

South Asian Public Health Association (SAPHA)
Inaugural National Conference

**By Us, For Us:
Shaping the Future of South
Asian Public Health**



November 6, 2025
Milken Institute School of Public Health
George Washington University | Washington, DC

Welcome from the President



Dear Colleagues, Partners, and Friends,

It is my honor to welcome you to the South Asian Public Health Association's Inaugural National Conference. This milestone is more than a celebration — it is a testament to 25 years of community-driven advocacy, research, education, and leadership that continue to shape the future of South Asian health.

Our theme, By Us, For Us: Shaping the Future of South Asian Public Health, reflects the heart of our work. For 25 years, SAPHA has united researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and community leaders to elevate South Asian health from **invisibility to influence**. Together, we've advanced culturally grounded care, advocated for stronger data, and policies rooted in the lived realities of our communities.

As we look ahead, this gathering is not only about what we've achieved, but what we will build together. The ideas, partnerships, and visions born here will define the next 25 years of South Asian public health.

Thank you for your dedication, partnership, and belief in SAPHA's mission. Here's to the next 25 years of progress, purpose, and possibility.

Warmly,
Samira Khan, MPH,
President, South Asian Public Health Association

Conference Overview



Today's program brings together researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and advocates for a day of dialogue, reflection, and connection. Through panels on leadership, funding, advocacy, and innovation—alongside interactive networking and a keynote by Dr. Ashish Jha—we'll explore how community, collaboration, and shared vision can drive the next generation of South Asian public health.

About the South Asian Public Health Association (SAPHA)

Mission

To advance the health and well-being of South Asian communities in the United States through research, advocacy, and education.

Vision

A future where South Asians in the U.S. and the communities in which they live, experience better health and well-being.

Who We Serve

South Asian communities across the U.S., including those of Bangladeshi, Bhutanese, Indian, Maldivian, Nepali, Pakistani, and Sri Lankan descent, as well as members of the broader South Asian diaspora from the Caribbean, Africa, and the Middle East, across all immigration statuses.

Our Values

Equity: We strive to eliminate health inequities by addressing social, political, and structural determinants of health.

Justice: We center the needs of the most marginalized and act in solidarity with other communities of color, advancing policies and practices that dismantle structural barriers and affirm dignity, fairness, and human rights.

Advocacy: We use research, education, and coalition-building to amplify South Asian voices, influence policy, and drive system-level change that improves health and well-being.

Community-Centeredness: We ground our work in the lived experiences of South Asians, ensuring that our programs, research, and advocacy reflect the diversity of our diaspora and honor community wisdom.

Who We Are

Founded in 1999, the South Asian Public Health Association (SAPHA) is a volunteer-run national nonprofit and the leading voice on public health issues affecting South Asian communities in the U.S. For 25 years, SAPHA has connected researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and advocates to advance health equity through education, research, partnerships, and advocacy.

SAPHA Conference Agenda

**George Washington University Milken Institute School of Public Health
950 New Hampshire Avenue, NW, Washington DC, 20037**

Upon arrival please check in with security at the front desk before proceeding to the convening room.

9:00am - 9:30am - Registration & Breakfast

9:30am-9:40am - SAPHA Welcome & Overview

9:45am-10:30am - Panel 1 – From Pioneers to Pathmakers: Leadership and Legacy in South Asian Public Health

This keynote panel brings together trailblazing leaders whose work has defined the field of South Asian public health. Panelists will reflect on mentorship, leadership, and legacy, share lessons learned from their journeys, and discuss how to sustain progress through equity-driven, community-rooted change.

Featuring: Alka Kanaya, MD; Arnab Mukherjea, DrPH, MPH; Susan Ivey, MD, MHSA; Amita Vyas, PhD, MHS; Nitasha Nagaraj, DrPH, MPH

Moderator: Aisha Bhimla, PhD, MPH

10:35am - 11:35am - Panel 2 – Funding What Matters: Mobilizing Cross-Sector Investment for South Asian Health Equity

This panel convenes leaders from philanthropy, foundations, and private sectors to explore how to elevate South Asian health as a funding priority. Panelists will discuss gaps in institutional support, innovative funding models, and strategies for cross-sector collaboration to drive long-term, sustainable equity.

Featuring: Giridhar Mallia, MD, MSPH; Leena Patel, MPH; Sapna Pandya, MPH; Nelly Ganesan, MPH; Niloufer Memon, MS

Moderator: Pooja Mittal, MD

SAPHA Conference Agenda



11:45-12:25pm Professional Speed Dating at the Intersection of Policy, Practice and Research - Interactive Networking & Collaboration Session

This fast-paced, guided session is designed to spark meaningful connections and generate actionable ideas across South Asian public health. Through rotating small-group discussions, participants will share perspectives, refine emerging concepts, and identify opportunities for collaboration. The session combines structured prompts with open dialogue, ensuring attendees leave with new insights, potential collaborators, and fresh momentum for their work.

12:25pm-12:30pm - Partner Presentation: Introduction to the ASPIRE Asian American Cohort Study

12:30pm-1:00pm- Lunch Break

1:00pm-1:15pm Partner Presentation: Introduction to the Collaborative Approach for Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (AANHPI) Research and Education (CARE) Study

1:15pm-1:30pm - Viewing of "Brown Heart" with Q&A moderated by Dr. Alka Kanaya

1:30-2:30pm Continuation of Professional Speed Dating at the Intersection of Policy, Practice and Research - Interactive Networking & Collaboration Session

This fast-paced, guided session is designed to spark meaningful connections and generate actionable ideas across South Asian public health. Through rotating small-group discussions, participants will share perspectives, refine emerging concepts, and identify opportunities for collaboration. The session combines structured prompts with open dialogue, ensuring attendees leave with new insights, potential collaborators, and fresh momentum for their work.

SAPHA Conference Agenda

2:35pm -3:20pm Panel 3 – Power in Action: Advocacy for South Asian Health Equity

This panel highlights South Asian advocates and policy leaders working to build coalitions, advance equity, and sustain long-term movement building. Panelists will discuss the power of advocacy, cross-racial solidarity, and strategies for translating community voice into meaningful policy change.

Featuring: Karthick Ramakrishan, PhD; Deepa Iyer, JD; Ashwin Vasan, MD, PhD, Kamal Menghrajani, MD, MS

Moderator: Shamsun Nahar, BA

3:25pm - 4:10pm Panel 4 – Driving Innovation: Reimagining South Asian Health Through Technology and Storytelling

This panel explores how South Asians can lead at the forefront of health innovation—bridging public health, technology, and leadership. Panelists will discuss opportunities and risks in digital transformation, the role of storytelling in shaping narratives, and how to ensure South Asian communities are not left behind in this era of disruption.

Featuring: Nabeel Kaukab, MB; Abdul Shaikh, PhD; Sravya Durbha, MBA; Faraz Zubairi, BA

Moderator: Umair Shah, MD, MPH

4:15pm-4:45pm Closing Keynote – A Vision for the Future of South Asian Health

This keynote will offer a forward-looking vision for the future of South Asian public health. Dean Jha will reflect on lessons from the past, the urgent challenges of today, and the bold opportunities ahead. A visionary talk on where South Asian health is headed and the leadership needed for the next generation.

Featuring: Ashish Jha, MD, MPH

SAPHA Conference Speakers



Aisha Bhimla, PhD, MPH, is an Assistant Professor at the Center for Asian Health at Temple University's Lewis Katz School of Medicine. Her research focuses on reducing health disparities among minority populations through culturally tailored, community-engaged approaches. She has co-developed prevention interventions among Asian Americans and supports NIH- and CDC-funded studies. Dr. Bhimla also leads SAPHA's Empowering South Asian Communities initiative to combat health misinformation and promote information literacy.



Sravya Durbha, MBA, is a healthcare strategist with deep experience in digital health and life sciences innovation. She has launched AI-based clinical-decision tools, built digital-health platforms, and served as Chief of Staff at a leading transplant-diagnostics company. Passionate about equity and technology, she works to scale solutions that make healthcare more inclusive and accessible.



Nelly Ganesan, MPH, is a health equity leader with 20 years of experience in quality, value, and care transformation. Formerly Executive Director of Health Equity and External Affairs at Morgan Health (JPMorgan Chase), she has advised health systems, employers, and foundations on embedding equity into care delivery. She holds an MPH from Boston University and a BA from the University of Oregon.

SAPHA Conference Speakers



Susan Ivey, MD, MHSA, is Co-Director of Research at UC Berkeley's Health Research for Action Center and Adjunct Professor in the UCB-UCSF Joint Medical Program. An inaugural SAPHA Board Member and family physician with 30 years of experience, she studies cardiovascular and chronic disease disparities in Asian Americans. Dr. Ivey's work emphasizes participatory, multilingual, and community-based approaches to improve preventive care and health equity.



Ashish Jha, MD, MPH, is the Dean of the Brown University School of Public Health and one of the world's leading public health experts. A practicing physician and former White House COVID-19 Response Coordinator, he led national efforts on vaccines, testing, and pandemic preparedness. Previously at Harvard, he directed the Global Health Institute and authored 300+ publications on health systems, quality, and policy.



Alka Kanaya, MD, is a Professor of Medicine, Epidemiology, and Biostatistics at UCSF and a practicing internist. She founded the Mediators of Atherosclerosis in South Asians Living in America (MASALA) Study, which transformed national screening guidelines. Her research focuses on diabetes and cardiovascular disease prevention in Asian American populations.

SAPHA Conference Speakers



Nabeel Kaukab, MB, is Founder and CEO of Jaan Health, a company transforming chronic-disease management through AI-driven virtual care. With 25 years of experience bridging technology and healthcare, he previously served as a healthcare investment banker at UBS and Barclays, advising on \$50 billion in transactions. Nabeel holds a BA in Neuroscience and Behavior from Columbia University and studied Biotechnology & Bioengineering at the University of Pennsylvania.



Giridhar Mallya, MD, MSHP, is a Senior Policy Officer at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, where he leads initiatives advancing racial equity, diversity, and inclusion through policy and narrative change. A public health physician and former Director of Policy and Planning for the Philadelphia Department of Public Health, he has led national efforts on health equity, housing, and cross-sector collaboration.



Niloufer Memon, MS, leads Strategic Initiatives within the Gender Equality Division at the Gates Foundation, advancing gender-transformative approaches in women's health and livelihoods. Formerly with the Bridgespan Group and Dalberg, she has advised philanthropies and nonprofits across Asia, Africa, and the U.S. on governance, equity, and impact strategy. She also mentors emerging leaders in global health and gender equity.

SAPHA Conference Speakers



Kamal Menghrajani, MD, MS, is an oncologist and physician-scientist joining Massachusetts General Hospital / Harvard Medical School. A former White House Fellow and Assistant Director at the Office of Science and Technology Policy, she advanced initiatives in cell and gene therapy, global health, and cancer outcomes. Previously at Memorial Sloan Kettering, she led research on clonal hematopoiesis and myeloid diseases and earned an NIH K Award and ASCO Young Investigator Award.



Pooja Mittal, MD, is the Chief Health Equity Officer at Health Net, where she leads strategy to embed health equity across programs and services. A family medicine physician specializing in maternal and child health, she also practices at a Federally Qualified Health Center and teaches at UCSF and Stanford. She is a national advocate for birth justice and health equity.



Arnab Mukherjee, DrPH, MPH, is a Professor of Public Health at California State University, East Bay, and Faculty Director for Health Professions at the CSU Chancellor's Office. His research uses community-engaged methods to address health disparities among Asian and South Asian Americans. A long-time SAPHA leader and national mentor, he has led NIH- and CDC-funded studies on cancer screening, trauma, and resilience.

SAPHA Conference Speakers



Shamsun Nahar, BA, is a Program Director at the Center for Pan Asian Community Services (CPACS), where she leads substance use and HIV prevention programs and drives strategic initiatives to advance health equity among AAPI and Latinx communities. She oversees partnerships, funding, and compliance while building community engagement and youth empowerment programs. A passionate advocate for education and equity, Shamsun has dedicated her career to supporting immigrants and refugees through advocacy and health education.



Nitasha Nagaraj, DrPH, MPH, is an Associate Professor at George Washington University's Milken Institute School of Public Health and a past SAPHA Board Chair. Her research focuses on women's and girls' health, reproductive health, and gender equity, particularly in immigrant and South Asian communities. She teaches courses on Women's Health and Program Evaluation and serves on the boards of the Global India Fund and the Asian/Pacific Islander Domestic Violence Resource Project (DVRP). Dr. Nagaraj's work integrates community engagement, evaluation, and health equity in both domestic and global contexts.



Sapna Pandya, MPH, is DC Director for Partnerships and Strategy at the Meyer Foundation, where she mobilizes resources for racial justice and systems change. A public health practitioner, strategist, and founder of Chingaree Consulting, her 20+ year career spans global and community health, immigrant justice, and LGBTQ advocacy. She has led South Asian health and language justice initiatives across the U.S.

SAPHA Conference Speakers



Leena Patel, MPH, is Vice President of Development and Business Strategy at The Assistance Fund, where she leads fundraising to help patients access life-saving treatments. With over a decade of experience in healthcare management and access, she previously served as Vice President of Development at the PAN Foundation, helping raise more than \$3 billion for patient support.



Karthick Ramakrishnan, PhD, is Founder and Executive Director of AAPI Data, Strategy Lead for the Americas at the School of International Futures, and Senior Advisor at States for the Future. A political scientist and author of seven books, he has led major statewide and national initiatives on democracy, equity, and data. He serves on the boards of The California Endowment and the U.S. Census Bureau's National Advisory Committee.



Abdul R. Shaikh, PhD, is Global Leader for Population Health at Amazon Web Services, where he helps organizations harness data and AI for better health outcomes. Formerly at NIH and ONC, he led federal data-modernization efforts and later advised major health systems at PwC and Guidehouse. Dr. Shaikh serves on advisory boards including the National Academy of Medicine's Digital Health Collaborative and ASPPH's AI Task Force.

SAPHA Conference Speakers



Umair A. Shah, MD, MPH, is Founder and CEO of Rickshaw Health, a venture driving transformational change across health systems through strategy, leadership, and real-world implementation. A physician and former Washington State Secretary of Health, he previously led Harris County Public Health (TX) and served as President of NACCHO, representing 3,000 local health departments. With over two decades bridging global, state, and local health systems—including work with the WHO—Dr. Shah blends operational insight and visionary leadership. A past SAPHA Board Chair, he continues advancing equity-driven public health innovation nationwide.



Ashwin Vasan, MD, PhD, is a physician, epidemiologist, and reformer who served as New York City's 44th Health Commissioner. He led HealthyNYC, a plan to raise life expectancy and reduce inequities, and spearheaded the nation's largest local medical-debt relief program. Dr. Vasan strengthened mental-health infrastructure, launched NYC TeenSpace, and improved overdose and cancer-screening outcomes. Formerly CEO of Fountain House and faculty at Columbia University, he now serves as Senior Fellow at Yale University and Advisor at Commonwealth Ventures.

SAPHA Conference Speakers



Amita Vyas, PhD, MHS, is a Professor at George Washington University's School of Public Health, Director of the Center of Excellence in Maternal & Child Health, and an inaugural SAPHA Board Member. Co-founder of the Global India Fund and co-producer of Girl Rising India, she has advanced global efforts to improve women's and adolescent health through education, advocacy, and storytelling. Dr. Vyas's research, teaching, and mentorship focus on gender equity and maternal and child health across local and global contexts.



Faraz Zubairi, BA is Founder of Treehouse Holdings, a healthcare venture firm that builds and invests in companies transforming care through innovation. He is also Founder and CEO of ExamMed, an award-winning Intelligent Care Management platform used nationally by health systems and payers. A former congressional staffer and legal-tech executive, Faraz lectures on entrepreneurship and social responsibility and serves on multiple corporate and nonprofit boards.

Sponsors & Partners

The South Asian Public Health Association extends heartfelt gratitude to our sponsors, partners, and collaborators whose generous support made this inaugural national conference possible. Your commitment to advancing South Asian health equity ensures that this work continues for years to come.

Guardian Sponsor

- [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation \(RWJF\)](#)

Advocate Sponsor

- Arnab Mukherjea, DrPH, MPH

Health Sponsor

- [American Association of Retired Persons \(AARP\)](#)

Wellness Sponsor

- [Manifold](#)

Education Sponsors

- [Asian Pacific Islander American Health Forum \(APIAHF\)](#)
- [Center for Asian Health, Temple University's Lewis Katz School of Medicine](#)
- [Health Camp of New Jersey](#)

Community Sponsors

- [Asian Health Services](#)
- [Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations \(AAPCHO\)](#)
- [Asian Pacific Partners for Empowerment, Advocacy and Leadership \(APPEAL\)](#)

Table Sponsors

- [Global India Fund](#)
- [Center of Deaf Health Excellence, Gallaudet University](#)

Academic Partners

- [Milken Institute School of Public Health, George Washington University](#)
- University of North Texas Health Science Center - [CEAL study](#)
- California State University, East Bay - [CARE study](#)
- University of California, San Francisco - [ASPIRE Asian American Cohort Study](#)

Friends of SAPHA

Honoring the individuals whose generosity strengthens our community and mission.

SAPHA extends heartfelt gratitude to the friends and supporters whose personal contributions made our inaugural National Conference and 25th Anniversary possible. Your generosity reflects the collective power of our community, and helps sustain our ongoing work to advance South Asian health equity nationwide.

Changemakers

- Syed Zaki Hossain
- Purvi Patel

Advocates

- Sharad Malavade
- Neomi Shah

Supporters

- Shweta Doshi
- Amandeep Sandher
- Melika Rahman
- Naazneen Pal
- Susan Ivey
- Olamide Ojo-Fati
- Omair Ahmad
- Arpit Desai

Contributors

- Naima Asjad
- Aleeya Ali
- Juvariya Lat
- Jahanaran Hoque
- Kinza Siddiqui
- Saleha Ali
- Saima Umar
- Annum Rashedi

Acknowledgements

SAPHA extends heartfelt gratitude to our Board of Directors, Conference Planning Committee, Event Production Team, and the many volunteers whose leadership, creativity, and dedication made this inaugural National Conference possible. From speaker outreach and program design to communications and on-site coordination, your collective efforts brought SAPHA's 25th Anniversary celebration to life.

Board of Directors

Ayesha Azam, MSHIA · Anita Balan, MPH · Amish Doshi, MPH · Sheikh Rubana Hossain, MPH · Samira Khan, MPH · Mushira M. Khan, PhD · Anita Makkenchery, MBBS, MPH · Malinee Neelamegam, PhD, MPH, CPH · Navami Naik, MSS · Minal Patel, MPH · Anto Paul, RN-BC, MS/MPH, CDE, CPHQ · Sonia Shah, MPH · Anmol Sharma, MGH · Pavithra Suresh, PhD · Nawal Umar, MPH

Conference Planning Committee

Aisha Bhimla, PhD, MPH · Samira Khan, MPH · Anita Makkenchery, MBBS, MPH · Arnab Mukherjea, DrPH, MPH · Nitasha Nagaraj, DrPH, MPH · Malinee Neelamegam, PhD, MPH, CPH · Minal Patel, MPH · Sonia Shah, MPH · Umair A. Shah, MD, MPH

Event Production Team

East Oxford Collective — Jessica DiBenedetto (Event Lead), Sarah, Chanel, and Maura

Special Thanks

Palash Bhanot, MPH for communications support and *Vaibhav Jain, MPH* for speaker outreach.

Stay Connected!

The work doesn't end here. For 25 years, SAPHA has united researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and advocates to advance the health and well-being of South Asian communities across the U.S. Join us as we continue building the next 25 years of progress together.

Follow Us!



<https://sapha.org>



<https://x.com/SAPHAinfo>



facebook.com/SAPHAorg/



linkedin.com/company/south-asian-public-health-association/



<https://instagram.com/saphainfo>



Sign up for SAPHA's email listserv: bit.ly/SAPHAlistserv

Support SAPHA by donating today:
<https://bit.ly/SAPHAdonate>