

## Who We Are and What We Do

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**“The strength of the CAFA Network is that it mobilizes the voice and experience of communities across California to shape asthma policies.”**

— Melissa Stephens, San Diego Regional Asthma Coalition Coordinator



### 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 members work to support the creation and implementation of policies that reduce environmental risk factors for school-aged children with asthma. The CAFA Network 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 people with asthma. The CAFA Network comprises 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. The CAFA Network mobilizes the 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 in the U.S. and the leading cause of school absences due to chronic disease, affecting student performance and reducing schools' attendance-based funding. 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 because of 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

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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?

The CAFA Network 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 is to maintain 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 Network 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.

The CAFA Network is led by **Regional Asthma Management and Prevention (RAMP)**, with support from the **National Latino Research Center (NLRC)**. To view a current list of the growing number of asthma coalitions in the CAFA Network, visit [www.rampasthma.org](http://www.rampasthma.org).

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## References

- 1 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2006. *Indoor Air Quality*. <http://www.epa.gov/iaq/> (accessed September 15, 2009).
- 2 UCLA Center for Health Policy Research. 2003 *California Health Interview Survey*. <http://www.chis.ucla.edu/>.
- 3 Stockman, J. K., K. Garcia, J. Von Behren, O. Bembom, N. Shaikh, and R. Kreutzer. "Asthma Disparities Among African Americans." *California Asthma Facts 2* (1): 2004. California Department of Health Services, Environmental Health Investigations Branch. [http://www.ehib.org/papers/California\\_Asthma\\_Facts\\_Disparities.pdf](http://www.ehib.org/papers/California_Asthma_Facts_Disparities.pdf).

