

Statement from Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal (WA-07)

House Committee on Energy and Commerce

Subcommittee on Health

Markup of H.R. 3771, the “South Asian Heart Health Awareness and Research Act”

May 11, 2022

Every 36 seconds, a person in the United States dies from cardiovascular disease. It is the leading cause of death regardless of gender and for most racial and ethnic groups in America.¹ South Asian Americans have the highest death rate from heart disease nationwide and that is why I am proud to sponsor the bipartisan H.R. 3771, the South Asian Heart Health Awareness and Research Act.²

I originally introduced this bill in 2017 with Representative Joe Wilson (R-SC) after the mother of Ven Neralla, my then-legislative director, tragically died suddenly of heart disease. In the aftermath, he and I learned that South Asians—people who immigrated from or whose families immigrated from countries including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal—are four times more at risk of developing heart disease than the general population.³ Moreover, South Asians have a much greater chance of having a heart attack before age 50 and have emerged as the ethnic group with the highest prevalence of Type 2 diabetes, which is the leading cause of heart disease.⁴ As the second fastest growing minority group in the country, this is a serious public health issue.

As the first South Asian woman elected to the House of Representatives, I am aware of the barriers South Asians experience in addressing this epidemic. Much of our knowledge about risks within the South Asian community is thanks to relatively new research and personal experience. I have seen people who are close to me lose loved ones suddenly because of heart disease who did not exhibit any of the typical risk factors. Traditional measures of predisposition to heart disease, such as BMI, have not been fully predictive of the disproportionate rates by which South Asians experience heart disease and high mortality rates. We often present with different risk factors, which prevents early diagnosis.

Science and education are among the greatest preventative tools to mitigate this issue. My bipartisan bill would direct the Department of Health and Human Services to create grants to fund research on heart disease, develop a clearinghouse and web portal of information on heart health research, and fund development of culturally appropriate materials to promote heart health among communities vulnerable to heart disease, including the South Asian community.

While my bill focuses on research and resources for the South Asian community, it will deliver benefits for all Americans. The bill has become even more important as we continue to grapple with COVID-19 and its lasting impacts. According to the American Heart Association, heart disease will likely continue to kill more Americans than any other cause as “the influence of COVID-19 will directly and indirectly impact rates of cardiovascular disease prevalence and

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Underlying Cause of Death, 1999–2018. CDC WONDER Online Database. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2018.

² Jyoti Madhusoodanan, *MASALA Study Examines South Asian Heart Disease Risks*, University of California San Francisco (Apr. 6, 2016) <https://www.ucsf.edu/news/2016/04/402316/masala-study-examines-south-asian-heart-disease-risks>.

³ Monica Lular, *New report details high heart disease risk in South Asians in U.S.*, NBC NEWS (Jun. 29, 2018) <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asia/new-report-details-high-heart-disease-risk-south-asians-u-n886991>.

⁴ *Id.*

deaths for years to come.”⁵ Research on why South Asians are greatly impacted by heart disease will also have global implications. South Asians are about 25 percent of the world's population but comprise 60 percent of the world's heart disease patients.⁶

Yesterday would have been Ven's mother's 80th birthday. His family is just one of millions who have lost a loved one because of heart disease. By passing this bill, not only will we prevent deaths within the South Asian community, but we will also increase awareness and understanding of cardiovascular disease that will have impacts on the health and well-being of every American. I urge my colleagues to report it favorably to the House floor.

⁵ American Heart Association, “Heart disease likely to remain #1 killer in U.S. indefinitely due to long-term COVID-19 impact” (Jul. 21, 2021) <https://newsroom.heart.org/news/heart-disease-likely-to-remain>.

⁶ American College of Cardiology, *South Asians and Cardiovascular Disease: The Hidden Threat* (May 17, 2019) <https://www.acc.org/latest-in-cardiology/articles/2019/05/07/12/42/cover-story-south-asians-and-cardiovascular-disease-the-hidden-threat>.