South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT) – Takoma Park, Maryland

Overview
South Asian Americans Leading Together is a national, nonpartisan, non-profit organization that fights for racial justice and advocates for the civil rights of all South Asians in the US.

Mission
Our ultimate vision is dignity and full inclusion for all. We fulfill our mission through: advocating for just and equitable public policies at the national and local level; strengthening grassroots South Asian organizations as catalysts for community change; informing and influencing the national dialogue on trends impacting our communities. – SAALT website

Constituency
• Adults (18-64)
• Asian (including, Southeast Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, Arab, Middle Eastern; but primary group is South Asian)
• LGBTQ
• Immigrant
• Undocumented

Local Conditions & Critical Issues Impacting 0-5 Childhood Health in Takoma Park, Maryland

Access to and quality of public education, school-to-prison pipeline
“The health and wellbeing of schools [is a concern] including food, infrastructure, facility and the relevance of curriculum taught to students of color.” – Lakshmi Sridaran, Director of National Policy and Advocacy

Limited day care options
 “[We hear from folks in the community that child care] is extremely expensive and very difficult to access those services. People tend to have to be on wait lists for a very long time, and generally, those all seem to be privatized and not available through the public school system.”

Barriers to healthcare
“In terms of the working class South Asian community, there are a lot of language access barriers to healthcare services. There’s also just a lack of knowledge I think around public benefits and what folks are eligible for and how to enroll in those programs if needed.”

Immigration
“When we talk about immigration and enforcement and detention and deportation, I think those issues definitely affect kids at any age, if their families are being torn apart. We have a lot of mixed-status families in the South Asian community, where one or two people might be legal permanent residents or citizens and some are on DACA and some are undocumented all together.”

Key Indicators of Childhood Health in Takoma Park, Maryland

16.5% of 2-4 year old WIC participants are obese.¹

Among Maryland high school students, only a quarter (25.8%) ate vegetables 2 or more times per day.²

11.3% of adolescents (12-17) had at least one major depressive episode, 57.6% of whom did not receive treatment for their depression in 2013-2014.³

In Maryland there is a lack of access to dentists for low-income children and a lack of simple, literate, public health messages on oral health.³
Campaigns on immigrant rights, racial profiling and combating hate violence—document incidents of hate violence and law enforcement response

“[Our campaigns address] how the consistent racial profiling—both by law enforcement at the local level but also by federal policies like special registration and surveillance—have an impact on our community over all, and also make us more vulnerable to hate violence, which has been a huge issue especially recently.”

Anti-bullying efforts

“We’re hearing more accounts of incidents of bullying at a very young age happening in schools, even as young as Kindergarten. At one point, SAALT did have some curriculum around bullying, for kids that were in Kindergarten and elementary school. That’s actually something we’re re-visiting again.”

SAALT’s Accomplishments in Wellness & Safety

• Helped to dismantle the regulation that put in place the Special Registration program—over eighty thousand non-immigrant men and boys 16 and older from 25 predominantly Muslim countries were forced to register and report to local immigration offices after September 11th.

“The last week of the Obama administration, we worked with the Department of Homeland Security to dismantle the regulation that put that special registration program in place, kind of anticipating the Muslim registry and the Muslim ban coming out of this [current] administration. That was a huge victory, because people worked really hard to have the program at least stop collecting people’s information. But, then we realized that there was this huge legal framework still in place that could easily be reactivated with any set of countries so, I think dismantling the entire regulation was a big victory for a lot of people.”

• Protecting civil rights of immigrants and asylum seekers

“We’ve had several waves of South Asian immigrants who have crossed the border. They came via plane from India to Brazil and went by foot through South and Central America and eventually Mexico and made it to the US and claimed asylum and then were not granted asylum…certain populations in India are facing political persecution. We had some success in terms of making sure that some of the civil rights violations that they were facing in detention centers were addressed, but a lot of them ended up getting deported back to these really dangerous political conditions so it’s hard to say that that was a victory.”

Community Defined “Best Practices” to Improve Childhood Health

1. Working as part of a national coalition—state and local work informs priorities at the national level

2. Youth leadership development

“We have a youth leadership development institute that we host every summer for three days, for young people who are college age, between 18 and 22. That’s a really important opportunity to cultivate young people and build a pipeline.”

3. Capacity building for local organizations—members of the national coalition identify campaign or project ideas where they need some expansion of staff or resources.

4. Shift the discourse

“We do as much as we can to shift discourse, in terms of the analysis that we put out and the way in which we engage with media. We’re definitely interested in shaping and shifting discourse on our community, and about racial justice in general.”
Allies/Partnerships Working on Children’s Health

- Sikh Coalition - New York, NY [https://www.sikhcoalition.org/](https://www.sikhcoalition.org/)

Website: [http://saalt.org/](http://saalt.org/)
Address: 6930 Carroll Avenue, Suite 506
Takoma Park, MD 20912
Telephone: 301-270-1882
Email: info@saalt.org
Facebook: [https://www.facebook.com/talktosaalt/](https://www.facebook.com/talktosaalt/)
Twitter: @SAALTweets