

AAPRI  
South Asian American  
Policy & Research Institute

All of Us  
RESEARCH PROGRAM

Asian Health  
Coalition

ARC

FTA/CTA Asian American Listening Session  
September 7, 2023

2023

# IMPACT REPORT

PREPARED BY

SAAPRI

4350 North Broadway Street, 2nd Floor,  
Chicago, Illinois 60613  
(773) 373-9750

[saapri@saapri.org](mailto:saapri@saapri.org)



# Table of Contents

1	<i>Letter from the Executive Director</i>	Page 1
2	<i>Impact by the Numbers &amp; Key Issue Areas</i>	Page 3
3	<i>Our Growth</i>	Page 4
4	<i>Health Equity Project</i>	Page 6
5	<i>Democracy Project</i>	Page 9
6	<i>Access to Justice Initiative</i>	Page 11
6	<i>TEACH Act Advocacy Project</i>	Page 13
7	<i>Elevating Impact: SAAPRI's Journey in 2023</i>	Page 14
8	<i>Next Steps</i>	Page 18



## 2023 LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear SAAPRI family,

The South Asian American community is one of the fastest-growing ethnic groups in Chicago and across the state and country. As we approach the end of 2023, I am proud to release SAAPRI's initial analyses of 2020 U.S. Census Data; and with it, I would like to share a few reflections.

SAAPRI continues to focus on building solidarity with the broader community while advocating on behalf of South Asian Americans.

This year has been pivotal in our growth, and we have worked tirelessly throughout the year to make strides in advancing the organization's mission.

Whether by addressing healthcare disparities, documenting bias motivated discrimination and hate crimes, or employing multifaceted approaches to defend voting rights, we have remained committed to bringing about positive change via our Health Equity, Access to Justice, and Democracy projects respectively. None of these would have been possible without the continued generosity of our supporters, donors, funders, and partners who have collectively helped strengthen our financial stability and position us for growth. In 2023, we welcomed three new staff members to create and maintain important internal systems to support our finances, programming, operations, communications and development.

I am delighted to introduce to you Murtaza Ali (Finance Manager), Maya Bhowmik (Programs and Operations Associate) and Francys Munoz (Communications and Development Associate). Please join me in extending a warm welcome to these new team members who are already contributing to our ongoing and future initiatives. I am also pleased to welcome three talented research fellows to our team: Aakash Ray, Litcy Kurisinkal and Prottusha Sarkar. This dynamic, talented, and driven group brings a wide range of unique skills and experiences that will help advance our goals by ensuring our communities have voice and visibility through data-driven advocacy.

While we have reached some noteworthy milestones this year, I would also like to highlight a project you have significantly contributed to on various levels over the past four years. As South Asian Americans are not a homogeneous group, a precise count of our community members is essential in order to gauge the true impact of our growing presence. In 2020, SAAPRI collaborated with our elected officials, community leaders, and partners to ensure a comprehensive count during the decennial census followed by advocating with the U.S. Census Bureau and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for disaggregated data to enable a full understanding of the increasingly diverse populace. In September 2023, the U.S. Census Bureau released new data on nearly 1,500 race and ethnicity groups.

2023

## LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Building upon the groundbreaking 2005 and 2013 demographic reports titled Making Data Count, today I am excited to share the updated [demographic profile of South Asian Americans in Illinois](#). This is our first release from our ongoing analysis of data sourced from the 2020 United States Census.

Without nuanced reporting such as this, our communities are often overlooked by policy makers, resulting in our critical emerging and longstanding needs remaining unmet. As we continue to expand our analysis, I hope this report not only provides you with insightful information about our communities but also underscores the meaningful impact your continued support for SAAPRI makes.


I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to the [SAAPRI team](#), the SAAPRI Board, our funders, donors, and the rest of the SAAPRI family as we move forward into 2024 and beyond. Together, you have helped the organization carry out its mission by fostering independent research, maintaining community partnerships, and developing policy recommendations to address issues that are most meaningful to our communities. For frequent updates and additional details regarding our influence in our communities, visit our [website](#) and follow us on social media! **Please consider making a year-end donation to SAAPRI today at [www.saapri.org/donate](http://www.saapri.org/donate) if you would want to support our mission.**

I wish you a wonderful holiday season!

Sincerely,



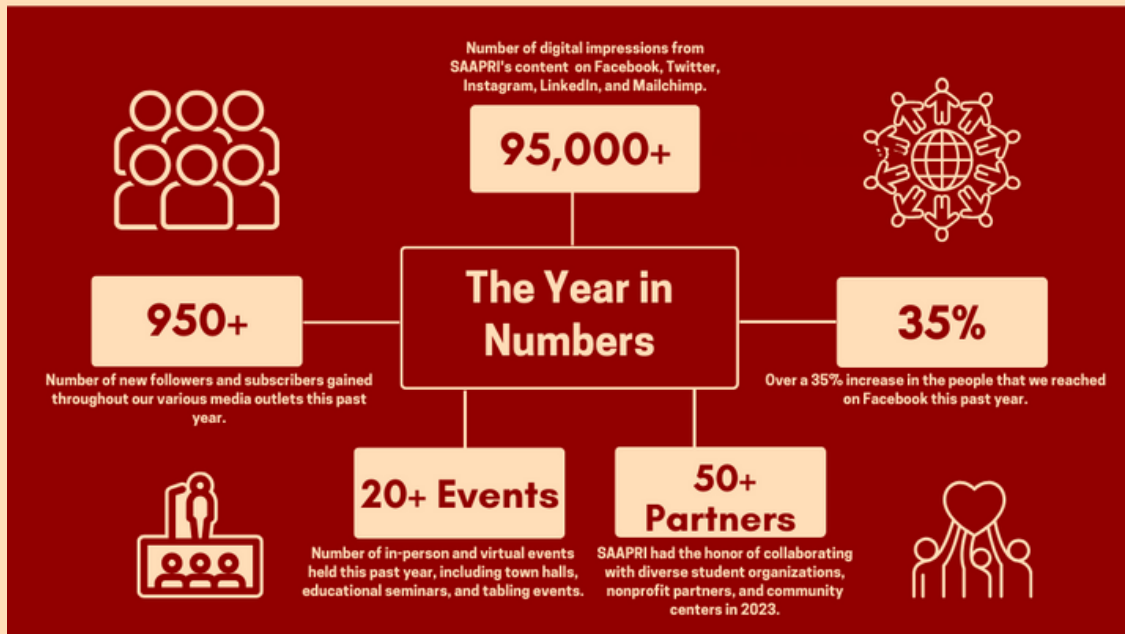
Executive Director

A group photograph of approximately 12 people, including men and women of various ethnicities, standing together in a professional setting. The photo is overlaid with a semi-transparent red filter.

A community stakeholder meeting with Robert L. Stantos, Director, U.S. Census Bureau at the University of Illinois-Chicago on February 16, 2023

# SAAPRI

## 2023 IMPACT REPORT



2023

## IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

In 2023, SAAPRI pivoted towards in-person events, such as our Chai Shai social gatherings, while maintaining connections with our online audience through educational panels on breast cancer awareness, mental health and diabetes. We actively participated in Asian American Action Day, rallying for civic engagement. The year marked substantial growth in SAAPRI's impact, digital outreach, and team dynamics.

## KEY ISSUE AREAS



Civic Engagement



Community Health



Community Engagement



Education Equity

2023

# OUR GROWTH



**Shobhana Johri Verma**  
Executive Director



**Maya Bhowmik**  
Programs & Operations



**Francys Munoz**  
Communications & Development



**Murtaza Ali**  
Finance Manager



**Litcy Kurisinkal**  
Democracy Project Fellow



**Aakash Ray**  
Communications & Research  
Fellow



**Protusha Sarkar**  
Health Equity Fellow



**Anushka Somani**  
Democracy Project Intern



**Anaka Srinivas**  
Health Equity Intern

**SAAPRI**  
Advocates & Volunteers

2023

# OUR GROWTH



**Maya Bhowmik**

**Programs & Operations Associate**

This year, I transitioned from focusing solely on the Health Equity project to a role in Programs & Operations, providing support across all SAAPRI projects.

Stepping into SAAPRI's first Programs & Operations Associate role, I am fortunate to be in a position to help the non-profit develop by formalizing our internal structures and cultivating strong relationships with all of our external stakeholders. I hope to grow with the organization as SAAPRI becomes involved in more health-related research efforts for the South Asian American community.



**Francys Munoz**

**Communications & Development Associate**

Earlier this year, I became a part of the SAAPRI team, with whom I've been dedicated to enhancing SAAPRI's relationships and community partnerships, particularly through our digital communications.

Over the past few months, I've collaborated with state legislators and community leaders although my primary focus has been aiding our different projects in creating culturally relevant events for our community members. I am enthusiastic about continuing this work into the new year and eagerly anticipate forging new partnerships and expanding our impact in 2024.

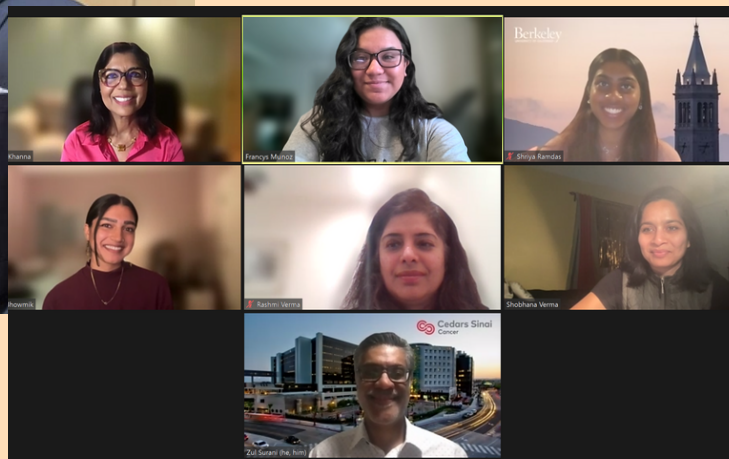


2023

# PROGRAMMING OVERVIEW



**May 4th, 2023:** SAAPRI's Executive Director Shobhana Johri Verma and Health Equity Project Intern Emmanuel Ravichandar attended the [Asian Engagement & Recruitment Core's \(ARC\) 2023 National Conference](#) where SAAPRI was recognized as an ARC Legacy Partner



**November 14th, 2023:** SAAPRI hosted our third and final part in our [3-part Breast Cancer Awareness Series](#). This final panel focused on outreach & advocacy surrounding breast cancer and its impact on the South Asian American community

## HEALTH EQUITY PROJECT

SAAPRI continued its dedication to advancing health equity in 2023, serving as a crucial Regional Community Based Partner in the Asian Engagement and Recruitment Core (ARC) under the Asian Health Coalition. ARC's mission, as part of the National Institute of Health's *All of Us* research program, is to involve diverse Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander populations in research, accelerating healthcare advancements. Our outreach and educational activities supported the program's goal of gathering medical data from one million individuals in the U.S. to enhance precision medicine, particularly addressing the lack of disaggregated health data for South Asian Americans, one of the fastest-growing ethnic groups.

In addition to our partnership with ARC, SAAPRI hosted impactful events throughout the year, addressing health disparities and expanding internal capacities for collaborative research. Events focused on community health, social determinants of health, diabetes, mental health, and breast cancer awareness. The Breast Cancer Awareness series featured engaging virtual panel discussions, involving survivors, providers, researchers, legislators, and advocates.



2023

# PROGRAMMING OVERVIEW

## HEALTH EQUITY PROJECT

Our partnership with Friends of the Forest Preserve at Bunker Hill highlighted mental health in the September Chai Shai & Yoga event. Collaborating with the Chinese American Service League (CASL) for the second year, we conducted a survey identifying social determinants of health affecting South Asians within the broader AAPI community.

Looking ahead, SAAPRI will continue to nurture our current community partnerships while taking on several new and important research collaborations.

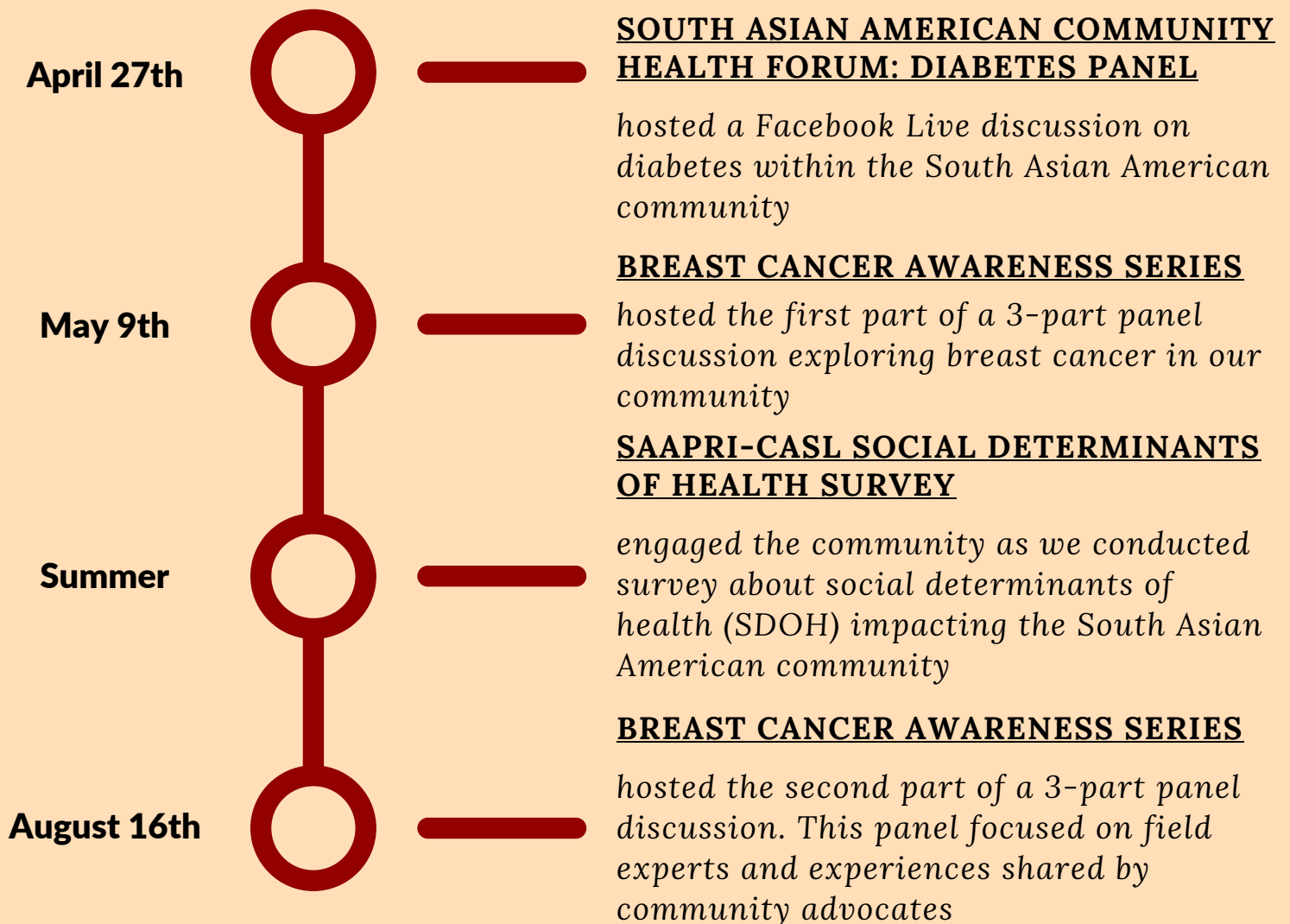


**Summer:** SAAPRI team members engaging community members at our Chai Shai & Yoga event, and collecting responses for our Social Determinants of Health Survey (SDOH) survey.

2023

# PROGRAMMING OVERVIEW

## HEALTH EQUITY PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS




---

### PROTTUSHA SARKAR

*Research and Health Equity Fellow*



“My interest in health equity stems from personal experiences and witnessing barriers to healthcare. As a future physician, I want to increase access to healthcare for all. My goal at SAAPRI is to characterize barriers for South Asians in seeking breast health care and contributing to the literature on South Asian health disparities so that we can better address their specific needs.”

2023

# PROGRAMMING OVERVIEW



Feb. 6th, 2023: SAAPRI co-hosted a 2023 Mayoral Candidate Forum at the Chicago History Museum's McCormick Theater.



May 9th, 2023: SAAPRI joined our Pan Asian Voter Empowerment Coalition partners for the 10th Annual Asian American Action Day in Springfield, IL.

## DEMOCRACY PROJECT

In 2023, SAAPRI continued its impactful Democracy Project, acknowledging the substantial role South Asian Americans play in sustaining democracy. Through initiatives like Census work, redistricting advocacy, and non-partisan voting rights awareness, SAAPRI aimed to elevate the civic engagement of the underrepresented South Asian American community in Illinois.

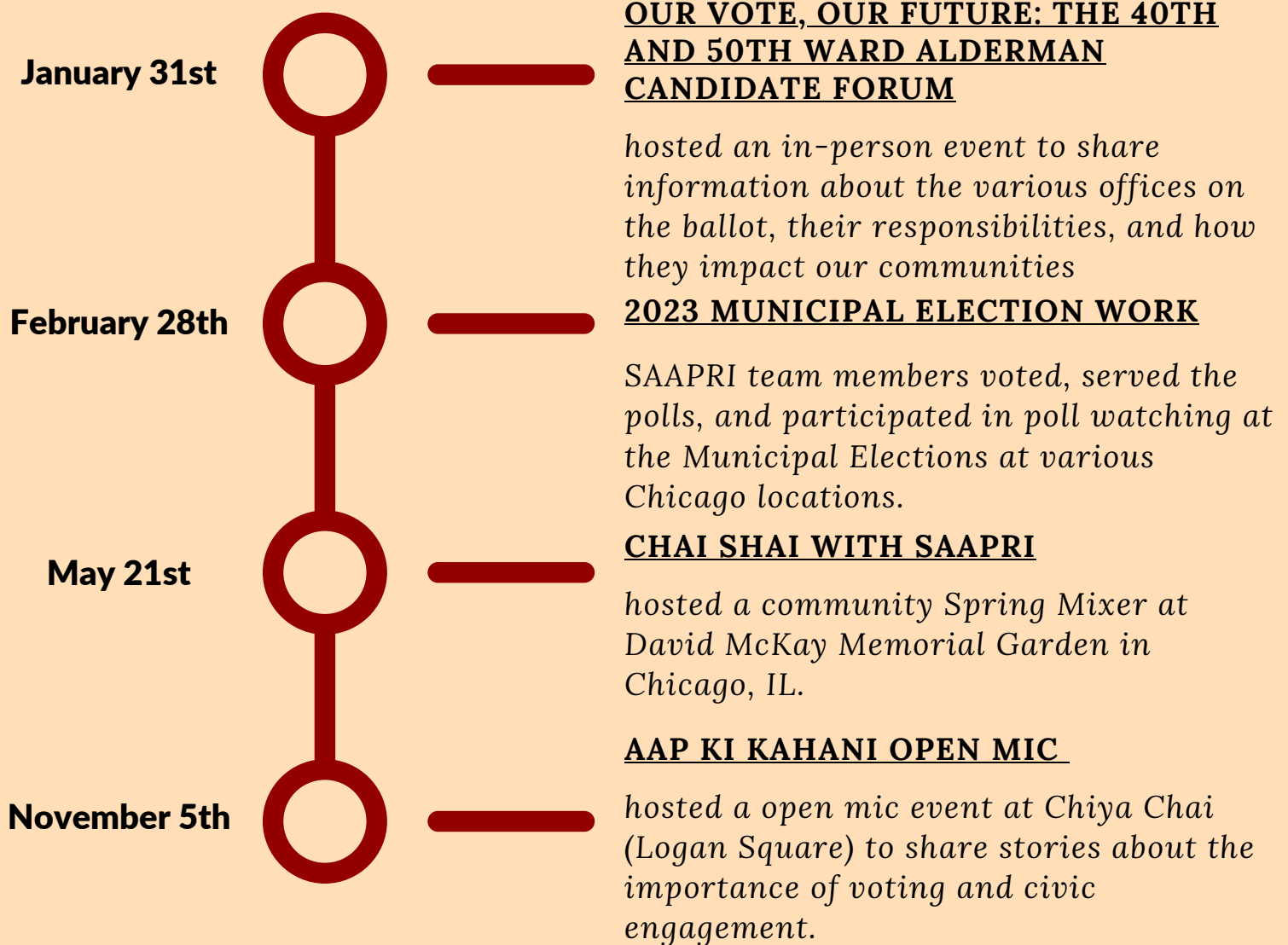
The project focused on three pillars: advocacy, education, and engagement. Notable events included the Aap Ki Kahani Open Mic at Chiya Chai in Logan Square, featuring special guests like State Rep. Kevin Olickal and Sonny Patel. Executive Director Shobhana Verma's advocacy for improved language access for immigrants in Illinois was highlighted in a July 21st WBEZ report. SAAPRI actively engaged in community events like Oakton Community College's Asian Night Market and participated in the 10th Annual Asian American Action Day in Springfield.

Additionally, the team played a crucial role during the 2023 Chicago Municipal Elections by promoting voter turnout and advocating for language minority voting rights as required by Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act to ensure limited english proficient voters aren't excluded from participating in the electoral process. The 2023 Municipal Election turnout, while one of the highest in two decades, underscores the ongoing commitment of SAAPRI to protect the rights of the diverse South Asian American electorate.

2023

# PROGRAMMING OVERVIEW

## DEMOCRACY PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS



### LITCY KURISINKAL

*Community Research Fellow*



“At SAAPRI, I plan to channel my passion for civic engagement by emphasizing South Asian representation and converting aspirations into implementable policies. Excitingly, we've initiated engaging events like "Chai Shai with SAAPRI" and "Aap Ki Kahani (Open Mic)" to foster community connections and celebrate our diversity.”

2023

# PROGRAMMING OVERVIEW



February 6th, 2023: SAAPRI co-sponsored a discussion on Chicago's new District Councils coming to each of our city's 22 police districts. On Election Day on February 28th, voters across the city elected three District Council members in their police districts



September 11th, 2023: SAAPRI joined the Cook County United Against Hate panel in celebration of Racial Equity Week

## ACCESS TO JUSTICE INITIATIVE

Since its founding in 2001, SAAPRI has been deeply involved in combating hate crimes, and we continue this work as a central part of our organization's mission to advance policy in response to the South Asian American and broader community's needs. Our past work includes developing and helping pass anti-hate resolutions in the Illinois House and Chicago City Council as well as successfully advocating to the FBI to track hate crimes against our communities. **SAAPRI's Access to Justice Project** is conducting local and statewide research to prevent hate crimes and discrimination by strengthening interfaith coalitions and passing anti-hate resolutions in Illinois as well as helping advance racial equity through Asian American history education in IL public schools mandated by the TEACH Act.

2023

# PROGRAMMING OVERVIEW

## ACCESS TO JUSTICE HIGHLIGHTS



January 25th



### PAVE-IL STATE LEGISLATURE ASIAN AMERICAN CAUCUS

PAVE met with the IL State Legislature's nine-member Asian American Caucus to discuss language justice and a wide array of immigrant & refugee rights issues

February 6th



### INVESTING IN COMMUNITY SAFETY: CHICAGO'S NEW DISTRICT COUNCILS

co-sponsored a discussion on Chicago's new District Councils and civilian oversight to the Chicago Police Department

September 11th



### HATE CRIME INVESTIGATIONS AND REMEDIES

Executive Director Shobhana Verma attended a Cook County United Against Hate panel where different Cook County gov. depts. shared about their offices' initiatives and collaborative efforts in response to hate crimes

## AAKASH RAY

*Communications and Research Fellow*



My desire to improve access to justice for immigrant and South Asian populations in the Midwest arises from my belief in concrete policy recommendations creating change within our institutions. My goal through our project is to build sustainable relationships across the Midwest to advocate against anti-Asian hate and for the wider improvement of language access resources.

2023

# PROGRAMMING OVERVIEW



July 9th, 2021: State Rep. Jennifer Gong-Gershowitz and State Sen. Ram Villivalam watch Gov. J.B. Pritzker sign the TEAACH Act



SAAPRI Oral History Project: [“Our Immigrant Story: South Asians in Illinois, 1945-1965”](#)

## TEAACH ACT ADVOCACY PROJECT

In an effort to promote South Asian American history, this year SAAPRI received Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) approval to run Professional Development workshops for Illinois teachers. This is a great step forward for us to be able to hold workshops to guide educators who have never studied South Asian American history before. South Asian Americans also share a history with other marginalized groups, and SAAPRI’s Oral History Project will exemplify the similarities and differences between these groups in order to create a curriculum that builds solidarity. This is crucial in order for students to live in a diverse society.

While there is currently no funding for South Asian Americans to create their own curriculum, SAAPRI believes culturally responsive pedagogy is a model in which students bring in their culture into the curriculum. Their cultural identity is not hidden; instead, students are motivated to connect to the content by upholding their identity. In order for teachers to practice cultural competence, they need resources provided by experts. Unfortunately, some educators assume that students know their own history, but this is an assumption.

Although the student body is forever changing, the TEAACH Act only recently passed, and SAAPRI wants to prepare educators to teach in a socially just and equitable manner. Research indicates that more students attend school and get higher grades if they see themselves in the curriculum. In a way, [SAAPRI’s oral history project](#) can be therapeutic for students who have been invisible or dealing with silent trauma for so long.

We see a dire need in creating curriculum around South Asian American historical context, intergenerational comprehension, religions, holidays, festivals, immigration, discoveries, the film industry, political figures, return migration, and contributions to American society. SAAPRI remains committed to making a conscious effort to enhance representation through curriculum thus giving voice to a group that has been ignored, silenced, invisible, and stereotyped in history.

2023

# ELEVATING IMPACT: SAAPRI'S JOURNEY THROUGH 2023



January 19th, 2023: SAAPRI was honored to join partners and partner organizations in sharing the release of Change Insight's inaugural report at a press conference at the Union League Club of Chicago, sharing detailed findings on the well-being of our communities across Chicago as well as action steps.

February 6th, 2023: SAAPRI co-hosted a 2023 Mayoral Candidate Forum at the Chicago History Museum's McCormick Theater.



March 27th, 2023: SAAPRI team members celebrated Women's History Month at Mayor Lori Lightfoot's Women's History Month celebration at the Chicago Cultural Center. The celebration honored the achievements and progress women around us have made.

April 27th, 2023: SAAPRI hosted a Facebook Live discussion on diabetes within the South Asian American community and the challenges members face – in conversation with the Network of National Library of Medicine's diabetes documentary, "Curing Diabetes: the Human Trial".

SAAPRI PRESENTS:

		
<b>MODERATOR</b>	<b>PANELIST</b>	<b>PANELIST</b>
Emmanuel Ravichandar Medical Student, Health Equity Project Intern	Dr. Atif Hassan Interventional Cardiologist, Northshore University Health System	Dr. Mansal Jayaprakash Public Health Practitioner, Community Medicine

**SOUTH ASIAN AMERICAN  
COMMUNITY HEALTH FORUM:**



2023

# ELEVATING IMPACT: SAAPRI'S JOURNEY THROUGH 2023



May 2nd, 2023: SAAPRI team members attended the Asian Pacific American Heritage Month Chicago Community Kick-Off hosted by Mayor Lori Lightfoot's Office. Many friends of Team SAAPRI and community leaders were in attendance.

May 17th, 2023: SAAPRI's Executive Director Shobhana Verma joined WBEZ's Reset panel on "Creating Culturally Competent Care for Asian Americans." The panel discussed the barriers and stigma Asian Americans face when it comes to physical and mental health and how groups like SAAPRI and KAN-WIN are working to increase access to culturally competent care.



June 6-9th, 2023: SAAPRI's Executive Director Shobhana Verma participated in the 2023 Impact Summit & Gala, hosted by the Indian American Impact Project. SAAPRI collaborated with The Legal Defense Fund for the session "Diaspora on the Front Lines: Election Protection Ahead of 2024."

August 31st, 2023: SAAPRI and the offices of State Senator Ram Villivalam and State Rep. Kevin Olickal held a virtual town hall. Representatives from the Illinois Emergency Management Agency shared how to access Funding for Enhanced Security Preparedness through the Illinois Non-Profit Security Grant Program (NSGP-IL).

## Non-Profit Security Grant Program Overview

Bob Evans  
Acting Division Chief  
Preparedness and Grants Administration

August 31, 2023 – Senator  
Villivalam Townhall

ILLINOIS EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY  
AND OFFICE OF HOMELAND SECURITY



2023

# ELEVATING IMPACT: SAAPRI'S JOURNEY THROUGH 2023



**September 10th, 2023:** SAAPRI hosted a yoga session in nature at the Bunker Hill Forest Preserve in Chicago, IL. This event couldn't have been a success without our friends at Friends of the Forest Preserves.

**October 2023:** SAAPRI's Executive Director Shobhana Verma and Maya Bhowmik met with our Asian Engagement & Recruitment Core Central Region grantee partners at Xilin Association. SAAPRI team members were able to discuss outreach and education strategies relevant to the All of Us Research Program.



**October 18th, 2023:** SAAPRI's Executive Director Shobhana Verma participated in a panel discussion at the Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum (APIAHF) VOICES 2023 Conference in Washington, D.C. VOICES is an annual conference that gathers healthcare leaders, key stakeholders, and advocates to explore and discuss health equity and health justice.



**November 5th, 2023:** SAAPRI hosted an open mic event at Chiya Chai (Logan Square) to share stories about the importance of voting and civic engagement. We also highlighted the different ways one can be involved in the upcoming elections.



2023

# ELEVATING IMPACT: SAAPRI'S JOURNEY THROUGH 2023



**December 2023:** The SAAPRI team got together to reflect over our impact in 2023 and discuss our goals for next year. A team picture is always a plus!

## ANAKA SRINIVAS

*Research and Health Equity Intern*



I'm really enthusiastic about SAAPRI because the South Asian diaspora in the U.S. is a group that is extremely underrepresented in medical research.



SAAPRI 

# Next Steps



**Donate**

*Support SAAPRI by making a tax-deductible donation*



**Volunteer**

*Serve your community*



**Subscribe**

*Stay up-to-date with our newsletter*



**Website**

*Learn more about our organization*



**2022 Impact Report**

**2021 Impact Report**