement and willingness to seek help (**56%** of respondents reported having **previously sought or are currently seeking professional mental health support**).
- More workplaces are providing mental health resources (**78%** say their **companies offer mental health resources**) but APIs still report **high levels of mental exhaustion (70%)** and **tension and stress (60%)** at work. At companies that offer mental health resources, APIs reported better mental health. However, only **15%** of respondents **thought that their company leadership made mental health a top priority**.
- Although anti-Asian hate may not be the top-of-mind concern that it had been at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, the **overall racial climate** in the U.S. is still of foremost concern as the **top stressor for APIs**.

---

<sup>6</sup> We use the term "Asian and Pacific Islander" (API) to include all people of Asian, Asian American, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander ancestry. "Asian" refers to a person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent. "Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander" refers to people having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands.

# Introduction

Since the onset of a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic three years ago that has profoundly impacted the physical and mental health of individuals all across the world, the United States has been experiencing a mental health crisis<sup>7</sup>, with Americans' reported mental health reaching a new low.<sup>8</sup>

For Asians and Pacific Islanders (API), however, some of the data and findings of the general American population capture only part of the story as APIs have faced a disproportionate mental health impact from the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>9</sup> In the last three years alone, not only have APIs had to manage the work, family, and life disruptions faced by most people, but they have also had to contend with a vast increase in anti-Asian hate, violence, and discrimination that have negatively impacted their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing.<sup>10</sup> In 2020, suicide was the leading cause of death among 10 to 19 year-old APIs and the second leading cause of death among those aged 20-34.<sup>11</sup>

Even prior to the pandemic, APIs have faced unique challenges in mental health. Although stigma surrounding mental health affects many nationalities and cultures, it may be especially prevalent among APIs.<sup>12</sup> Data has shown that before 2020, APIs sought mental health services less than any other racial/ethnic group, and they were also three times less likely to access mental health services than their white counterparts.<sup>13</sup> As well, workplace surveys from before and during the pandemic have found that APIs report feeling the lowest level of belonging and inclusion among different racial groups.<sup>14</sup> Not feeling a sense of belonging or inclusion, whether in the workplace or in society, invariably has a negative impact on mental health.

To get a clearer picture of the latest attitudes and, behaviors surrounding mental health among API professionals, Ascend conducted an API Mental Health Survey<sup>15</sup> from May to July 2023 of 605 API professionals in Ascend's network.

The findings from the survey presented below will be contextualized and explored in greater detail in future installments of our API Mental Health series where we delve deeper into the interconnected social, cultural, and historical factors that impact upon API mental health. For now, given that these influences show up in some of the survey findings below, it is helpful to keep the following key points in mind when discussing API mental health:



## Mosaic, Not a Monolith:

The tremendous diversity of the API population,<sup>16</sup> wherein there are wide differences not just in countries of origin and languages spoken, but also in income, education, and immigration status,<sup>17</sup> means that experiences will vary widely among individuals and communities, not just by ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, education, and socioeconomic status, but very importantly, also by ancestry, immigration status, and Asian-American generation. After all, whether one arrives in the United States as a war refugee, or from a legacy of colonialism, or on an H-1B visa, or is a 6th generation-descendant of a Chinese railroad worker will lead to significantly different life experiences. These different identities and lived experiences can have different mental health impacts and intergenerational legacies that can present themselves in different ways amongst this diverse population. Such diversities should caution against making generalizations about API mental health, or delivering a one-size-fits-all diagnosis or prescription in both assessing and addressing individual mental and emotional needs.

<sup>7</sup> See American Psychological Association, "[The national mental health crisis](#)"; Mental Health America, "[The State Of Mental Health In America](#)"; McPhillips, "[90% of US adults say the United States is experiencing a mental health crisis. CNN/KFF poll finds](#)"; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "[Anxiety and Depression: Household Pulse Survey](#)"; and Ducharme, "[America Has Reached Peak Therapy. Why Is Our Mental Health Getting Worse?](#)"

<sup>8</sup> See Brenan, "[Americans' Reported Mental Health at New Low: More Seek Help.](#)"

<sup>9</sup> See Wu et al, "[Anti-Asian discrimination and the Asian-white mental health gap during COVID-19.](#)"

<sup>10</sup> See Coqual, "[Coqual's New Study Examines the Professional Experience of the AAPI Community and Finds Racial Prejudice, Stereotypes, Microaggressions, Career Stall, and Inequitable Treatment.](#)"

<sup>11</sup> See Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "[10 Leading Causes of Death, United States, 2020, Both Sexes, All Ages, Asian/PI, Non-Hispanic.](#)"

<sup>12</sup> See Apodaca Schlossberg, "[Confronting mental health barriers in the Asian American and Pacific Islander community.](#)"

<sup>13</sup> See Hu, "[Fighting the Stigma: Mental Health among Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.](#)"

<sup>14</sup> See Venkataraman and Yee, "[Greater Inclusion Can Help Asian Americans Crack the Bamboo Ceiling.](#)"

<sup>15</sup> For more information on the survey, please see the "Methodology" section at the end of this report.

<sup>16</sup> The U.S. API population includes 24 million Asian Americans from more than 20 countries of origin, and 1.7 million Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (NHPs). The community includes approximately 50 distinct ethnic groups with over 100 languages spoken. See Monte, Lindsay and Shin, Hyon, "[20.6 Million People in the U.S. Identify as Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander](#)" and NAMI, "[Asian American and Pacific Islander.](#)" and NAMI, "[Asian American and Pacific Islander.](#)"

<sup>17</sup> It is important to recognize that while immigration may be central to many Asian American experiences, many NHPs often identify more as indigenous, and see their relationship with America as stemming more from militarization and colonization than from immigration. These different experiences can result in different kinds of trauma, mental health impacts, and intergenerational legacies that can present themselves in different ways amongst this diverse population. See Zhou, Li, "[The inadequacy of the term 'Asian American.'](#)"



## Multi-layered Stressors, compounded by Socio-Cultural-Historical Factors:

Not only do APIs have to contend with the ordinary stressors of daily life common to most people, for example, **work, family, and health issues**, but by virtue of being a racial minority, they may be subject to any number of stressors and traumas that a marginalized group in a dominant culture might encounter, from something more benign as navigating difference, fitting in, and acculturating, to being “othered” and subject to microaggressions that can leave one feeling devalued, invisible, or excluded, to more virulent forms of oppression such as **racism** and **discrimination**. Furthermore, depending on different identity intersections, APIs may additionally be subject to sexism, homo/trans-phobia, classism, able-ism, and other discriminations. A third layer of potential stressors particular to Asians arise largely out of racial stereotypes such as the **Model Minority Myth**<sup>18</sup>, the perception of APIs as **Perpetual Foreigners**, and the stereotype of **Techno-Orientalism** that portrays Asians, especially the Asian worker, as robots or machines. All these racial stereotypes prevent people from seeing APIs as fully human with the same human needs, drives, and emotions as everyone else, and can compound the mental health challenges APIs may be facing at any given time, and influence how APIs relate to work, family, and societal stressors in ways that may be different from other groups.



## Multi-layered Barriers to Seeking Help:

At the same time, the barriers to APIs seeking mental health support are also multi-layered. Besides **structural barriers** common to many people, such as **cost, accessibility** (whether through language barriers or the lack of culturally competent care), and a **lack of education** and awareness about mental health, an equally formidable barrier may be the **stigma** surrounding mental health, which is exacerbated by social, cultural, and historical factors in the case of APIs.

Many Asian cultures are **collectivist cultures** that emphasize the group rather than the individual, with individual needs often taking a back seat to the group’s needs. While the API emphasis on family and community can be a protective factor, providing a support network for those experiencing mental health issues, it can also create pressure to conform to family or societal expectations. Actions of individuals are often seen as reflecting on the larger group, so any acknowledgement of mental health issues can often be seen as a source of **shame** that can bring dishonor to the family. Also prevalent in many Asian cultures is the concept of “**Saving Face**” or keeping up appearances, with the result that any acknowledgement of mental health issues can be perceived as weakness or personal failure. Finally, different **generational experiences of hardship**<sup>19</sup> can often make younger generations feel guilty and reluctant about calling attention to their own mental health needs compared to the hardships and traumas faced by their parents or grandparents who may have been refugees or immigrants starting from scratch.

**Understanding how, at any given point in time, some or all of the above different factors may be intersecting and affecting how APIs show up, whether in school, at work, or in any other environment, is crucial** for APIs to allow themselves the grace and self-compassion to tend to their own needs. It is equally important for non-API allies, friends, colleagues, bosses, and health care professionals to become attuned to these factors if we are to genuinely support the mental health and wellbeing of API individuals and the community.

<sup>18</sup> See Nguyen, “[Model Minority Myth & The Double Edged Sword](#).”

<sup>19</sup> See Hu, “[Fighting the Stigma: Mental Health among Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders](#).”

“

I struggled to look for mental health help at first because it was looked down upon when I was growing up. I was taught to not talk about feelings or express emotions. Crying was not an option. Talking about problems, especially family or money issues, with outsiders (like teachers or even friends) was punished severely. And I was raised with the whole do-it-yourself-and-do-it-right mentality, so I never learned how to ask for help. It took years of struggling with depression and anxiety to finally take the first step and talk to a professional mental health provider. And even when I finally did get a therapist, I found myself holding back and not being able to share everything I was struggling with.

— Generation X Pacific Islander Woman  
in the Financial Services and Insurance Industry

”

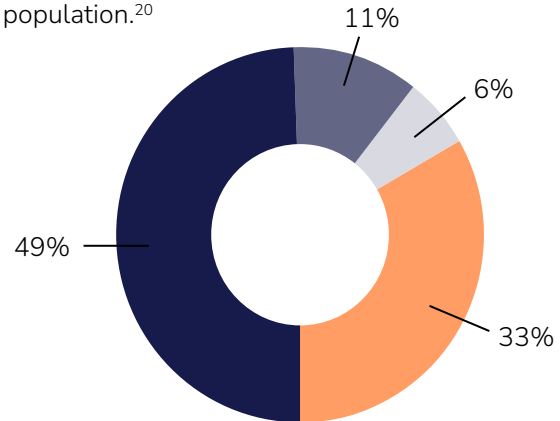
# Survey Findings

## I. APIs' reported mental health is worse than Americans' mental health as a whole, particularly among women and younger APIs.

Overall, APIs' reported mental health is worse than Americans' mental health as a whole, with 39% of APIs reporting fair to poor mental health compared to 25% of the general American population.<sup>20</sup>

### How would you rate your overall mental health?

- Poor
- Fair
- Good
- Excellent

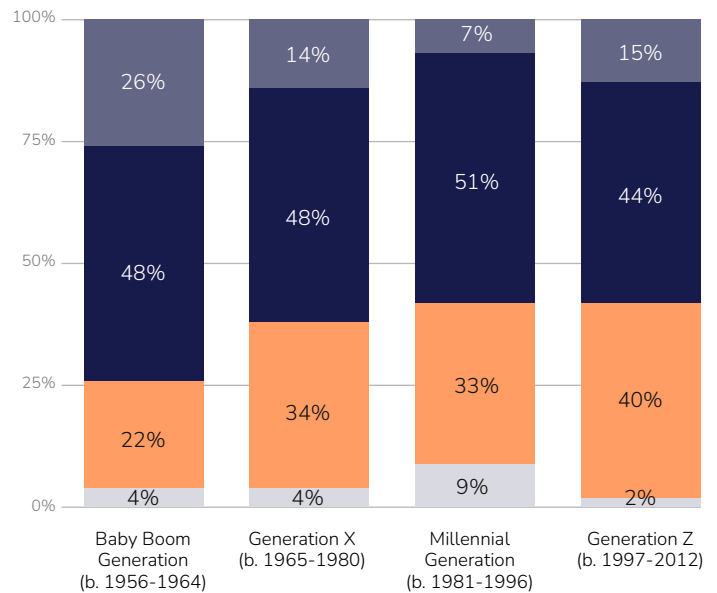


Note: This chart represents the breakdown of responses of how APIs rate their mental health. Numbers may not equal 100% due to rounding. N = 605 API professionals in Ascend's network.

**Age Differences:** Baby Boomers reported significantly better mental health than Gen X and Millennials. This finding supports previous research showing that mental health improves with age.<sup>21</sup>

### How would you rate your overall mental health?

- Poor
- Fair
- Good
- Excellent



Note: This chart represents the breakdown of responses of how APIs rate their mental health. Numbers may not equal 100% due to rounding. N = 605 API professionals in Ascend's network.

<sup>20</sup> See Brenan, "Americans' Reported Mental Health at New Low; More Seek Help."

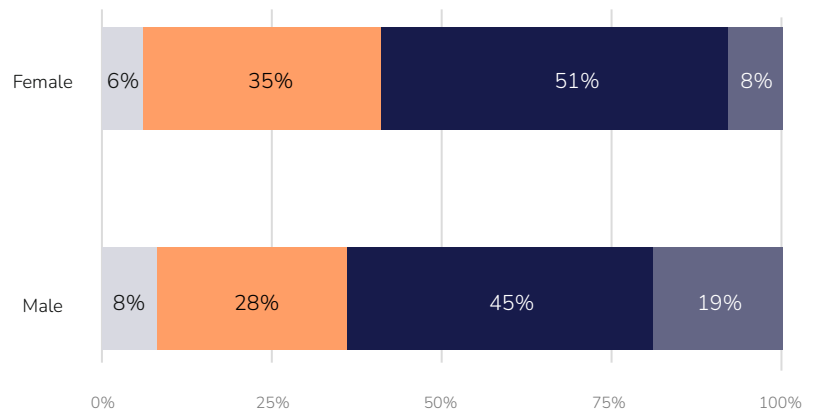
<sup>21</sup> See Thomas et al, "Paradoxical Trend for Improvement in Mental Health with Aging: A Community-Based Study of 1,546 Adults Aged 21-100 Years."



**Gender Differences:** API Women reported worse mental health than men. Only 8% of API women reported excellent mental health, compared to 19% of men.<sup>22</sup>

### How would you rate your overall mental health?

- Poor
- Fair
- Good
- Excellent



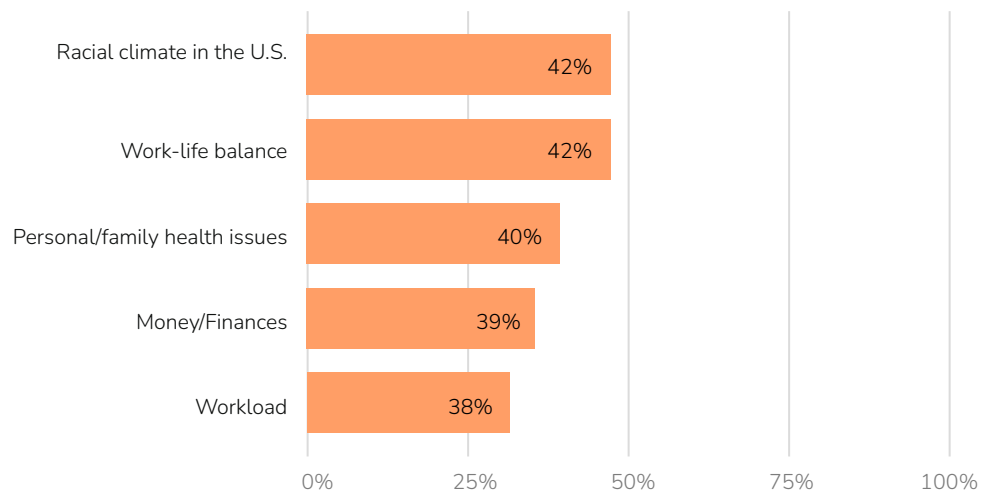
Note: This chart represents the breakdown of responses of how APIs rate their mental health by generation. Numbers may not equal 100% due to rounding. N = 597 API professionals in Ascend's network.

## II. Multi-Factored, Multi-Layered Stressors for APIs

Stress is pervasive in all aspects of APIs' lives, covering personal, work, and societal factors. Not only are APIs having to manage the daily stressors of life common to most people such as work and family issues, but APIs are significantly stressed by race issues, with the racial climate in the U.S. being the top stressor, along with work-life balance.

### Top 5 Stressors for APIs

- % Reporting Very Significant Source of Stress



Note: These charts represent the top stressors of each category by the % of respondents who reported each stressor as a very significant source of stress. N = 560 API professionals in Ascend's network.

<sup>22</sup> The number of non-binary/third gender respondents was not sufficient for sub-group analysis.



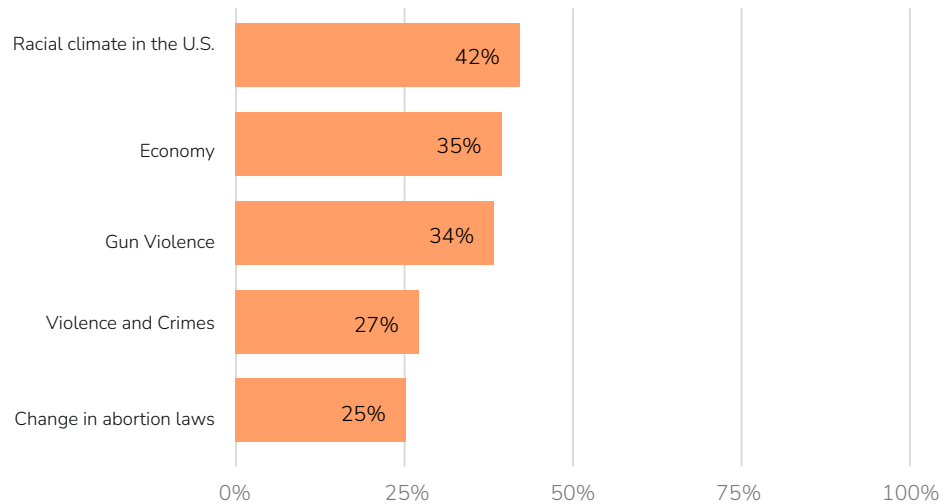
**Cultural Factors Add Additional Stress:** What the numbers don't always reveal, however, is how certain cultural factors can add additional pressure to APIs' experiences of these daily stresses and influence how APIs relate to societal, work, and family stressors in ways that may be different than other groups. For instance, many API cultures emphasize a strong work ethic, which can lead to high levels of stress at work, but the stereotype of APIs as model workers can obscure the reality and depth of the struggles and burnout APIs may in fact be experiencing. Coming from collectivist cultures where the group is emphasized over the individual can make something like advocating for oneself at work (the third most significant work stressor) a source of stress. As well, the emphasis in Asian cultures on filial piety and taking care of aging parents in need can add to the work and life stresses that APIs may already be feeling.<sup>23</sup>

“Sometimes I think people who aren't AAPI don't always understand that AAPI's struggle with their mental health. It seems to fall under the bucket of the Model Minority Myth, that we're not only able to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps for the sake of work/success, but that somehow we can persevere quietly through our mental health challenges. I sometimes feel sandwiched in between the expectations that the greater society assumes of us to be able to bounce back with little disruption and our internal AAPI communities/families, especially our parents/elders who tend to steer away from talking about mental health at all.”

— Generation X API Woman in career transition

### Top 5 Societal Stressors for APIs

● % Reporting Very Significant Source of Stress

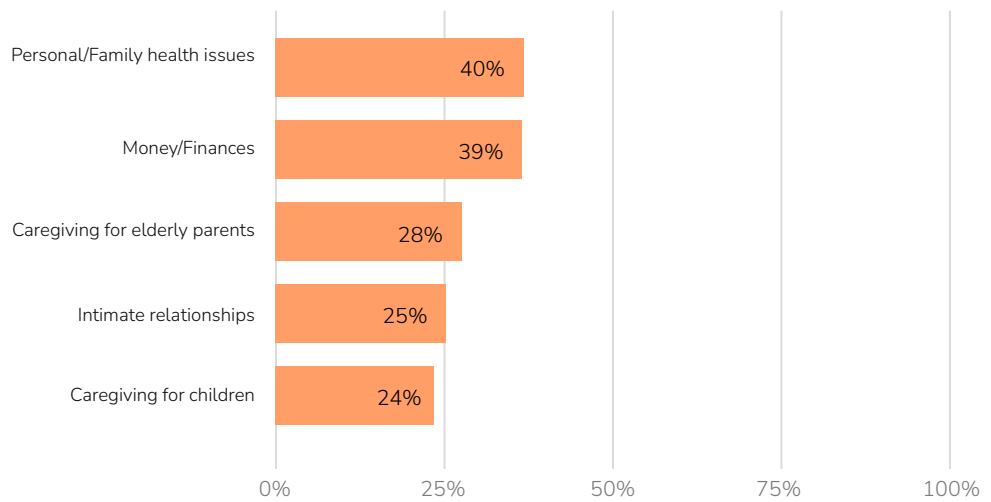


*Note: These charts represent the top stressors of each category by the % of respondents who reported each stressor as a very significant source of stress.  
N = 560 API professionals in Ascend's network.*

<sup>23</sup> See NBC, “[New Study Reveals Strong Support for Elder Care in Asian America.](#)”

### Top 5 Family Stressors for APIs

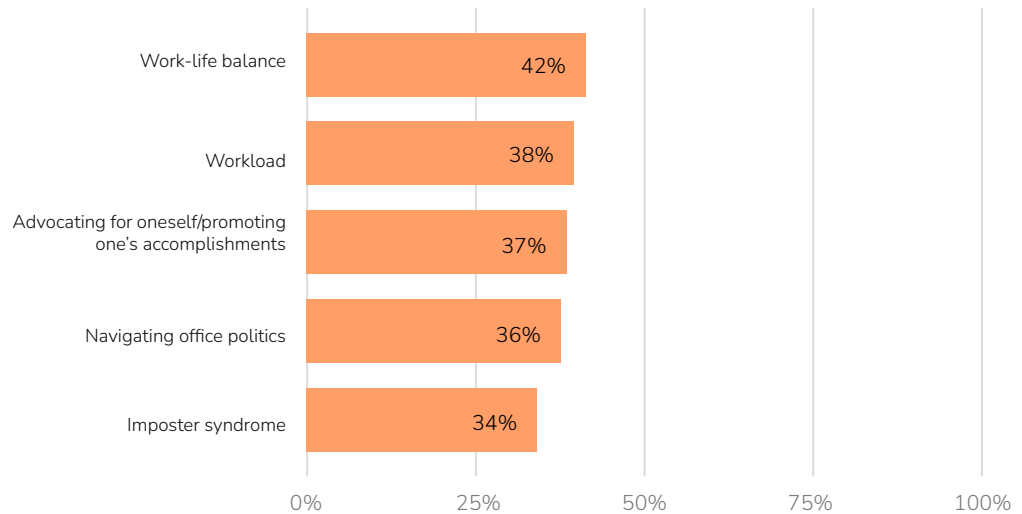
● % Reporting Very Significant Source of Stress



*Note: These charts represent the top stressors of each category by the % of respondents who reported each stressor as a very significant source of stress. N = 560 API professionals in Ascend's network.*

### Top 5 Work Stressors for APIs

● % Reporting Very Significant Source of Stress



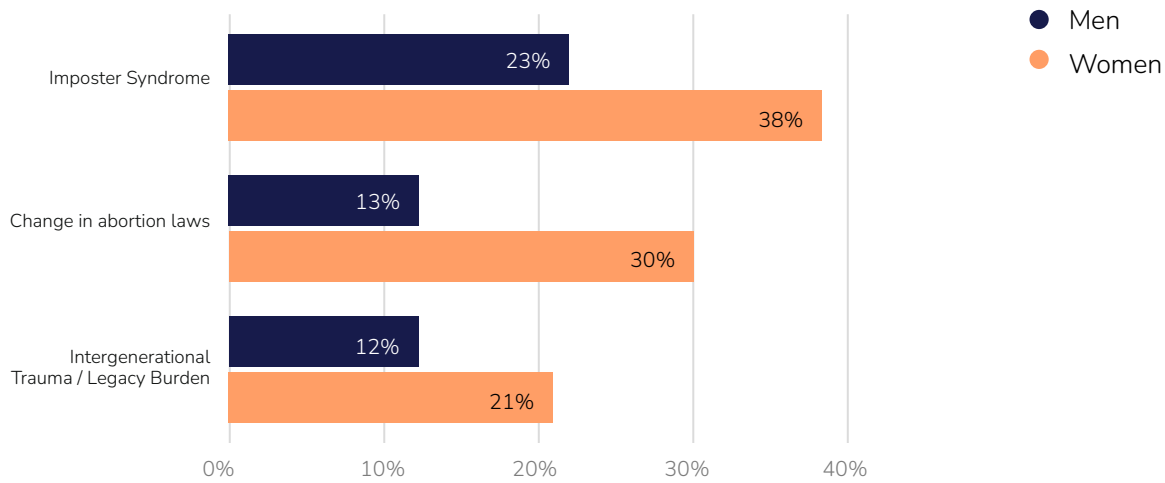
*Note: These charts represent the top stressors of each category by the % of respondents who reported each stressor as a very significant source of stress. N = 560 API professionals in Ascend's network.*

“There is a disconnect between what the workload expectations are against what the reality of the job is. It is difficult as a minority to get out of the “model minority” mindset and even more so when management does not understand the microaggressions that occur in the daily life of a minority.”

— Millennial API Man in the Financial Services & Insurance Industry

**Gender Differences:** Although work-life balance ranked as the top work stressor for both men and women, women were significantly more likely than men to report being very stressed from **imposter syndrome, change in abortion laws, and intergenerational trauma/legacy burden.**

### Significant Differences in Stress Sources



Note: This chart represents a comparison of the % of respondents who reported each stressor as a very significant source of stress by gender.  
N = 552 API professionals in Ascend's network.

**Generational Differences:** The data also showed that stressors for early-generation APIs appear to be more related to personal and family issues, whereas later generations are more stressed about work and societal issues.

### Top Stressors

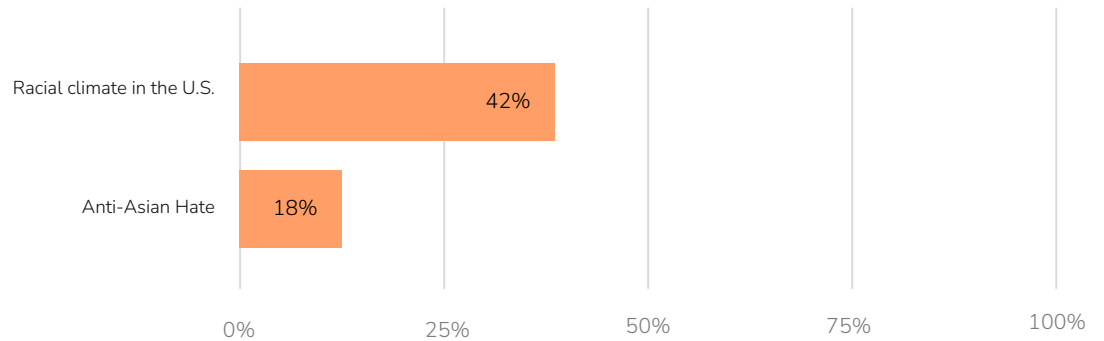
		0th Gen*	1st Gen	1.5th Gen	2nd Gen	3rd Gen	4th Gen+
Family	Immigration	✓					
	Immigration Status	✓					
	Personal/family health issues	✓	✓	✓			
	Money Finances	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Work	Workload	✓			✓		
	Work life balance		✓		✓		
	Advocating for oneself		✓				✓
	Imposter syndrome				✓	✓	
Society	Gun Violence			✓		✓	✓
	Racial climate in the U.S.		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Economy			✓			
	Political Climate					✓	✓
	Anti-Asian Hate					✓	
	Change in abortion laws						✓

\*Asian (non U.S. citizen) living and working in the U.S.

**Ongoing Concern about Racial Climate:** Two years after the height of anti-Asian hate incidences spawned by the Covid-19 pandemic,<sup>24</sup> APIs continue to be significantly stressed and affected by the overall racial climate in the U.S. even though anti-Asian hate may not currently be a top concern for APIs.

● % Reporting Very Significant Source of Stress

### Racial Climate in the U.S. vs. Anti-Asian Hate



*Note: This chart represents a comparison of the % of respondents who reported each stressor as a very significant source of stress. N = 560 API professionals in Ascend's network.*

## III. Stigma Surrounding Mental Health and Barriers to Accessing Support Remain, But There are Signs of Increasing Acceptance and Engagement

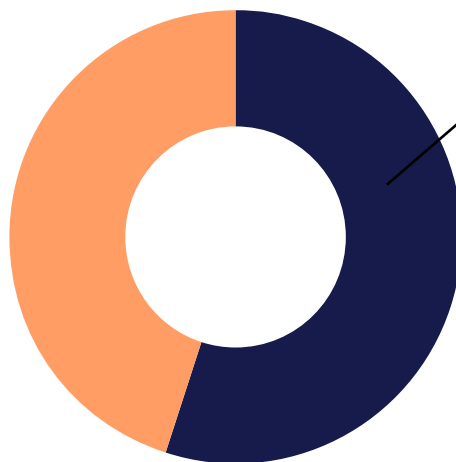
**Stigma** or negativity surrounding mental health is present across all cultures and nationalities. Among our survey respondents, 55% reported having experienced shame or negativity surrounding mental health.

### Have you ever experienced shame or negative remarks from others when talking about mental health?

- Yes
- No

55%

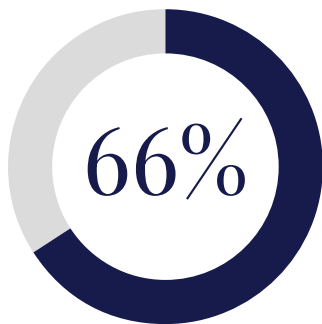
report having experienced shame or negativity surrounding mental health



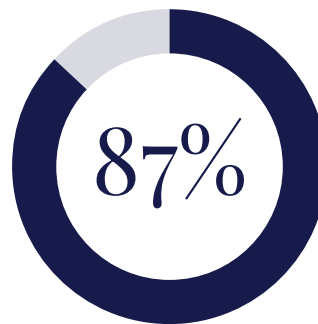
*Note: This chart represents the proportion of respondents who reported experiencing shame or negative remarks from others when talking about mental health. Respondents who answered "I don't know" are excluded.*

<sup>24</sup> See Li and Lartey, "New FBI Data Shows More Hate Crimes. These Groups Saw The Sharpest Rise."

**Barriers are Myriad:** The barriers to seeking mental health support for APIs are myriad (98% of survey respondents identified at least one barrier to seeking mental health support) and include both **structural barriers** such as cost (66% of respondents cited the expensive nature of professional mental health services as a barrier) and **cultural barriers** (41% of respondents identified language and/or cultural barriers as a barrier for APIs to access mental health support, including 43% of 0th generation APIs). Furthermore, 87% of respondents think it is somewhat or very important to receive support from someone of a similar background.

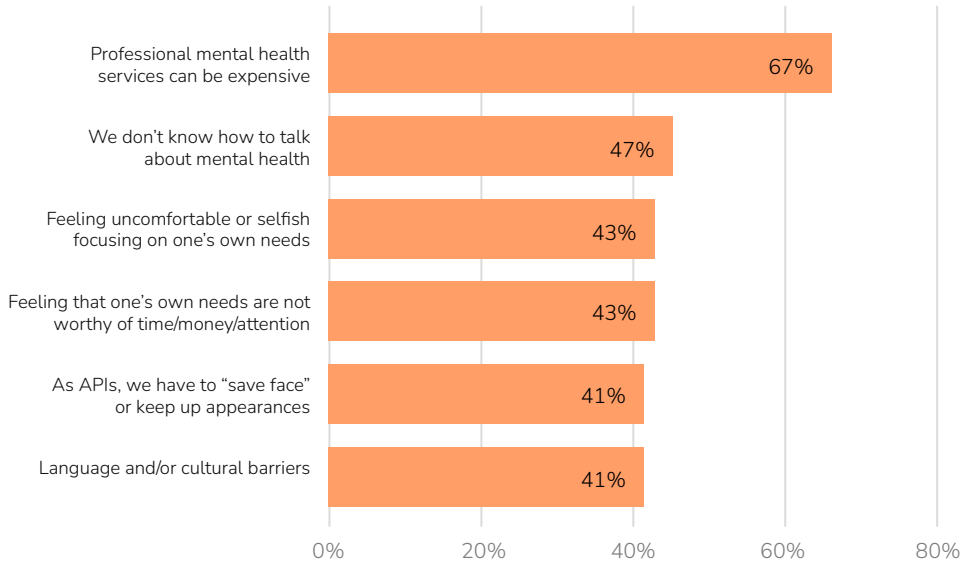


say the expensive cost of mental health services is a barrier for API access to mental health



say it is very or somewhat important to receive support from someone of a similar background

### Top Barriers for APIs Seeking Mental Health Support



*Note: This chart represents the top barriers of a list of 10+ options for APIs seeking mental health support. N = 572 API professionals in Ascend's network.*

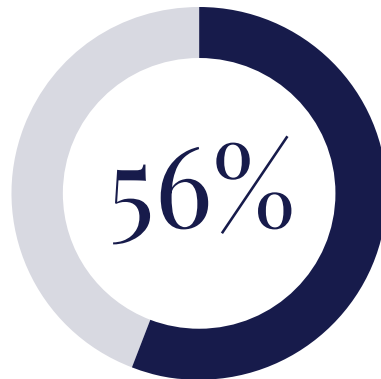
As the chart above shows, four of the top six barriers to accessing mental health support are **socio-cultural-linguistic barriers** that can make talking about and seeking mental health support and treatment even more challenging. The second biggest barrier cited – not knowing how to talk about mental health – is not surprising given the particular stigma that has heretofore been associated with mental health in Asian cultures, which has resulted in a lack of knowledge about mental health, and a lack of facility in knowing how to talk about the subject. It is hoped that as our workplaces, schools, and society continue to focus more attention on mental health and wellbeing that more people come to embrace it as a normal part of life.

“I used to cite the high cost of therapy as an excuse for not going, even though I knew I needed help; after I started therapy, I came to realize that my underlying message to myself had been that my needs and happiness weren’t worth spending money on.”

— Baby Boomer API Woman in Media and Entertainment



**Increasing engagement with professional mental health:** Yet, despite the many barriers to accessing mental health support, our survey found that 56% of respondents have either previously sought or are currently seeking professional help for their mental health. Women (46%) were more likely than men (29%) to rely on professionals for mental health support when they are going through a difficult time.



have sought or are currently seeking professional help for their mental health

**Have you ever sought or are you currently seeking professional help for your mental health?**

21%

No, but I can use the help

22%

No, have not needed/do not need to

25%

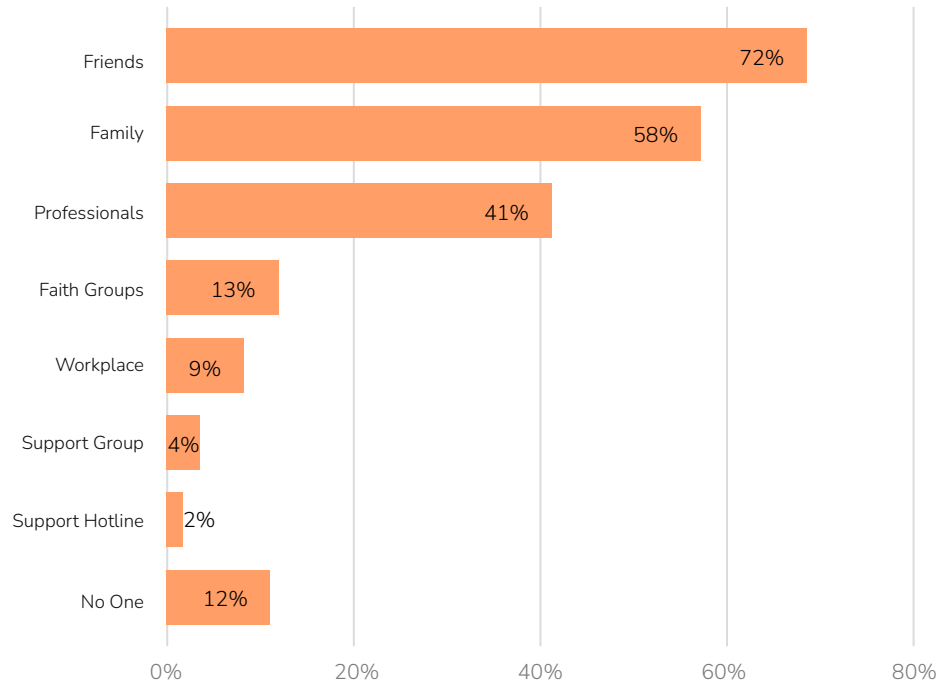
Yes, currently

31%

Yes, previously but not currently

**Other Sources of Mental Health Support:** Professional mental health services is but one of many different sources of mental health support. The survey revealed that the two most common sources of support for APIs are friends (72%) and family (58%). While collectivist cultures can be a barrier to seeking professional help, they also can provide a strong sense of community and strong support networks in the form of friends and family.

### Sources of Mental Health Support



*Note: This chart represents the sources of mental health support reported by respondents when they are going through a hard time. Respondents were allowed to check as many responses as applied. N = 596 API professionals in Ascend's network.*

### Generational Differences:

Asians (0th generation)\* are the least likely to go to mental health professionals (20% would not see a mental health professional regardless of the level of stress), and more likely to go to family (62%); whereas 1.5 and 2nd generation Asians are most likely of all generations to seek professional help, and less likely to go to family than friends.



\*Asian (non U.S. citizen) living and working in the U.S.



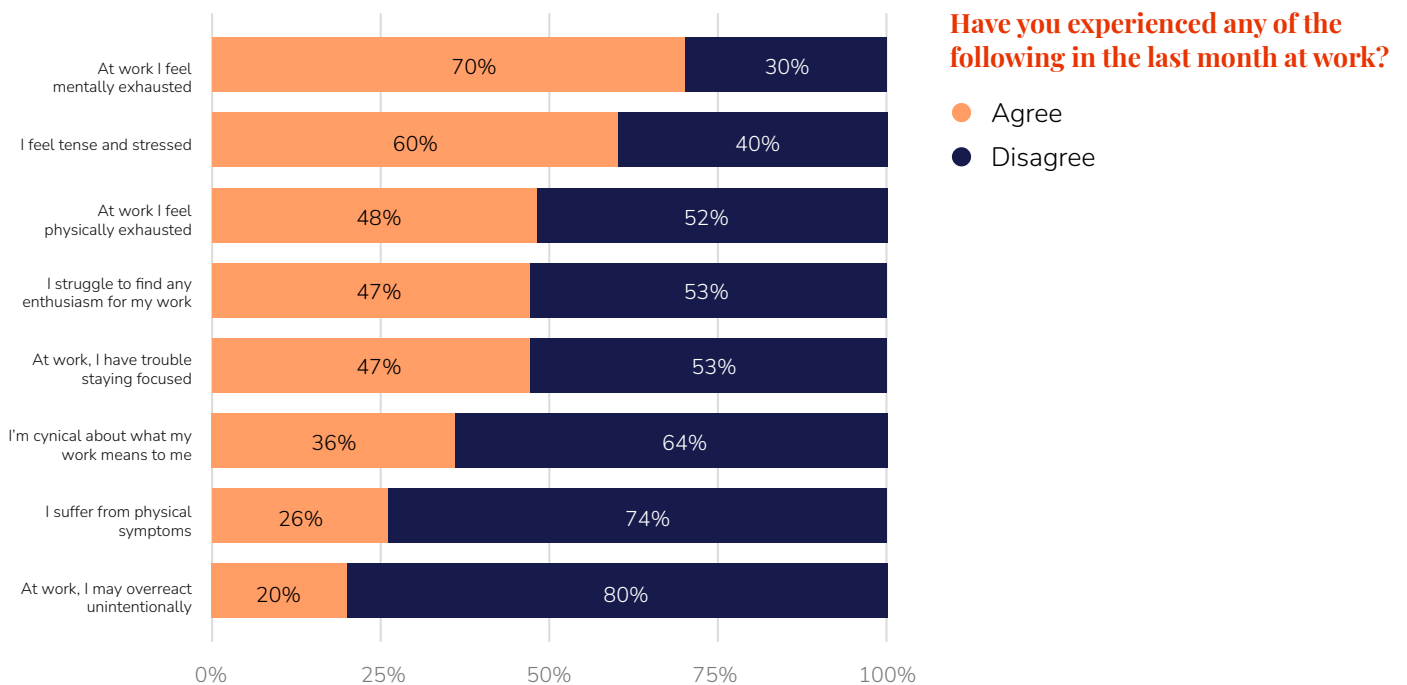
## IV. Mental Health at Work: More Resources, But Still High Stress

More companies are offering mental health resources at work, but API employees still reported high levels of stress.

**High Workplace Stress:** Three years after the Covid-19 pandemic changed the landscape of work, managing workplace stresses continues to be a major concern for all workers.<sup>25</sup> APIs reported feeling “mentally exhausted” (70%) and “tense and stressed” (60%) at work in the last month, displaying symptoms of burnout.<sup>26</sup>

“There is a burden of representation because often women of color are the first and only. And the expectations are much higher which leads to higher levels of stress, longer hours, and burn out.”

— Millennial API Woman in the Professional Services/Consulting Industry



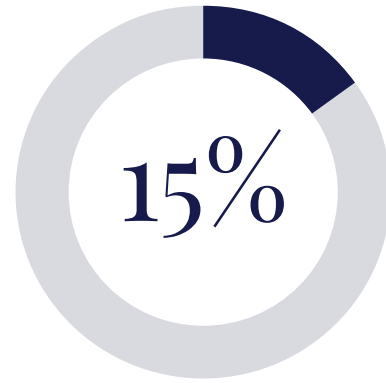
Note: This chart represents the proportion of respondents who agree with various statements regarding burnout at work. N = 519 API professionals in Ascend's network.

**Workplaces Offering More Mental Health Resources and Support:** 78% of respondents' companies offer mental health resources. The most common benefits provided are: Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) (87% of those companies with resources); Meditation and Wellness Apps (59%); and Workshops (49%).

<sup>25</sup> See American Psychological Association. "2023 Work in America Survey."

<sup>26</sup> See Schaufeli and De Witte, "Burnout Assessment Tool."

**More Support from Leadership Needed:** Yet, just 15% of respondents said that their organization’s leadership prioritizes employee mental wellbeing a great deal, while another 35% thought their leadership prioritized it “a moderate amount”.



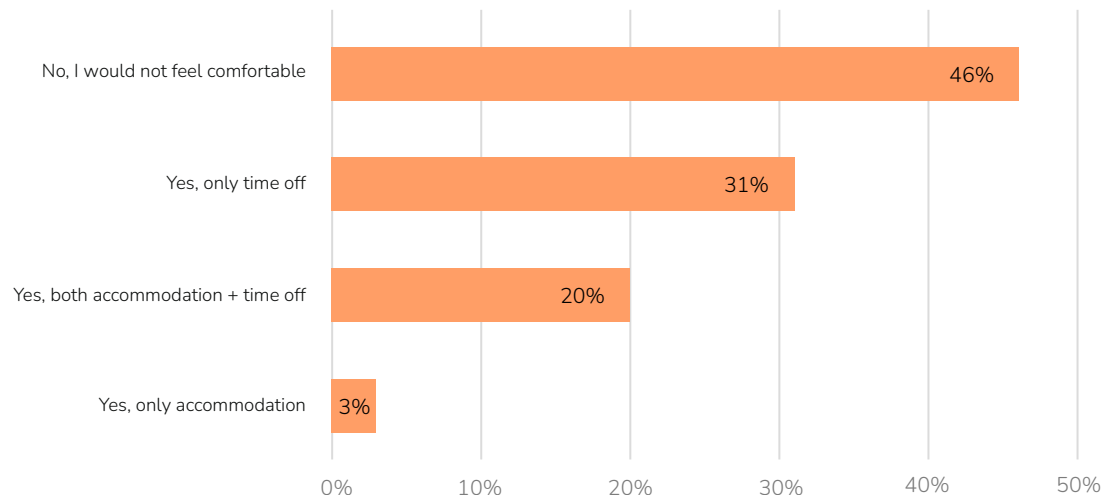
Feel their organization's leadership prioritized employee mental wellbeing a great deal

“I feel that the mental health support at the senior manager level has improved greatly at my company, but I’d like to see more modeling mental health and self-care examples at the executive leadership level.”

— Generation X API Woman in the Technology and Engineering Industry

**Time Off for Mental Health:** Almost half of respondents (46%) would not feel comfortable taking time off and/or asking for accommodations due to mental health issues. Only 20% feel comfortable asking for both, and 31% feel comfortable asking only for time off. Additionally, women were more likely to report not being comfortable asking for time off/accommodations (49%) compared to men (41%). All of this suggests that more than just providing mental health resources, companies need to foster a company culture where employees feel safe and comfortable asking for time off or accommodations for mental health without fear of being judged negatively or penalized.

**Would you feel comfortable asking for an accommodation and/or time off due to poor mental health?**



Note: This chart represents the proportion of professionals who feel comfortable asking for accommodations/time off at work. N = 509 API professionals in Ascend's network.

“There needs to be more flexible hours and manpower available for mental health screenings and meetings. Co-workers also need to know that seeking mental health help is not a sign of “weakness” or being soft.”

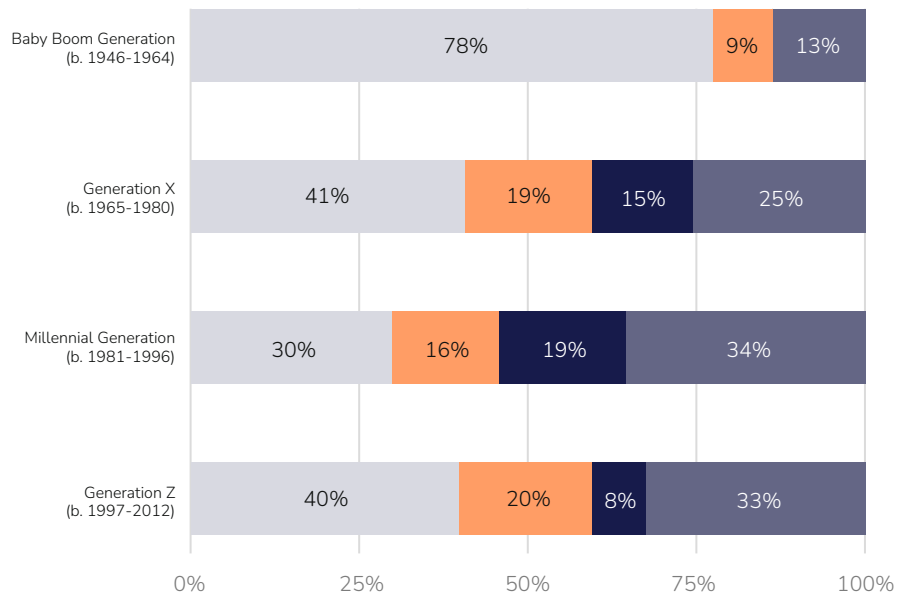
— Millennial LGBTQ+ API Man in Government



**Talking About Mental Health At Work:** As mentioned earlier, the perception of mental illness as a personal failure that can contribute to feelings of shame in many Asian cultures can prevent many APIs from talking about mental health issues in general, let alone at work where there is overwhelming pressure to appear as we have it all together in order to succeed and advance. More than half (55%) of respondents had not talked about mental health with their boss or colleagues, but younger generations are bringing discussions of mental health to work. For example, 53% of Millennials have discussed mental health with their coworkers or manager, compared to 13% of Baby Boomers. Women (51%) are also significantly more likely than men (30%) to talk about mental health at work.

**Have you ever talked about your mental health with your coworkers or manager?**

- No, because I didn't feel the need to
- No, but I wanted to
- Yes, but it was not helpful
- Yes, it was helpful



*Note: This chart represents the proportion of professionals who have discussed mental health with their coworkers or manager. Numbers may not equal 100% due to rounding. N = 516 API professionals in Ascend's network.*

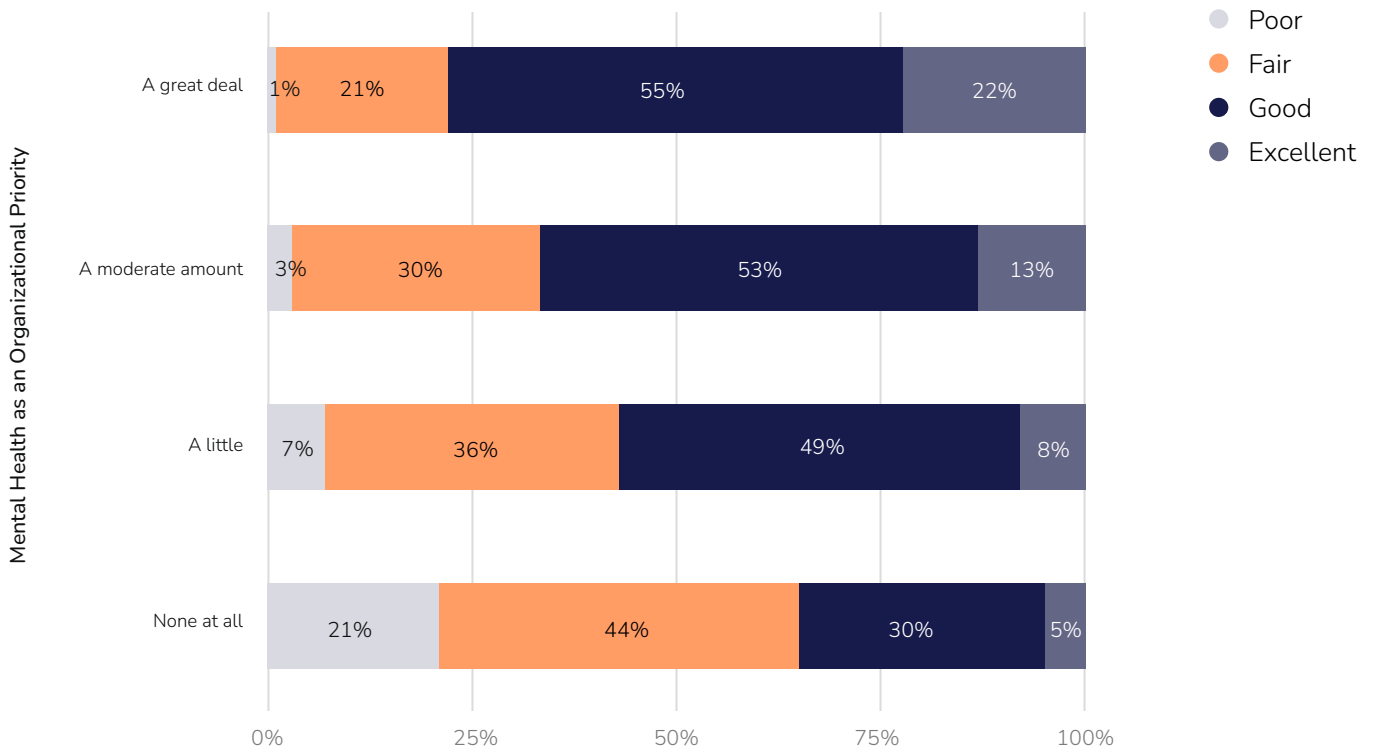
“I wish there were more conversations surrounding mental health within each department on a more granular level. Having my manager ask how my mental health was, would have been beneficial.”

—Millennial API Woman in the Non-profit Industry

**Truly Prioritizing Mental Health At Work:** The data shows that companies that prioritize employee mental health generally have employees who report better mental health. While this survey is not able to make any causal conclusions regarding this finding and more research is needed, companies should hopefully be inspired to take this as an incentive to continue prioritizing employee mental health. In addition to providing mental health resources, companies need to continue to create cultures where mental health is truly prioritized, where leaders genuinely embody their commitments to mental wellbeing, and where employees feel comfortable talking about mental health and/or asking for time off and accommodations.



### Mental Health Status by Company Prioritization of Mental Health



Breakdown of Respondents' Mental Health Status

*Note: This chart represents the mental health status of respondents compared to perception of company prioritization of mental health. N = 511 API professionals in Ascend's network.*

# Conclusion

The findings from our survey on API professionals' mental health needs and behaviors paint a picture that is both concerning and encouraging. With API professionals' reported mental health faring worse than Americans' mental health as a whole, and with the barrage of multi-factored, multi-layered stressors affecting API lives in today's fast-paced, high-stress world, it is imperative that we continue to shine a giant spotlight on the topic, and work to destigmatize mental illness, eradicate barriers to seeking help, and protect and promote API mental health and wellbeing, so that as individuals and as a community, APIs can thrive, live up to our full potential, and contribute meaningfully to society. At the same time, challenges and stigmas notwithstanding, there are encouraging signs of progress, from the number of APIs willing to seek professional help and talk more about mental health issues, to more workplaces providing mental health resources and continuing to find ways to improve employee mental health.

In subsequent installments of our mental health series, we will be unpacking in more detail some of the socio-cultural-historical factors unique to APIs that underlie and drive some of our survey findings, with an exploration of trauma and its impacts on mental health. We will also be looking more deeply into how workplaces and leaders can better support the mental health of their API workforce, and offer resources, both Eastern and Western, ancient and modern, that can support API mental health. By understanding more clearly the complexities and nexus of factors that constitute API mental health, individuals and companies, employees and employers can develop a more holistic, skillful, and compassionate approach to improving API mental health and wellbeing.

# Methodology

## Survey

Ascend conducted an online survey of Asian and Pacific Islander (API) professionals with responses completed from May 2023 to July 2023. The survey was distributed through Ascend's network. Due to the method by which the survey was distributed, the findings are not considered representative of the general API population in the United States or Canada. Survey questions were developed by Ascend considering organization priorities and prior research on the subject.

In total, 700 participants took the survey, of which 605 responses were considered valid for analysis. Disqualified responses either did not come from APIs in the United States/Canada or were less than 30% complete. The 605 responses included 518 complete and 87 partial responses. Exact sample sizes for each analysis are included under each graph.

## Data Analysis

Cross-tabulations were used to generate response frequencies of all survey questions for the groups under study. Two-dimensional tables were used to investigate relevant proportions to be reported, as well as relevant proportion discrepancies between different groups (i.e., races, genders etc.). Three-dimensional tables were used to investigate relationships between different grouping schemes with respect to the response frequencies (e.g., different genders of a single race). General figures were not weighted in respect to sub-ethnicity, gender, or any other variable.

# Works Cited

- American Psychological Association. "2023 Work in America Survey." American Psychological Association, 13 July 2023, <https://www.apa.org/pubs/reports/work-in-america/2023-workplace-health-well-being>.
- American Psychological Association. "The national mental health crisis." American Psychological Association, 1 Jan. 2021, <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2021/01/trends-national-crisis>.
- Apodaca Schlossberg, Jocelyn. "Confronting mental health barriers in the Asian American and Pacific Islander community." UCLA Health, 9 May 2023, <https://www.uclahealth.org/news/confronting-mental-health-barriers-asian-american-and-2>.
- Brenan, Megan. "Americans' Reported Mental Health at New Low; More Seek Help." Gallup, Gallup, Inc, 21 Dec. 2022, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/467303/americans-reported-mental-health-new-low-seek-help.aspx>.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "10 Leading Causes of Death, United States, 2020, Both Sexes, All Ages, Asian/PI, Non-Hispanic." National Center for Health Statistics, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2023, <https://wisqars.cdc.gov/data/>.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Anxiety and Depression: Household Pulse Survey." National Center for Health Statistics, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2023, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/covid19/pulse/mental-health.htm>.
- Coqual. "Coqual's New Study Examines the Professional Experience of the AAPI Community and Finds Racial Prejudice, Stereotypes, Microaggressions, Career Stall, and Inequitable Treatment." Coqual, 19 Jan. 2023, <https://coqual.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/AAPI-Press-Release-FINAL-2-01.18.pdf>.
- Ducharme, Jamie. "America Has Reached Peak Therapy. Why Is Our Mental Health Getting Worse?" Time, 28 Aug. 2023, <https://time.com/6308096/therapy-mental-health-worse-us/>.
- HHS Press Office. "Biden-Harris Administration Hosts Inaugural Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Mental Health Summit." U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 21 July 2023, <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2023/07/21/biden-harris-administration-hosts-inaugural-asian-american-native-hawaiian-pacific-islander-mental-health-summit.html>.
- Hu, Cathy. "Fighting the Stigma: Mental Health among Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders." Urban Institute, 20 May 2019, <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/fighting-stigma-mental-health-among-asian-americans-and-pacific-islanders>.
- Li, Weihua and Lartey, Jamiles. "New FBI Data Shows More Hate Crimes. These Groups Saw The Sharpest Rise." The Marshall Project, 25 Mar. 2023, <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2023/03/25/asian-hate-crime-fbi-black-lgbtq>.
- Monte, Lindsay and Shin, Hyon. "20.6 Million People in the U.S. Identify as Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander." U.S. Census Bureau, 25 May 2022, <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/05/aanhpi-population-diverse-geographically-dispersed.html>.
- McPhillips, Deidre. "90% of US adults say the United States is experiencing a mental health crisis, CNN/KFF poll finds." CNNhealth, CNN, 5 Oct. 2022, <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/10/05/health/cnn-kff-mental-health-poll-wellness/index.html>.
- Mental Health America. "The State Of Mental Health In America." Mental Health America, Mental Health America, Inc, 2023, <https://mhanational.org/issues/state-mental-health-america>.

NAMI. "Asian American and Pacific Islander." National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2023, <https://www.nami.org/Your-Journey/Identity-and-Cultural-Dimensions/Asian-American-and-Pacific-Islander>.

NBC. "New Study Reveals Strong Support for Elder Care in Asian America." NBC Universal, 13 Nov. 2014, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/new-study-reveals-strong-support-elder-care-asian-america-n247306>.

Nguyen, Ngan. "Model Minority Myth & The Double Edged Sword." Ascend, The Ascend Foundation, April 2021, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/621f898a98dc785cd663ab7b/t/6411f91ffc7e1639278cbd80/1678899493041/Model-Minority-Myth-the-Double-Edged-Sword.pdf>.

SAMHSA. "Creating a Healthier Life: A Step-By-Step Guide to Wellness." SAMHSA, 2016, <https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma16-4958.pdf>.

Schaufeli, Wilmar and De Witte, Hans. "Burnout Assessment Tool." KU Leuven, 2020, <https://burnoutassessmenttool.be/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/User-Manual-BAT-version-2.0.pdf>.

Thomas, Michael et al. "Paradoxical Trend for Improvement in Mental Health with Aging: A Community-Based Study of 1,546 Adults Aged 21–100 Years." National Library of Medicine, Department of Health and Human Services, 1 Aug. 2017, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5461877/>.

Office of the U.S. Surgeon General. "Current Priorities of the U.S. Surgeon General." U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2023, <https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/priorities/workplace-well-being/index.html>.

Venkataraman, Karthik and Yee, Pam. "Greater Inclusion Can Help Asian Americans Crack the Bamboo Ceiling." Bain & Company, 4 May 2022, <https://www.bain.com/insights/greater-inclusion-can-help-asian-americans-crack-the-bamboo-ceiling/>.

World Health Organization. "World mental health report: transforming mental health for all." World Health Organization, 2022, <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/356119/9789240049338-eng.pdf>.

Wu, Cary et al. "Anti-Asian discrimination and the Asian-white mental health gap during COVID-19." Ethnic and Racial Studies, Taylor & Francis Online, 14 Dec. 2020, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01419870.2020.1851739?needAccess=true>.

Zhou, Li. "The inadequacy of the term 'Asian American.'" Vox, Vox Media, 5 May 2021, <https://www.vox.com/identities/22380197/asian-american-pacific-islander-aapi-heritage-anti-asian-hate-attacks>.



# Appendix

## *Ascend Resources*

### **Recent Mental Health Programming**

The following are some of Ascend's recent programming addressing API mental health. These recordings are available on our YouTube channel as a resource.

[Global Ascend Together Forum to #StopAsianHate \(March 2022\)](#): Leaders from a cross-section of industries – Dion Lim (ABC7/KGO-TV News Anchor and Reporter), Tasneem Chipty (Managing Principal, Chipty Economics), Alexander Peh (VP, Head of Merchant Payment Services, RBC), Michelle Ng (Impact Innovation Leader, Americas Innovation, EY), and Anuja Burns (Private Equity Alum and Education Entrepreneur) – discuss the rising anti-Asian hate and violence, and share practical insights on how companies can tackle the scourge of hatred, violence, and microaggressions.

[Shedding Light in Times of Darkness: Destigmatizing Mental Health + ERG Showcases \(Ascend National Convention, August 2022\)](#): ABC7/KGO-TV news anchor and reporter Dion Lim shares her reflections on covering the hate and assaults targeting Asian Americans throughout the pandemic, and the importance of de-stigmatizing mental health for the API community; Michelle Meow (Radio and TV Talk Show Host and Producer), Randall Chin (Private Equity Investor and Finance Executive), Dr. Clayton McClintock (Neuroscience Researcher and Clinical Psychologist), Trace Le (Singer and Songwriter) and Snigdha Sur (Founder and CEO, The Juggernaut) tell their stories and discuss the mental health impacts of not belonging; Merck's Asia Pacific Association (APA) offers strategies to create psychological safe spaces at work; Liberty Mutual's Leading & Empowering Asian and Ally Professionals shares their roadmap to address invisibility for APIs, allies, and managers.

[Global Ascend Together Forum Supporting Our Resilient Community \(February 2023\)](#): Ascend organizes a community reflection on the Monterey Park, CA mass shooting. CeFaan Kim (Journalist, ABC7 New York), Anna Mok (President and Executive Chair, Ascend and Ascend Foundation), David Doan (Board of Advisors, Ascend LA Metro), Dr. Jenny Wang (Psychologist; Author, *Permission to Come Home: Reclaiming Mental Health as Asian Americans*), Dr. Clayton Hoi-Yun McClintock (Neuroscience Researcher & Clinical Psychologist), Dan Regalado (Chief Information Officer, CIO, Banfield Pet Hospital (Mars Inc.)), and Ranjana Ramchandran (President, Ascend Southeast) explore the mental health impact of violence, and strategies for embracing our resilience in the face of adversity.

[Mental Health Symposium: Tackling Stigma and Supporting Employee Mental Health \(Ascend National Convention, July 2023\)](#): David Doan (Board of Advisors, Ascend LA Metro) shares his story of overcoming the trauma of war, abuse, and loss to find healing and to thrive; Ginger So (Managing Director, Strategy Head, Client Sustainability Solutions at US Bank), Johnny Cheng (Managing Director, Accenture), Manjusha Kulkarni (Executive Director of AAPI Equity Alliance and Co-Founder of Stop AAPI Hate) and Sheila Enriquez (Texas Market Leader and Advisory Partner, Crowe) explore the unique mental health challenges faced by Pan-Asians in the workplace and the community at large.

### **Additional Ascend Foundation Research**

[The Diversity-Equity Gap in the Fortune 500: Too Few Racial Minority Executives](#)

[Elevating Asian-Black Allyship in Corporate America](#)

[Model Minority Myth & The Double-Edged Sword](#)

[Asian Representation on Fortune 1000 Boards](#)

[Ascend Covid-19 Resource Guide](#)

# External Mental Health Resources

*Note: Links are provided for informational purposes only and do not represent an endorsement by Ascend. If you are in crisis, you can reach the National Hotline For Mental Health Crises And Suicide Prevention at 988.*

[Anise Health](#): Anise Health is a culturally-responsive digital mental health and wellbeing platform dedicated to meeting the unique needs of communities of color, starting with a focus on the Asian American population.

[Asian American Foundation – Mental Health Directory](#): AF's goal is to make sure every Asian New Yorker who needs mental health care is able to receive it in a language they speak, from providers who understand Asian cultures.

[Asian American Psychological Association](#): APA's mission is to advance the mental health and well-being of Asian American communities through research, professional practice, education, and policy.

[Asians for Mental Health](#): Asians for Mental Health was created to help Asians feel seen, heard, and empowered in their journeys towards better mental health. It is a directory to find Asian therapists in the U.S.

[Asian Mental Health Collective](#): AMHC aspires to make mental health easily available, approachable, and accessible to Asian communities worldwide.

[Healwise](#): Healwise is a nonprofit that makes it easier to find mental health services and supports that fit your budget and unique needs. All listings in the national directory have resources that cost \$30 or less.

[Mental Health America](#): Mental Health America advances the mental health and well-being of all people living in the U.S. through public education, research, advocacy and public policy, and direct service.

[National Alliance on Mental Illness](#): NAMI works to educate, support, advocate, listen and lead to improve the lives of people with mental illness and their loved ones.

[National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health Association](#): NAAPIMHA is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote and redefine the mental health and well being of the Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander individuals and communities in the United States through training, programs, policy & advocacy, centering those with lived experience.

[SouthAsianTherapists.org](#): southasiantherapists.org was founded by Raj Kaur in June 2020. It has quickly become the largest South Asian mental health community in the world.

# Acknowledgments

We extend our gratitude to all of Ascend’s volunteer leaders, Chief Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Officers (CDEIOs), executives, and supporters who have encouraged and supported our work around API mental health in the last few years. We are also immensely grateful to the panelists and speakers who have participated in our API mental health forums and programs, and to all who participated in our 2023 API Mental Health Survey and shared their stories. Thanks to Dr. Clayton McClintock for subject advice and guidance on survey design. Additional polls consulted include the Gallup poll of Nov 9-Dec 2, 2022, and the AAPI Data/Momentive 2023 Poll on Diversity in American Life. Special thanks to Russell Jeung, Manjusha Kulkarni, Michelle Meow, and Susan Shimazu for their reviews of this paper. We wish to acknowledge and thank our staff for the production of our mental health series, particularly Sharon Owyang, Christy Bae, and Shaila Lothe for their work in the survey design, data analysis, and the research and writing of this paper.

## About Ascend Foundation and Ascend

The Ascend Foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization that drives research, cultivates DEI best practices, and advocates for greater awareness of the challenges facing the Asian and Pacific Islander (API) community at work and beyond. In partnership with leading business organizations, the Foundation launches initiatives like the 5-Point Action Agenda, provides student scholarships, and publishes noteworthy reports that aim to increase recognition of API leadership.

Ascend is the largest global network advancing API professionals in the workplace and corporate boardrooms. With a mission to build community and ignite change, Ascend empowers leaders throughout their entire careers to rise to their full potential.

Visit [ascendleadership.org](https://ascendleadership.org) for more information.



© January 2024, The Ascend Foundation Inc. and Ascend Inc. (collectively, “Ascend”). All rights reserved. This paper may not be reproduced or distributed in any form without Ascend’s prior written permission. This paper includes the opinions of Ascend which should not be construed as statements of fact. While information contained in this paper has been obtained from sources believed to be reliable, Ascend disclaims all warranties as to the accuracy, completeness or adequacy of such information.

