

SAPHA Policy Statement:  
Social Determinants of Health

Table of Contents:

Topic: Social Determinants of Health (SDOH)	2
Purpose	2
Problem Statement	2
Background	2
SAPHA's Key Positions	3
Recommendations	3
Research	3
Policy	4
Direct Service Provision	4
References	5

## Topic: Social Determinants of Health (SDOH)

### Purpose

The purpose of this policy statement is to outline SAPHA's commitment to addressing the social determinants of health (SDOH) that impact South Asian American (SAA) communities. This includes raising awareness for policymakers and advocacy organizations, promoting research, guiding policy, and advocating for improved health outcomes through data disaggregation.

### Problem Statement

SDOH are defined as the conditions in which individuals are born, live, work, and age, influencing their quality of life and health outcomes. SAA are disproportionately affected by various health conditions compared to their counterparts, with SDOH playing a significant role in exacerbating disease outcomes and risks in this community (1). Evidence shows significant gaps in health disparities, with SAA at much higher risk for cardiometabolic diseases (CMDs) such as coronary heart disease, stroke, hypertension, and type 2 diabetes (1). Increasing recognition and understanding of SDOH is crucial to ensure that SAA health needs are better addressed.

### Background

SDOH includes one's economic stability, health care access and quality, social and community contexts, education access, and neighborhood and built environment (2). Within SAA communities, individual factors such as education, income, immigration status, caste, and cultural and religious backgrounds are social determinants that influence health outcomes. Acculturation encompasses one's proficiency in English, length of time living in the United States, and nativity; acculturation plays a significant role in shaping health behaviors, thus influencing chronic disease and mental health outcomes within SAA communities (1).

Structural inequalities, including racism, are leading contributors to poor health outcomes for South Asian Americans (1). These inequalities can impact one's mental health and well-being, causing considerable psychological stress. Mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation have been linked to the effects of racism and discrimination (1).

These health inequalities are further compounded for undocumented SAAs who are barred from accessing Medicare, Medicaid, and Affordable Care Act Marketplace health insurance coverage (3).

Environmental exposures, exacerbated by the effects of climate change, also influence eating habits, physical activity, and home food accessibility. Additionally, increased exposure to

pollutants and environmental toxins can worsen respiratory conditions, such as asthma (4). Existing studies of environmental determinants of health are unable to be disaggregated by SAA ethnic groups to consider the precise impact of these factors on SAA health outcomes. Furthermore, as we continue to witness an increased frequency and severity of natural disasters, such as wildfires, hurricanes, and droughts, SAA communities face new risks of poor health outcomes brought on by climate change and its effects.

Meaningfully addressing the social determinants of health that impact SAA communities is essential for improving overall health outcomes for these communities. Thus, it proves necessary to include tackling structural inequalities, enhancing access to healthcare, and mitigating the impacts of climate change in order to improve overall health in SAA communities. Comprehensive public health interventions that consider the multifaceted nature of SDOH are crucial for fostering healthier, empowered, and more resilient communities.

### SAPHA's Key Positions

1. **Raising Awareness:** SAPHA is dedicated to increasing awareness of the social determinants that can inform SAA health outcomes among health practitioners and SAA communities themselves.
2. **Advocacy for Understanding and Data Disaggregation:** SAPHA advocates for a deeper understanding of SDOH and emphasizes the importance of data disaggregation to improve health outcomes within SAA communities. Elaborating on the individual determinants and the extent to which they impact communities would enable health practitioners, researchers, and policymakers to identify specific existing inequities. Furthermore, the disaggregation of data pertaining to diverse Asian populations in the US exposes the wide range of disparities that impact these groups to allow for more targeted research efforts and health interventions.
3. **Guiding Research and Policy:** SAPHA is committed to providing frameworks that guide researchers and policymakers to recognize and address the critical SDOH that influence health outcomes among SAA.

### Recommendations

#### Research

- Conduct more comprehensive research to provide data and insights on the unique challenges South Asian Americans face due to SDOH, including issues of acculturation, racial inequity, immigration, and climate.

- Ensure the availability of disaggregated demographic data to bridge gaps in SDOH for specific subgroups within the Asian American population, facilitating more precise policies for South Asian American health.

#### Policy

- Work with policymakers to develop policies focused on a) improving overall population health and b) addressing the specific health needs of SAA communities.
- [Health Equity and Accountability Act of 2022](#): This bill requires the Dept. of Health and Human Services to undertake measures to reduce health disparities, such as more detailed reporting of demographic and health outcomes data, diversifying the healthcare workforce capacity and promoting access to culturally competent healthcare, and ensuring equitable access to social welfare, government, and private healthcare insurance and other benefits like Medicaid, Medicare, and nutrition assistance.
- [HEAL for Immigrant Families of 2021](#): This bill extends Medicaid and Children’s Health Insurance Program coverage to legal residents who meet eligibility criteria.
- [Stop Mental Health Stigma in our Communities Act](#): This bill requires the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to develop and implement outreach/education initiatives for the promotion of mental and behavioral health among AANHPI communities and reduce stigma.

#### Direct Service Provision

- Improve language-access services to enhance health literacy among South Asian Americans, particularly those with lower-English proficiency to empower the SAA population with the tools to address their health needs.
- Work with existing organizations to create sustainable pathways for healthcare access for undocumented SAAs.
- Work with existing organizations and advocates to increase help-seeking behaviors among vulnerable SAAs.

## References

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