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## **Asian Health Services Receives Award from U.S. EPA to Pilot the Nation's First-of-Its-Kind Microloan Program for Bay Area Nail Salons to Improve Worker Health**

**OAKLAND, Calif.** – Asian Health Services announced today that it has received an award from U.S. Environmental Protection Agency of \$120,000 to pilot a microloan program for nail salons who want to achieve a “Healthy Nail Salon” status in Alameda, San Francisco, Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties. This microloan program will continue the efforts of Asian Health Services and the California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative to improve the health of nail salon workers by reducing their chemical exposure to toxic chemicals. The award was announced by Matthew Tejada, director of U.S. EPA’s Office of Environmental Justice at Leann’s Nails, the first recognized Healthy Nail Salon in Alameda County.

“We are very grateful for EPA’s award and partnership in taking our efforts to the next level,” said Julia Liou, director of the Program Planning and Development Department at Asian Health Services and co-founder of the California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative. “We now have a unique opportunity to provide capital and resources to nail salons to improve the health of their workers. These small businesses make up an important economic fabric of our immigrant communities. We look forward to pioneering this innovative approach toward building healthier communities.”

The microloan program will allow nail salons to receive zero percent loans to purchase safer, less toxic nail products and indoor ventilation equipment as part of an overall strategy in becoming a recognized Healthy Nail Salon. Asian Health Services will implement the project in partnership with the California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative; the Federal Reserve Bank; San Mateo, San Francisco, and Alameda Counties; and two local nonprofit microlenders - Working Solutions and Opportunity Fund.

“EPA is proud to continue supporting Asian Health Services, the California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative, and their partners as they address health issues experienced by the nail salon community,” said Mr. Tejada. “This project will increase the number of Bay Area salons using healthier workplace practices, reducing both worker and customer exposure to toxic chemicals.”

“I believe many nail salon owners would benefit from the microloan to help their salons become a Healthy Nail Salon,” said Lan-Ahn Truong, owner of Leann’s Nails. “As the first nail salon recognized as a Healthy Nail Salon in Alameda County, I have not only noticed improvements in my health and the health of my employees, but have also have seen an increase in business.”

Using nail polishes and similar products for long hours in inadequately ventilated spaces is a suspected health risk for nail salon workers. Nail polishes and lacquers often contain the chemicals toluene, formaldehyde, or dibutyl phthalate, which, at cumulative exposures, have been associated with respiratory problems, reproductive effects, and cancer. Industry estimates show that, nationally, 97% of salon workers are women, with 60% people of color, including 51% of Vietnamese background. California has the largest estimated number of salons of any state in the country with up to 80% of nail salon workers of Vietnamese descent.

This project builds on earlier successes of Asian Health Services and the California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative supported in part by EPA. Asian Health Services is one of 10 organizations selected across the nation to receive support from this cooperative agreement, which totals about \$1.2 million in funding this year to promote community-based actions to address environmental justice issues.

Asian Health Services first began identifying and documenting an increasing number of patients and community members working in nail salons with acute symptoms, such as chronic asthma, dermatitis and memory loss with a significant number experiencing reproductive health impacts and other chronic issues, such as cancer. It was soon discovered that this was an overlooked epidemic--nail salon workers, working long hours, six to seven days a week, were unknowingly and chronically exposed to reproductively harmful chemicals found in the nail products and solvents they utilized to pamper clients on a daily basis. The epidemic of public health, environmental and reproductive justice issues faced by this overlooked population of primarily Vietnamese immigrants prompted the founding of the California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative in 2005 to address these issues utilizing a multi-tiered approach of community organizing, policy advocacy and community based research. The Collaborative now serves as a statewide coalition of over 20 organizations, researchers, agency allies, and also includes salon workers from across California and the nation

This year, Asian Health Services and the California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative also received the national Roy Family Award for Environmental Partnership from Harvard University for its innovative and creative approach to partnering with public, private and nonprofit organizations to meet social and environmental goals.

“The Healthy Nail Salon Program work of Asian Health Services and the California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative were chosen from highly qualified environmental projects nominated from around the world due to its impact in the workplace and communities,” said Henry Lee, director of the Environment and Natural Resources Program at Harvard Kennedy School’s Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs. “The local, targeted approach in addressing environmental health and justice issues makes this program one that can be replicated around the globe.”

Nail salon owners interested in learning more about the microloan program can reach Asian Health Services’ contacts Aiesha at (510) 986-6830 x743 (English) or Phuong An at (510) 986-6830 x773 (Vietnamese).

#### **About Asian Health Services**

Asian Health Services, founded in 1974, is a community health center that provides primary, dental and behavioral health services to underserved families of Oakland and Alameda County in English and 12 different Asian languages (Cantonese, Vietnamese, Mandarin, Khmer, Korean, Tagalog, Mien, Lao, Mongolian, Karen, Karenni, and Burmese). In addition to serving 27,000 patients a year, AHS advocates for the health of low-income families and children. As a nationally recognized community health center model, AHS stands at the forefront of quality and innovation. For more information, go to: [www.asianhealthservices.org](http://www.asianhealthservices.org)

#### **About the California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative**

The California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative was established in 2005 out of a growing concern for the health, safety and rights of nail salon and cosmetology workers, owners, and students. The Collaborative includes over 40 organizational members and allies, including members from environmental and reproductive justice groups, the salon workforce, non-profit organizations, researchers, government agencies and other key stakeholders. The Collaborative’s mission is to improve the health, safety, and rights of the nail and beauty care workforce to achieve a healthier, more sustainable, and just industry. For additional information about the Collaborative, visit <http://www.cahealthynailsalons.org/>

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