

South Asian Public Health Association (SAPHA)



May 10, 2022

Dear Congresswoman Jayapal:

The South Asian Public Health Association (SAPHA) is the leading voice on public health issues impacting South Asians in the United States. Since its inception in 1999, SAPHA has dedicated itself to promoting health equity and well-being of our broad and diverse South Asian American communities through partnerships, research, education, communication, and advocacy. Representing the South Asian diaspora, SAPHA aims to address the unique challenges facing South Asians and advance opportunities for people to reach their utmost potential health in the communities where they live, work, and play. Our shared values around the importance of addressing integral health issues that face the South Asian community is why **SAPHA continues to be a strong supporter of the South Asian Heart Health Awareness and Research Act (HR 3.771)**, which you have been championing over the past few years.

South Asian Americans are more likely to die from coronary heart disease compared to other ethnic groups in the United States. However, the lack of disaggregated data masks the true burden of cardiovascular disease (CVD) among South Asian Americans. Lifestyle changes associated with acculturation, including increased binge drinking and higher calorie diets, further contribute to the CVD burden in this population. Additionally, the lack of knowledge within the South Asian American community regarding information about factors contributing to CVD, e.g., tobacco products, has further added to the accumulating health disparities among South Asian Americans. Cumulatively, the literature demonstrates high prevalence of CVD and increasing CVD risk among South Asian Americans.

SAPHA-affiliated researchers reported that CVD has been linked to be the leading cause of morbidity and mortality in the South Asian American population. The review of evidence indicates heightened CVD risk among the overall South Asian population, including early coronary artery disease, type II diabetes mellitus, hypertension, and more. Evidence evaluating biological predisposition to heightened CVD risk among South Asians in the United States remains limited. Our research group also recently held a webinar around this exact issue that [we would encourage anyone looking for more information to watch.](#)

The paucity of evidence on South Asian Americans, and in particular South Asian American sub-groups, hinders efforts to better understand and address this health issue, which still constitutes the leading cause of death in the United States, with one person dying every 36 seconds from cardiovascular disease. With a health issue as pervasive as CVD, there is a critical need to create and analyze data on more than just the general population, but on subgroups like South Asians, in order to make a meaningful impact. There is also an imperative need for primary care and public health efforts to mitigate this burden through science-based, culturally appropriate, and people-centered interventions focused on empowering and educating both people and their doctors on how to prevent CVD, and allow further research to understand CVD, and develop health-protective policies to combat CVD. If passed, H.R.3771 will be a major turning point to improve the health of South Asian Americans across the country and help reduce this tragic disease that has touched nearly every American family.

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SAPHA commends you and your office for bringing this critical issue to the forefront to protect health now and into the future. We unequivocally support this bill. If you need any additional support or information in reference to South Asian health, please feel to reach us at advocacy@sapha.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Samira Khan'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Samira' being larger and more prominent than the last name 'Khan'.

Samira Khan, MPH
Executive Board President
South Asian Public Health Association

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Swati Rayasam'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Swati' being larger and more prominent than the last name 'Rayasam'.

Swati Rayasam, MSc
Advocacy Committee Co-Chair
South Asian Public Health Association