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community experts who have a common goal to improve this population's health outcomes on a national level," said [Francesca Gany, MD, MS](#), Chief of the [Immigrant Health and Cancer Disparities Service](#) at Memorial Sloan Kettering and Principal Investigator and Co-Director of the South Asian Health Initiative. "The result will be a culturally directed, translational research blueprint with recommendations that can make a measurable difference in community settings."

These experts have been actively involved in a series of ongoing work group meetings to review preliminary epidemiologic and behavioral research evidence on the most prevalent risk factors influencing cancer and cardiovascular health in the South Asian community; identify pressing gaps in the available data; and produce recommendations to address identified issues. This plan of action, or blueprint, will include the development of health-related services, research programs, and policy actions and advocacy.

The initiative, supported by the National Institutes of Health, is culminating in a daylong research conference hosted by Memorial Sloan Kettering on September 20. South Asian health experts from around the world are expected to attend the conference, during which work groups will report on their findings and strategize approaches to facilitate them moving forward. The reports presented at the conference will be submitted to the *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health* next year.

The work groups are focusing on six thematic areas that play a key role in the disproportionate rates of cardiovascular disease and certain cancers seen among South Asians in the United States. The themes include genetics and other underlying biological factors; lifestyle and common cultural behaviors related to diet, exercise, and the use of alternative medicine; inflammation, infection, and emerging research on the effect of human microbiome changes on obesity and diabetes risk; the prevalent use of alternative tobacco products and associated risk of disease; the role of cultural issues, institutional barriers, and healthcare reform on access to care; and stress and mental health issues.

The initiative is also providing opportunities for interactive community input on needed research, service, and policy priorities by engaging with the South Asian community in metropolitan areas with the largest South Asian populations, including New York City, Chicago, Washington DC, Los Angeles, the San Francisco Bay area, Atlanta, New Jersey, and Houston.

There are more than 3.4 million South Asians in the United States, representing seven countries and a wide diversity of languages and religious affiliations in the community. Recognized as the second fastest growing immigrant group in the country, many South Asians face poor healthcare access, which has been attributed to linguistic, cultural, and financial barriers, including a lack of health insurance, inadequate medical interpretation services, and inaccurate perceptions about healthcare.

[See more information about the initiative and the conference agenda.](#)

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