



Joint Statement Outlining Public Health Gaps in COVID-19 Response for Asian American and South Asian American Communities

The world has been confronting a global pandemic that is putting our public health infrastructure to the test. The US has the [highest number of confirmed COVID-19 cases](#) in the world. Coronavirus disease has particularly affected communities of color in cities such as New York, Los Angeles, and Seattle, among others. The [South Asian Public Health Association \(SAPHA\)](#), in partnership with the organizations listed below, is releasing this statement to vocalize the public health priorities of our Asian American (AA) and South Asian American (SAA) communities that have been deeply impacted on multiple levels by the pandemic. We call upon the US government for a coordinated effort to adequately respond to this crisis. We know that an effective federal response is possible, but it requires investing in populations most impacted.

New York City, which is home to the [largest concentration of South Asians](#), has recorded the highest number of cases in the country. The coronavirus disease has [particularly hit hard](#) in neighborhoods with [low median incomes](#), which is [home to many AA and SAA communities](#). These areas house many immigrant families living in [close quarters](#) with individuals [employed in the service industry](#) without telecommuting options. Undocumented immigrants from our communities face especially harsh [economic and healthcare challenges](#) such as employment instability, limited access to healthcare, inadequate health insurance, and inability to receive the full range of government relief resources. In addition, healthcare facilities in these neighborhoods are struggling to assist with the enormous influx of COVID-19 patients while grappling with shortages of medical supplies, tests, and personal protective equipment (PPE) to safely provide care and ensure staff safety. Countless AA and SAA healthcare workers are tirelessly providing care while [risking their own health](#) and safety.

As organizations advocating for the safety and well-being of AA and SAA communities across the US, we believe the US government must condemn anti-Asian racism and xenophobia, sustain funding for COVID-19 testing, report disaggregated data, provide adequate healthcare regardless of immigration status, and act in accordance with public health guidelines for the safety of all.

We condemn anti-Asian racism, islamophobia, and xenophobia against AA and SAA communities. Across the US, in addition to responding to the disease, AA communities are facing the challenge of racist attacks on individuals and businesses. [Bigoted language from elected officials](#) has intensified stereotypes and created an [atmosphere of fear in our communities](#). Online violence on [social media platforms](#) has also continued to inflame the growing violence

against our communities. Furthermore, there has been [no federal response](#) even though over 450 civil rights, social justice, and labor organizations have [signed a letter calling on Congress](#) to denounce anti-Asian racism related to COVID-19. We call upon federal agencies for a concerted effort to prevent and address anti-Asian racism, hate crimes, islamophobia, and xenophobia both online and in-person against our communities.

We demand increased funding for medical supplies and testing of COVID-19. We join the wider public health and medical community demanding increased diagnostic testing and medical resources to meet the PPE shortages in healthcare facilities that are crucial for our health providers to respond to the current pandemic. Although the most recent coronavirus relief package allocated additional funds for [healthcare facilities and COVID-19 testing](#), with the ongoing crisis, there will be a [continued need for funding to facilities](#) for deployment of testing and containment of cases and distribution of medical supplies for health professionals across the country.

We urge the reporting of disaggregated demographic data on COVID-19. We strongly advocate for collecting, analyzing, and reporting [disaggregated data](#) by age, race, sex, and socio-economic status on those who have been tested, hospitalized, or have lost their lives to COVID-19. Currently, the data collected and reported is incomplete-- South Asian leaders say the [COVID-19 toll is undercounted](#) in AA and SAA communities since confirmed or probable cases are relegated to the “other” or “unknown” race categories with no detailed ethnic-specific data. Without this data, AA and SAA organizations are unable to tailor their COVID-19 responses to the needs of their communities. We believe accurate reporting on detailed demographic data can empower health organizations to develop informed responses that can better serve our communities.

We advocate for equitable healthcare for all Americans regardless of their immigration status. AA and SAA immigrants comprise the [second-largest share](#) of immigrants in the US and [one out of every six](#) undocumented immigrants are from countries of Asian origin. AA and SAA workers rely on jobs in the [healthcare and social service industries](#), representing a [large share of workers](#) who are keeping frontline essential businesses, such as grocery stores and pharmacies, open amid the crisis. These individuals have a high likelihood of being exposed to infection due to their work. Furthermore, fear and concerns related to existing policies surrounding [immigration enforcement and the public charge rule](#) can prevent individuals from seeking timely healthcare. Many individuals also [lack adequate health insurance](#) to seek care. We call for inclusive policies that provide equitable health care for all Americans regardless of their immigration status.

We believe a phased reopening of the US grounded in public health principles will ensure the safety of AA and SAA communities. In these unprecedented times, we need to employ [healthcare reform strategies](#) that allow access to health insurance and affordable care to ensure the health and well-being of our communities. As we move past the [reported flattening of the curve](#) in many areas of the country, opening the US economy without adequate public health measures in place would be detrimental to the health and economy of our communities. We call on all levels of the government to respond to the pandemic with an [appropriate public health](#)

[plan](#) for a phased reopening of the US economy grounded in public health principles that follow recommendations from both the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and [international guidelines](#).

We stand in solidarity with AA and SAA communities across the US. We are deeply saddened by the lives and livelihoods lost as a result of this pandemic. We are also worried and concerned for our community members working on the frontlines, whether at the grocery store or at the hospital, who are facing avoidable risks to their health. While this pandemic is a stark reminder of the ongoing [inequalities in health](#) in the US, a robust and coordinated response that utilizes existing public health knowledge, resources, and skills, has the potential to treat, prevent, and save thousands of lives.

We, the undersigned organizations, are concerned about worsening health inequities with the current public health response to this crisis and call on all levels of our government to collaborate and act jointly to uphold the health and well-being of vulnerable AA and SAA communities. Now is the time for strong public health action.

Sincerely,

[South Asian Public Health Association](#) (SAPHA)

Academy of Medical & Public Health Services
Adhikaar
American Muslim Health Professionals
American University South Asian Student Association
American Pakistani Advocacy Group
Apna Ghar, Inc.
Apna Ghar LLC
Arizona Korean Nurses Association
Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA)
Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Atlanta
Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Chicago
Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF)
Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum
Asian/Pacific Islander Domestic Violence Resource Project
Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations (AAPCHO)
Bangla Health Collective
BAPP: Bangladeshi Americans for Political Progress
Coalition for Asian American Children and Families
Council Of Peoples Organization
Daya Inc
Division on South Asian Americans (DoSAA), Asian American Psychological Association (AAPA)
Equality Labs
Equitable Health Solutions

GAPIMNY—Empowering Queer & Trans Asian Pacific Islanders
Hawaii Korean American Nurses Association (HKANA)
Hello South Asians
Indian American Cancer Network
India Home
Indo-American Center
Jakara Movement
Long Island Helpers
MannMukti
Metropolitan Asian Family Services
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF)
National Council of Asian Pacific Americans
National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development
Nepalese Association In South East America, NAsEA
NQAPIA
NYU Center for the Study of Asian American Health, NYU Langone Health
OCA - Asian Pacific American Advocates
Overseas Korea Nurse Association
People Over Profit
Poverty Alleviation Organization Balochistan (Pakistan)
Reviving the Islamic Sisterhood for Empowerment
Revolutionary Love Project
Saheli Inc
Sakhi for South Asian Women
Sapna NYC
South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)
South Asian American Policy and Research Institute (SAAPRI)
South Asian Bar Association of New York
South Asian Mental Health Alliance
South Asian Network
South Asian Rapid Response Initiative
South Asian Youth Action
Students Against Hindutva (SAHI)
United We Dream
WiseUp TX