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Challenges and Barriers in Diabetes Management among Chinese Americans

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Several ethnic populations are believed to be at a higher risk for diabetes mellitus (DM), and Asian American is one of them. Within the Asian American community, diabetes is the fifth leading cause of illness and death.¹ With 3.8 million people, Chinese Americans make up the most heavily populated Asian ethnic group in the United States.² Among Chinese Americans, diabetes prevalence estimates range from 12-21% compared to 6.86% non-Hispanic Whites.³ The Chinese population has higher odds of Type 2 diabetes prevalence compared to non-Hispanics despite having lower age- and sex-adjusted Body Mass Indices (BMI).⁴

Barriers such as cultural attitudes and beliefs, language, diet, support system, technology, and other socioeconomic barriers may hinder diabetes education and management outcomes among Chinese Americans. The American Diabetes Association Standard of Medical Care (2010) recommended that patient centered or individualized diabetes self-management plans should equip patients with the knowledge and resources to make informed self-management decisions through health education, self-care behaviors, problem solving, and empowerment.⁵ Currently, diabetes self-management programs have mainly been available for those with higher socioeconomic status and whose primary language spoken at home is English (Hardin et al., 2004).

To reduce diabetes education-related disparities within the Chinese community, it is critical to address barriers specific to this population. Collaborations with community members, academia, and government entities to leverage resources and promote community engagement can help to address hindrances and challenges in achieving positive outcomes of diabetes education and management within the Chinese American community.

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