

# **Community Action to Fight Asthma: Who We Are and What We Do**

## **WHAT IS COMMUNITY ACTION TO FIGHT ASTHMA?**

Community Action to Fight Asthma (CAFA) is a network of asthma coalitions in California working to shape local, regional, and state policies to reduce the environmental triggers of asthma for school-aged children where they live, learn, and play. It is widely recognized that environmental factors play a major role in asthma, so CAFA works with communities to support the creation and implementation of policies that reduce environmental risk factors for school-aged children with asthma. CAFA provides a structure to help safeguard and enact environmental policies at the state, regional, and local levels throughout California. The policies are focused on reducing environmental triggers in schools, homes, and outdoor air, ultimately improving the quality of life for school-aged children with asthma.

CAFA is comprised of local coalitions that bring together diverse constituents, including health care providers, schools, public health organizations, environmental health and justice groups, and community residents to collectively address the problem of asthma in their communities. These coalitions receive technical assistance from a variety of CAFA Partners in the areas of coalition development, strategic planning, program implementation, evaluation, policy and media advocacy. Together, the coalitions and partners constitute the CAFA Network, which mobilizes the collective voice and experience of the local communities to shape asthma policies.

## **WHY ARE WE CONCERNED ABOUT ASTHMA?**

Asthma is the most common chronic childhood disease, affecting 6.3 million children nationwide.<sup>1</sup> It is the most common cause of disability among children nationwide and the leading cause of school absences due to chronic disease, costing children their education and our schools their resources in lost funding based on attendance. In California, 1 in 6 children under 18 years of age has been diagnosed with asthma.<sup>2</sup> This is higher than the rates found in the United States overall. Although asthma affects all ages, races, and ethnic groups in America, low-income and minority populations experience substantially higher rates of fatalities, hospital admissions, and emergency room visits due to asthma. For example, the hospitalization rate for asthma in California is three times higher for African-American children than for other children.<sup>3</sup>

We do not yet know how to cure asthma, but costly sick days, hospitalizations, and emergency room use are largely preventable. We know that many environmental pollutants have been implicated in causing or worsening asthma. Poor environmental conditions mean more asthma attacks for children with asthma. Prevention of attacks can be achieved through a combination of good clinical management and decreased exposure to environmental triggers of asthma. Armed with this information, communities across California are taking action to help our children breathe easier.

## **WHAT MAKES COMMUNITY ACTION TO FIGHT ASTHMA UNIQUE?**

CAFA is unique in its focus on environmental triggers. Historically, most asthma coalitions and programs have focused on clinical management of asthma. While that work is essential, even children with the best clinically managed asthma will continue to suffer if they're assaulted with environmental triggers. CAFA's mission nurtures a bridge between public health organizations and environmental health and justice groups, making for a more collaborative and interdisciplinary effort.

CAFA is also unique in its focus on policy change. In order to have far-reaching and long-lasting reductions in environmental triggers, policy change is needed. The CAFA Initiative aims to build the capacity of local groups to advocate for policy change.

Finally, as a network of coalitions, CAFA is unique. While many asthma coalitions exist across the country, California is innovative in that many of its coalitions are part of a statewide network. The network structure allows for peer-learning and a much greater capacity to effect policy change.

### **WHO CARRIES ON THE WORK OF COMMUNITY ACTION TO FIGHT ASTHMA?**

CAFA coalitions across California work to reduce environmental triggers in the home, school, and outdoor air through policy change.

#### **CAFA COALITIONS**

##### **NORTHERN CALIFORNIA**

Contra Costa Asthma Coalition  
Oakland/Berkeley CAFA  
San Francisco Asthma Task Force  
Solano Asthma Coalition  
Sonoma County Asthma Coalition

##### **CENTRAL CALIFORNIA**

Kern County Asthma Coalition  
Merced/Mariposa County Asthma Coalition  
Tulare County Asthma Coalition

##### **SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA**

Long Beach Alliance for Children with Asthma  
Los Angeles CAFA Collaborative  
San Diego Regional Asthma Coalition

The coalitions use numerous strategies to achieve their goals including partnership-building, creating strategic alliances, community organizing, public education, media and communications, data collection, and policy advocacy. They receive technical assistance in all of these areas.

#### **CAFA TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDERS**

The Regional Asthma Management & Prevention (RAMP) Initiative provides overall coordination of the CAFA Network, as well as direct technical assistance to the coalitions in Northern and Central California. The National Latino Research Center provides technical assistance to coalitions in Southern and Central California. The CAFA Network is also supported by technical assistance partners in the areas of policy (PolicyLink), evaluation (UCSF Institute for Health Policy Studies), and communications (Public Media Center). CAFA is funded by The California Endowment. Please go to our website at [www.calasthma.org](http://www.calasthma.org) to learn more about Community Action to Fight Asthma, connect with local coalitions, locate asthma resources across California, and sign up for our newsletter.

#### **FOOTNOTES**

1. USEPA. 2006. Asthma and Indoor Environments. Internet, <http://www.epa.gov/asthma/about.html>.

2. California Health Interview Survey. 2003 Data. Ask CHIS. Internet, accessed 2006, <http://www.chis.ucla.edu>.

3. Stockman JK, Garcia K, Von Behren J, Bembom O, Shaikh N, Kreutzer R. "Asthma Disparities Among African Americans". California Asthma Facts, Volume 2, Issue 1. March 2004. Environmental Health Investigations Branch, California Department of Health Services.