



COUNCIL OF  
AGENCIES SERVING  
SOUTH ASIANS

2025

# ANNUAL GENERAL REPORT



**Annual General Meeting**  
Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA)

Wednesday, October 15th, 2025  
6:00 pm - 7:00 pm

Zoom Meeting

705 Progress Avenue Units 1, 101, 106  
Scarborough, Ontario M1H 2X1  
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# 2025 AGM AGENDA



**6:00 - 6:10 P.M.**

**Welcome and Land  
Acknowledgement**

**6:10 - 6:50 P.M.**

**Business Segment**

**6:50 - 7:00 P.M.**

**Closing Remarks**



# 2024 AGM MEETING MINUTES

**Date:** October 16, 2024

**Location:** Centre of Excellence for South Asians at 705 Progress Avenue, Unit 101, in Scarborough.

**Welcome, and Call to Order:**

Bharat Saini, Chair of the CASSA Board of Directors, called the meeting to order.

**Land Acknowledgement:** Nayani Nandakumar, Manager, Community Development, delivered the Land Acknowledgement before the business segment began.

**Approval of Draft Agenda:**

Nandini Tirumala from South Asian Center of Windsor made the motion to approve the agenda. Atulya Sharman from South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario (SALCO) seconded the motion.

**Approval of 2024 AGM Minutes:**

Zeeshan Sumrani from Skills for Change made the motion to approve and Nandini Tirumala from South Asian Center of Windsor seconded the motion.

**Chair's Report:**

Bharat Saini, the Chair of CASSA Board presented his report. We greatly appreciate all the attendees who are participating in the 2024 AGM. CASSA saw tremendous growth in 2023 and while we are happy with our achievements, we also want to acknowledge the ongoing global conflicts that have affected so many communities all around the world, the recovery effects of the Covid -19 pandemic and the systemic health inequalities that our communities still continue to experience. In 2023, CASSA undertook several new projects to address ongoing challenges faced by the South Asian community in Ontario and this was made possible with the help from by our funders and collaborators who worked alongside us to make these projects successful. Bharat encouraged everyone to read the AGM booklet which contains the summary of these projects to understand the impact our work is making in the South Asian communities.

**Executive Director Report:**

Samya Hasan presented the Executive Director's report and highlighted the achievements in 2023-24. Samya mentioned that we continued the implementation of our 2022-26 plan. We changed our purpose and by laws and officially became a charitable organization in the best interest of our community. We also got a new office space in Scarborough and were able to develop a hub of services for South Asian Communities in the Greater Toronto Area and the launch of the Centre of Excellence for South Asians. CASSA was also represented internationally at the United Nations Human Rights

Council's fourth Universal Periodic Review in Switzerland where we shared concerns and recommendations regarding human rights in Canada. Another big achievement was that CASSA was able to acquire the Anchor agency status with United Way which has helped us build capacity of our organization. We also successfully organized the annual Social Justice summit and the South Asian Heritage Month event with very high attendance. CASSA also made its presence felt in other parts of Canada by opening satellite offices in Edmonton, Alberta and Surrey, British Columbia to work with local South Asian communities there and provide them support. Samya concluded the report by expressing gratitude to all of the funders, partners, friends, and members for their ongoing trust, collaboration and support.

#### **Auditor's Report:**

Zeeshan Sumrani, Treasurer of CASSA, summarized the Auditor's report mentioning that the financial statements are presented fairly as remarked by Rashidi LLP. The motion to approve the 2023 audited statements was made by Harpreet Dhaliwal of Punjabi Community Health Services (PCHS). It was seconded by Hemant Bhadana of SALCO. The motion to reappoint Rashidi LLP as the auditor was moved by Atulya Sharman of SALCO and seconded by Nandini Tirumala of South Asian Centre of Windsor.

#### **Board Member Nomination:**

The 2024-25 slate is as under:

Bharat Saini: Chair

Tanzina Islam: Secretary

Zeeshan Sumrani: Treasurer

Jessica Singh: Member

Thanuya Mohanathan: Member

Ayesha Chughtai: Member

Samir Parmar: Member

Jessica Devi Chandrashekar: Member

Bharat acknowledged the work of Leanne Saldanha as the previous Treasurer and complemented Zeeshan for stepping in as the new Treasurer.

The motion to approve the 2024-25 slate as the board of directors was made by Atulya Sharman from SALCO and seconded by Nanadini Tirumala from South Asian Centre of Windsor.

#### **Meeting Adjournment:**

The motion to adjourn the business segment of the meeting was made by Atulya Sharman from SALCO and seconded by Zeeshan Sumrani. The business segment was adjourned.

# MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR OF THE BOARD

Dear friends, members, funders, and partners,

First, a sincere thank you to all of you for your ongoing collaboration, support, and trust. We are deeply appreciative. I would also like to extend a warm welcome to our new friends, members, funders and partners. Many thanks for working alongside us on this important and much-needed journey. There are many exciting projects and initiatives underway, and we look forward to sharing several updates and achievements.

Last year, 2024, was another year filled with significant growth and success for the Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA). However, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the ongoing local, national and international issues and conflicts as well as the negative rhetoric around equity work that is directly impacting communities across Canada and the world. Communities are witnessing and experiencing far too much discrimination and violence. We must remain steadfast in our commitment and actions to protect human rights, advocate for social and racial justice, advance equity, and foster inclusion for all.

CASSA's projects and initiatives continue to address social justice issues experienced by the South Asian communities. The list has grown which directly shows the critical need for this work. I would like to mention the names of the many projects and initiatives: Annual Health Equity Summit, South Asian Heritage Month, Annual Social Justice Summit, Data for Change Project, Racialized Health Working Group Initiative, Taking the Honour Out of 'Honour-Based Violence', Breaking Barriers: Improving Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health Services for South Asian Newcomer Women, The Coalition for Racial Equity in Education Project, and the regional South Asian Social Justice Networks. The CASSA team and partners continue to show their unwavering and sustained courage, commitment and dedication to this timely and pivotal work. The impact of this work is profound. Please do take some time to read through the 2024 and 2025 Project Updates sections where you will find fulsome details, including milestones and outcomes, about each project and initiative. On behalf of CASSA's Board of Directors, thank you to the CASSA team and partners for approaching this work with utmost consideration, determination, empathy, and reciprocity.

Along with the many ongoing and new projects and initiatives at CASSA, we continued the implementation of our 2022-2026 Strategic Plan, made progress towards the necessary policy and governance steps connected to our charitable status, and continued our work on national expansion. Additionally, we continued developing our space in Scarborough, Ontario and launched the Centre of Excellence for South Asians. This has allowed us to develop quite a unique hub of services for South Asian communities in the Greater Toronto Area.

It has definitely been another year highlighted by many achievements for CASSA. Again, our sincere gratitude to all of our funders, partners, friends, and members. Your ongoing support and collaboration help drive strategic and transformational systemic changes. We look forward to another productive and successful year ahead.

In solidarity,

**Bharat Saini**

Chair of the Board, CASSA

# CASSA 2024 PROJECT UPDATES

## 2nd Annual Social Justice Summit

**Project Managers:** Yomna Omar, Samaha Kureshi, and Ridah Asghar

CASSA's 2nd Annual Social Justice Summit was convened in person at the Centennial College Event Centre on Monday, March 4th, 2024, from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM. This year's theme, "Decolonizing Practices and Service Delivery: Agency to Racialized People and Resolute Allyship," addressed critically relevant issues.

The Summit sought to address a range of pressing social justice concerns, including the decolonization of workplaces, access to housing for racialized individuals, combating hate, the politics of allyship, and settler responsibilities.

The event featured six sessions and a "lunch & learn" workshop, highlighted by a distinguished roster of speakers:

1. **Fixing the Broken Rung for Racialized Women:** Amal Masri — CEO, Fix the Broken Rung
2. **Countering Extreme Polarization and Hate:** Mohamed Hashim — Executive Director, Canadian Race Relations Foundation; Peter Flegal — Executive Director, Government of Canada's Federal Anti-Racism Secretariat
3. **Lunch & Learn: Amrit Parhar** — Director of Programs, Institute of Change Leaders
4. **Workplaces for All: Decolonizing Workplaces and Service Provision:** Rayah Ali — Communications Coordinator, Coalition of Innovation Leaders Against Racism (CILAR)
5. **Policing of the Minds, Bodies, and Words!:** Justine Abigail Yu — Founder, Living Hyphen; Lakhdeep Singh — Program Manager, CASSA
6. **Rights to Reality: Racialized People's Access to Housing in Canada:** Sahar Raza — Director of Policy and Communications, National Right to Housing Network
7. **Politics of Allyship: Settler Responsibility and Establishing Relationships Between Indigenous and Settler Communities:** Kelly Brownbill — Educator on Indigenous Issues

The Summit brought together personnel from CASSA's member agencies, various service providers, and unaffiliated individuals. It provided a forum for professionals, community leaders, researchers, academics, students, social service workers, and policymakers to convene, exchange knowledge, critically evaluate concepts, and engage in pivotal discussions on social justice.

# 2024 SOCIAL JUSTICE SUMMIT

**Decolonizing Practices and Service Delivery:** Agency to Racialized People and Resolute Allyship

## WORKSHOPS OFFERED

- Politics of Allyship: Settler Responsibility and Establishing Relationships Between Indigenous and Settler Communities
- Fixing The Broken Rung for Racialized Women
- Policing of the Minds, Bodies, and Words!
- Workplaces for All: Decolonizing Workplaces and Service Provision
- Countering Extreme Polarization and Hate
- Rights to Reality: Racialized People's Access to Housing in Canada
- Telling Stories That Connect to the Heart



Monday, March 4, 2024



9:00 AM - 5:00 PM



**Centennial College  
Event Centre**  
937 Progress Ave,  
Scarborough, ON M1G 3T8

HOSTED BY:



COUNCIL OF  
AGENCIES SERVING  
SOUTH ASIANS

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:



Canadian  
Race Relations  
Foundation



**AMAL MASRI**

CEO, Fix The Broken Rung



**MOHAMMED HASHIM**

Executive Director, Canadian  
Race Relations Foundation



**PETER FLEGEL**

Executive Director, Government  
of Canada's Federal Anti-Racism  
Secretariat



**RAYAH ALI**

Documentary Filmmaker &  
Communications Coordinator,  
Coalition of Innovation leaders  
Against Racism (CILAR)



**LAKHDEEP SINGH**

Program Manager, Council of  
Agencies Serving South Asians  
(CASSA)



**JUSTINE ABIGAIL YU**

Founder, Living Hyphen



**SAHAR RAZA**

Director of Policy and  
Communications, National Right  
to Housing Network



**KELLY BROWNBILL**

Educator on Indigenous Issues



**AMRIT PARHAR**

Director of Programs, Institute  
for Change Leaders



## 2025 South Asian Heritage Month

**Project Managers:** Yomna Omar, Mahdiba Chowdhury, and Ria Arora

**Partner:** United Way Greater Toronto – South Asian Community Advisory Council (UWGT's SACAC)

Every May, CASSA organizes a month-long celebration to honor the rich cultural diversity, history, and heritage of South Asians in Canada. This year's theme, "Celebrating South Asian Business Leaders in Canada," shines a spotlight on diversity in leadership and entrepreneurship. Throughout the month, we showcased inspiring stories of South Asian trailblazers who are shaping various industries across Canada.

The campaign began with the launch of a poster on May 1, featuring distinguished leaders from multiple sectors including food, technology, real estate, finance, and communications:

- **Aman Adatia:** Managing Partner, FARE Group; Co-Founder & CEO, Epok Enterprises
- **Dr. Nabanita Nawar:** Co-Founder & CEO, HDAX
- **Nahid Aziz & Samad Razzak:** Co-Founders & Owners, Maison Chaïshai
- **Prasanna Ranganathan:** Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging (DEIB) Advisor and Consultant; Speaker; Correspondent; Writer; Columnist
- **Saadia Muzaffar:** Founder & President, TechGirls Canada; Co-Founder, Tech Reset Canada
- **Tony Singh:** Founder & President, Fruiticana

# 2024 SOUTH ASIAN HERITAGE MONTH

## CELEBRATING SOUTH ASIAN BUSINESS LEADERS IN CANADA



### TONY SINGH

30 years ago, Tony Singh saw a gap in the Indo-Canadian community in B.C. Leveraging his experience in Montreal's produce industry, he founded Fruiticana in 1994. Today, Fruiticana operates 24 stores across B.C. and Alberta, it's a leader in Indo-Canadian grocery. Singh and the company have won numerous accolades and awards for business excellence over the years. Singh credits success to offering fresh produce and Indian favorites in a welcoming atmosphere.



### NABANITA NAWAR

Nabanita Nawar is the CEO and Co-founder of HDAX Therapeutics. Dr. Nawar led in building HDAX's science during her Medicinal Chemistry PhD at UofT. Forbes 30 Under 30 for Toronto in 2023. BIOTECANEXA Next Generation Leadership Awardee 2023. Boasts 10 publications, 2 patents, 20+ awards. HDAX raised >\$1M USD for breakthrough therapies. Also lectures at UofT's Temerty Faculty of Medicine.



### PRASANNA RANGANATHAN

Prasanna Ranganathan, a producer, lawyer, DEIB consultant, and speaker, leads his consultancy. Formerly Head of Diversity at Shopify, he worked with the UN and as a human rights lawyer. Consulting Producer for Born for Business, speaker at TIFF, Guest Lecturer at USC Annenberg, Former CBC Radio columnist, red carpet correspondent, co-author of Made with Prema. Founding board member of Disability Screen Office.



### AMAN ADATIA

Aman Adatia passionately redefines real estate's future, focusing on people, inclusivity, affordability, and climate resilience. He sees neighborhoods as hubs for shared growth, viewing the housing revolution as a moral imperative for positive, lasting community transformation. A valued member of multiple boards, he tirelessly works towards a better Canada, especially in Calgary.



### NAHID AZIZ & SAMAD RAZZAK

Nahid Aziz and Samad Razzak, Co-founders of Maison Chaïshai in downtown Montreal, aim to create a cultural hub for the South Asian community. They serve fusion cuisine alongside authentic chais and street food. Nahid advocates for women in business and South Asian women's rights. Samad, previously in textiles, shares music at Chaïshai and volunteers with The Citizens Foundation.



### SAADIA MUZAFFAR

Saadia Muzaffar, tech entrepreneur and advocate, founded TGC, advancing a STEM economy for women. Co-founder of Tech Reset Canada, featured in Canada 150 Women and Toronto Museum's 2023 exhibit. Board member of Women's Shelters Canada and UofT's CARE-AI. Canadian delegate to UN's 67th Commission on the Status of Women. WCT's Woman Of The Year 2024 for Leadership Excellence.

Official 2024 South Asian Heritage Month Poster by the Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA).

This initiative is part of CASSA's ongoing efforts to recognize and celebrate South Asian-Canadian trailblazers. This year, we aim to celebrate diversity in leadership and entrepreneurship in Ontario, Quebec, Alberta and BC, spanning across various sectors like food, restaurants, technology, real estate, finance, and communications!

**CASSA**  
www.cassa.ca

The celebration culminated on May 29 with a panel discussion event, organized in partnership with UWGT's SACAC. The event featured a rich agenda, starting with an art exhibition by Asim Hussain (@studentasim), showcasing "First Contact," which explores the Partition of India. This was followed by captivating performances: Aakhya Singh, a celebrated Hindustani classical vocalist; Fahrina Kazi Junaid, presenting a classical South Indian dance; Tai Salih, offering a powerful spoken word piece on ancestral migration and sacrifices; and Ahkenam Arts, showcasing a powerful Tamil Indigenous Parai drum performance.

The highlight of the event was an engaging panel discussion featuring five distinguished individuals, accompanied by a live painting session by Khaula Siddique, a self-taught local artist of South Asian descent. The five speakers were:

- **Aman Adatia:** Managing Partner, FARE Group; Co-Founder & CEO, Epok Enterprises
- **Prasanna Ranganathan:** DEIB Advisor and Consultant; Speaker; Correspondent; Writer; Columnist
- **Saadia Muzaffar:** Founder & President, TechGirls Canada; Co-Founder, Tech Reset Canada
- **Puja Aggarwa:** Founder, KAPS Realty Group
- **Esa Para Esananda:** Real Estate Realtor; Community Activist/Volunteer

This event was a fitting conclusion to a month dedicated to celebrating the achievements and contributions of South Asian business leaders in Canada. We are proud to honour these trailblazers who continue to inspire and shape the future of our diverse community.

## 2024 South Asian Heritage Month Celebrating South Asian Business Leaders in Canada



**Aman Adatia**  
Managing Partner of FARE  
Group & Co-Founder + CEO  
of Epok Enterprises



**Saadia Muzaffar**  
Founder & President of  
TechGirls Canada & Co-  
Founder of Tech Reset Canada



**Prasanna Ranganathan**  
DEIB Advisor & Consultant,  
Speaker, Writer



**Puja Aggarwal**  
Founder & CEO of KAPS  
Realty Group



**Lubiana Fidaali**  
Director at Deloitte



**Esa Para Esnanda**  
Real Estate Broker



**Tai Salih**  
Founder of the Red Ma'at  
Collective & Red Ma'at Healing  
Center



**Kaula Siddique**  
Community Artist



**Ahkenam Arts**  
Tamil Indigenous  
Drumming & Dancing  
Group



**@StudentAsim**  
Multidisciplinary Artist



**Kazi Fahrina Junaid**  
Classical Dance Performer,  
Yoga Instructor



**Aakhya Singh**  
Classical Vocalist



## The Coalition for Racial Equity in Education Project

**Project Manager:** Samaha Kureshi

**Interns:** Ozair Asmal, Aeshah Doorani, Ameen Chaudhry, Hiba Syed, Humza Qureshi, Noorah Umar, Nurefsan Yigit, Nusaybah Akbar, Ruqayya Mulla, Sarah Popal, and Zahra Ali

### Partners:

- Urban Alliance on Race Relations (UARR)
- Tamil Canadian Centre for Civic Action (TCCCA)
- Chinese Canadian National Council – Toronto Chapter (CCNC-TO)
- Ontario Alliance for Black School Educators (ONABSE)
- National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM)

In this project, Muslim-identifying high school students and their parents are equipped with advocacy skills to actively participate in school board decision-making. By building community capacity and pursuing systemic policy changes, the overarching goal is to address and counter racism and Islamophobia within Ontario's education system.

This year, our focus was on two school boards: the York Region District School Board (YRDSB) and the Durham District School Board (DDSB). While we were unable to connect with YRDSB trustees for formal discussions, dedicated YRDSB student volunteers shared valuable first-hand experiences, shedding light on how their schools have—or have not—addressed key issues.

In 2023, many Muslim students were significantly impacted by the events of October 7th. Both students and parents reported heightened experiences of Islamophobia during this period. Among the school boards we approached, DDSB was the only one to respond, sharing that they are developing an Anti-Islamophobia Strategy and inviting CASSA and NCCM to collaborate on its creation.

Throughout 2024, we held in-person and virtual consultations with parents, youth, and educators in the Durham region, gathering their perspectives and lived experiences as Muslims within the school board. These consultations will conclude in October, after which we will begin drafting the strategy, with the goal of releasing it in early 2025.

In 2025, the final year of the project, we plan to engage with four additional school boards: Halton District School Board, Upper Grand District School Board, Waterloo Region District School Board, and Ottawa-Carleton District School Board. We aim to secure active partnerships with at least one of these boards to continue advancing this work.

## AFFIRMING MUSLIM IDENTITIES WITHIN DDSB

**Date:** Wednesday October 2, 2024

**Time:** 9:30am - 2:00pm (Door opens at 9:00 am)

**Location:** Maxwell Heights Secondary School

- 1100 Coldstream Dr, Oshawa, ON L1K 0N1

**For:** DDSB secondary students.



## 13th Annual Health Equity Summit

**Project Manager:** Mahdiba Chowdhury

**Interns:** Mayeesha Helali, Bengisu Onkal, Deepak Thapa, and Karishma Patel

**Volunteer:** Juwairia Razvi

### Partners:

- Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC)
- United Way Greater Toronto – South Asian Community Advisory Council (UWGT's SACAC)
- Roots Community Services (RootsCS)
- Hispanic Development Council (HDC)
- Chinese Canadian National Council – Toronto Chapter (CCNC-TO)
- Canadian Arab Institute (CAI)
- Black Health Alliance (BHA)
- Computek College
- LAMP Community Health Centre

The 13th Annual Health Equity Summit, titled "United for Health Equity: Collaborative Strategies for Racialized Communities in Ontario," was a two-day event held in collaboration with the PHAC, UWGT's SACAC, Racialized Health Working Group (RHWG), Computek College, and LAMP Community Health Centre. The event reached full capacity, with 105 attendees each day, totalling 210 participants.

### Event Details:

- **Day 1:** Wednesday, November 20, 2024, 9:30 AM – 3:00 PM
  - Residence & Conference Centre, (80 Cooperage St, Toronto, ON M5A 0J3)
- **Day 2:** Tuesday, November 26, 2024, 9:30 AM – 3:00 PM
  - Riverstone Community Centre (195 Don Minaker Dr, Brampton, ON L6P 2V7)

The summit highlighted the RHWG initiative, a collaborative effort involving CASSA, RootsCS, HDC, CCNC-TO, CAI, and BHA. The event presented key findings from surveys, consultations, and focus groups, showcasing the healthcare experiences of Black-African-Caribbean (BAC), South Asian, East Asian, Middle Eastern-North African (MENA), and LatinX Hispanic communities. The discussions focused on access to healthcare, quality of care, and systemic barriers such as racism, cultural competency gaps, and socio-economic disparities.

Over the two days, participants engaged in keynote speeches, plenary discussions, and breakout sessions to collaborate on actionable strategies for addressing health inequities, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. The breakout sessions focused on the unique healthcare challenges faced by various racialized communities, including South Asian, LatinX Hispanic, MENA, BAC, Indigenous, and East & Southeast Asian groups. Each session averaged 35 participants and facilitated in-depth discussions on advancing health equity and overcoming barriers.

To read full proceedings report, including details of the sessions and speakers, please visit [www.cassa.ca/annual-health-equity-summit/](http://www.cassa.ca/annual-health-equity-summit/)

# 13<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL HEALTH EQUITY SUMMIT

## UNITING FOR HEALTH EQUITY: COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIES FOR RACIALIZED COMMUNITIES IN ONTARIO

The Annual Health Equity Summit, hosted by CASSA, is dedicated to addressing health disparities that disproportionately affect marginalized communities, with a particular focus on South Asian and other racialized groups.

This year's Summit will be two days, it will center on the Racialized Health Working Group initiative, a collaborative effort between CASSA, Roots Community Services, Black Health Alliance, Hispanic Development Council, Chinese Canadian National Council-Toronto Chapter, and the Canadian Arab Institute. Together, these organizations will highlight the importance of community-led advocacy in driving targeted health equity strategies across Ontario.



Wednesday, November 20, 2024



9:30 AM - 3:00 PM



Residence & Conference Centre 80  
Cooperage St, Toronto, ON M5A 0J3

### HOSTED BY:



### IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:



Public Health  
Agency of Canada



United Way  
Greater Toronto



RACIALIZED HEALTH  
WORKING GROUP



COMPUTEK  
COLLEGE  
BUSINESS • HEALTH CARE • TECHNOLOGY



MC



### FARHEEN KHAN

*Chair, South Asian Advisory  
Council*  
United Way Greater Toronto



### SOPHIA IKURA

*Founder & Executive Director*  
Health Commons Solutions



### MAHDIBA CHOWDHURY

*Project Manager, Health  
Promotion & Equity*  
CASSA



### JAMAUL TAYLOR

*Community Development  
Officer*  
Roots Community Services



### DAVID SANCHEZ VILLA

*Researcher*  
Hispanic Development Council



### NOAH (YINUO) WANG

*Community Organizer*  
Chinese Canadian National  
Council Toronto Chapter



### NOURA HAMADE

*Director of Research and Policy*  
The Canadian Arab Institute



### DR. MANDANA VAHABI

*Professor & Research Chair*  
University of Toronto



### MARIANGELA CASTRO-ARTEAGA

*MD, MSc*  
University of Toronto



### DR. AREEJ AL-HAMAD

*Assistant Professor*  
Toronto Metropolitan  
University

# 13<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL HEALTH EQUITY SUMMIT

## UNITING FOR HEALTH EQUITY: COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIES FOR RACIALIZED COMMUNITIES IN ONTARIO

The Annual Health Equity Summit, hosted by CASSA, is dedicated to addressing health disparities that disproportionately affect marginalized communities, with a particular focus on South Asian and other racialized groups.

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Tuesday, November 26, 2024



9:30 AM - 3:00 PM



**Riverstone Community Centre**  
195 Don Minaker Dr, Brampton, ON  
L6P 2V7

### HOSTED BY:



### IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:



Public Health  
Agency of Canada



United Way  
Greater Toronto



RACIALIZED HEALTH  
WORKING GROUP



COMPUTEK  
COLLEGE  
BUSINESS • HEALTH CARE • TECHNOLOGY



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### JAMAUL TAYLOR

Community Development Officer  
Roots Community Services



### DR. ROBERTA TIMOTHY

Assistant Professor, Black  
Health Lead, & Program  
Director  
University of Toronto



### HEBA QAZILBASH

Healthcare Relations Officer  
National Council of Canadian  
Muslims (NCCM)



### DR. SUZANNE F. JACKSON

Associate Professor & Interim  
Program Director MPH SBHS  
University of Toronto



### ANGELA J. CARTER

Advisor, Strategic Initiatives  
Roots Community Services



### DR. JOSEPHINE PUI- HING WONG

Professor & Research Chair  
Toronto Metropolitan University



### DR. AKWATU KHENTI

Director, Community  
Resources Section, SDFA  
City of Toronto



### ASHLEY MORRISON

Indigenous Cultural Safety  
Program Coordinator  
Indigenous Primary Health Care  
Council

## New Horizons For Seniors Program

**Project Lead:** Kazi Fahrina Junaid

**Volunteer:** Parneet Kaur

The New Horizons for Seniors Program (NHSP) is a federal grants and contributions initiative that funds projects empowering seniors to engage in their communities and improve their overall health and well-being. This funded research project marks an important step toward addressing the systemic barriers that prevent seniors—particularly those aged 55 to 70—from accessing essential government assistance programs in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

The project's primary objective is to identify the challenges South Asian seniors and older adults face when accessing and navigating government assistance programs, to develop strategies for eliminating these barriers, and to provide policymakers with actionable insights. The findings will help inform the creation of more effective and culturally sensitive policies that better serve South Asian seniors as well as other diverse populations.

The project unfolded in four phases: literature review, data collection, report writing and analysis, and dissemination. In the literature review phase, CASSA conducted secondary research on Ontario's older adult population, with a specific focus on South Asian communities. For data collection, a mixed-methods approach was used, combining surveys, focus group discussions, and expert interviews. The report-writing phase involved a detailed analysis of this data to identify gaps in benefit accessibility for South Asian older adults.

Findings—including identified barriers and recommendations for improving access—will be shared widely to ensure they reach South Asian seniors and the organizations that serve them. Feedback from participants has already informed practical recommendations aimed at enhancing access to financial, social, and healthcare assistance programs. The final report will be distributed to government agencies, policymakers, community organizations, and other key stakeholders to support informed policy and program development.

To ensure broad reach, project findings will also be communicated through social media using engaging graphics, and informational flyers will be translated into Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, Bengali, Punjabi, and English. These materials will be distributed in grocery stores and religious institutions to directly reach the target community. Through these efforts, we expect to reach over 1,000 seniors and directly benefit more than 500 individuals in the GTA.





## Taking the Honour Out of ‘Honour-Based Violence’

**Project Manager:** Mahdiba Chowdhury

### Partners:

- United Way Greater Toronto – South Asian Community Advisory Council (SACAC)
- Women’s Mosque of Canada
- Leading Social Justice Collective (LSJC)

This project is rooted in our commitment to improving the health and well-being of South Asian women impacted by ‘honour-based violence’ (HBV) in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and across Canada.

Guided by the World Health Organization’s holistic definition of [women’s health](#), we address the interconnected physical, sexual, mental, and emotional needs of South Asian women. However, systemic barriers—such as cultural stigma, language obstacles, and limited access to culturally safe services—often hinder their ability to seek help, intensifying the impacts of HBV and allowing violence to manifest in multiple areas of life.

Our mission is to eliminate systemic barriers faced by South Asian women experiencing Honour-Based Violence by conducting rigorous research, engaging survivors and experts in meaningful consultation, developing culturally tailored training and resources, and raising public awareness—ultimately fostering safer, healthier communities empowered to respond effectively to HBV.

Through this project, we aim to:

1. **Conduct a Scoping Review:** Carry out a comprehensive review of HBV across Canada and internationally to guide consultations and inform training module development. This includes assessing HBV prevalence, identifying current partners and service agencies, evaluating existing intervention strategies, and pinpointing gaps that need innovative solutions.
2. **Facilitate Consultation with Survivors and Subject Matter Experts:** Engage survivors of HBV and diverse range of subject matter experts—including health service providers, researchers, community advocates, and leaders. These conversations explore their understanding of HBV, assess current intervention strategies, and evaluate the availability of health, mental health, and practical support services. The insights gathered provide a nuanced understanding of community needs and experiences that directly inform the final report.
3. **Release Comprehensive Report:** Present findings from the scoping review and consultations, capturing both survivor and subject matter experts perspectives. The report will evaluate providers’ knowledge, responsiveness, and safety planning, while ensuring survivors’ voices are central. Actionable recommendations will guide improved support and intervention strategies. An abridged public version will be released to raise awareness while avoiding the vilification of communities.
4. **Develop HBV Training Module:** Build on and adapt previous training developed through the Women’s Mosque of Canada, tailored for both urban and rural South Asian communities. The module will include a ‘train-the-trainer’ approach and be piloted with government officials, community agencies, and law enforcement personnel, ensuring it is culturally relevant and practically applicable.
5. **Launch Social Media Campaign:** Deliver a targeted, multilingual campaign to raise awareness of HBV, reduce stigma, share resources, and connect South Asian women with culturally safe supports.

## Racialized Health Working Group Initiative

**Project Manager:** Mahdiba Chowdhury

**Intern:** Mayeesha Helali

**Volunteer:** Juwairia Razvi

### Partners:

- Roots Community Services (RootsCS)
- Hispanic Development Council (HDC)
- Chinese Canadian National Council – Toronto Chapter (CCNC-TO)
- Canadian Arab Institute (CAI)
- Black Health Alliance (BHA)

Racialized populations in Ontario are among the fastest-growing demographic groups, yet they continue to face significant health inequities that strain the province's health and social services. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these challenges, underscoring the urgent need for systemic reforms to dismantle longstanding barriers within Ontario's healthcare system.

The Racialized Health Working Group (RHWG), funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada, is a coalition committed to driving transformative change in healthcare. Formed in 2019, the group initially brought together seven core partners: CASSA, Sickie Cell Awareness Group of Ontario, RootsCS, BHA, Punjabi Community Health Services, CCNC-TO, and the HDC. The original proposal included the creation of an Office of Racialized Health within Ontario's Ministry of Health to monitor health outcomes, foster partnerships, and ensure the delivery of culturally competent services.

In response to the evolving needs highlighted by the pandemic, RHWG revised its focus to prioritize racialized communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. Six core partners—CASSA, RootsCS, HDC, CCNC-TO, CAI, and BHA—collaborated on this project, each dedicated to advocating for systemic change.

As part of this initiative, RHWG conducted a mixed-methods study involving five key racialized populations in Ontario: South Asian, Black-African-Caribbean (BAC), Latinx Hispanic, Middle Eastern & North African (MENA), and East Asian communities. The study explored barriers to healthcare access and experiences of discrimination among these groups, producing data-driven, community-informed recommendations to guide effective policy reforms and advance equitable health outcomes for all Ontarians.

The specific objectives of this research were as follows:

1. **Assessed the Impact of COVID-19 on Health Disparities:** Evaluated how the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing health disparities within racialized communities and examined how these disparities evolved since the pandemic's onset. This included a closer look at the differential impact of the pandemic on various racialized groups and factors contributing to disproportionate outcomes.

2. **Analyzed Systemic Barriers to Healthcare Access:** Identified and assessed systemic barriers that affected healthcare access for racialized populations, including issues related to cultural competency, service availability, experiences of discrimination within healthcare settings, and the long-term consequences of the pandemic on accessibility.
3. **Examined the Impact of Social Determinants of Health:** Explored how social determinants such as employment, housing, and education contributed to health disparities, particularly in the context of the pandemic, and assessed how these factors evolved and their ongoing impact on health outcomes for racialized communities.
4. **Investigated the Need for Race-Based Disaggregated Data:** Advocated for the systematic collection and use of race-based, disaggregated data in healthcare, recognizing its importance for identifying health disparities and informing policies that address the unique needs of racialized populations.
5. **Engaged Racialized Communities in Healthcare Policy Development:** Involved racialized communities in the research through interviews, surveys, and focus groups, ensuring their perspectives were integral to the development of health equity strategies. This prioritized inclusion of community-driven insights to inform policy decisions and improve healthcare outcomes.
6. **Raised Awareness and Advocated for Change:** Increased awareness among healthcare providers, policymakers, and the public about persistent health disparities faced by racialized communities and the need for targeted health equity initiatives. This included advocacy for changes in healthcare delivery, policy reforms, and inclusion of health equity in medical education and practice.
7. **Provided Actionable Recommendations for Policy Reform:** Delivered evidence-based recommendations based on the research findings to inform policy reforms aimed at addressing ongoing health disparities. These recommendations were directed at Ontario's Ministry of Health and other key stakeholders to support the creation of a more equitable healthcare system.

The full research report is scheduled for release in early 2025.



# RACIALIZED HEALTH WORKING GROUP



## Alberta South Asian Social Justice Network

**Project Manager:** Amber Qureshi and Harnoor Kochar

**Volunteer:** Mariam Dar

Over the past 18 months, CASSA has been actively engaging with potential project partners, collaborators, and community members to better understand the needs of non-profit organizations and South Asian communities in Alberta. The primary aim of this initiative is to explore the expansion of CASSA's work into the province.

The initial phase focused on initiating dialogue with various nonprofit organizations and grassroots groups serving South Asian communities. These consultations aimed to explore the multifaceted landscape of South Asian-focused nonprofits and understand the unique challenges faced by these organizations and the communities they support.

In June 2024, CASSA conducted a series of in-person roundtables in Alberta to gain deeper insights into the needs and barriers faced by South Asian communities in the province. The findings from these discussions were compiled into a report highlighting the perspectives of stakeholders serving South Asians in Alberta. By meeting directly with key stakeholders—including representatives from nonprofits, grassroots groups, and community leaders—we explored region-specific issues relevant to the South Asian diaspora.

As we move forward, we are addressing gaps in our consultations and reaching out to additional South Asian-serving organizations. Our ultimate goal is to expand the South Asian Social Justice Network into Alberta. Through this network, we aim to foster collective community advocacy, raise awareness, and build capacity to empower South Asian communities across the country—guided by recommendations from local organizations and leaders.

We deeply appreciate the continued engagement and support from South Asian-serving organizations in both Edmonton and Calgary. Their involvement is essential to making a meaningful impact on South Asian communities in Alberta.

To find out more about the Social Justice Networks in British Columbia and Quebec, please take a look at our [National Expansion Report](#).



## Toxic Masculinity and Gender-Based Violence

**Project Manager:** Dinoba Kirupa

**Intern:** Charito Grafilo

**Volunteers:** Rasnat Chowdhury, Shifa Abbas, Nozomi Shirakawa, Manvinder Gill, Tom Robert, Anoushka Anoushka, and Wardah Malik

### Partners:

- South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario (SALCO)
- Punjabi Community Health Services (PCHS)
- South Asian and Tamil Women's Collective (SATWC)
- Nisa Homes
- Bangladesh Centre & Community Services (BCCS)
- Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention (ASAAP)

In 2022, CASSA was funded by United Way Greater Toronto to undertake a community-based research project. The study sought to understand toxic masculinity within the South Asian community and its impact on gender-based violence (GBV) in Canada. It was designed to examine healthy and unhealthy established gender norms in the community, identify factors that cause toxic masculinity, and develop culturally responsive intervention methods to combat it.

Toxic masculinity is a pervasive social construct affecting individuals across all genders and is linked to increased risks of GBV within families and intimate relationships. Building on this understanding, CASSA's previous GBV study revealed that GBV is a "silent pandemic" within the South Asian community in Canada, particularly impacting South Asian women. This new research expands on those findings by examining how toxic masculinity contributes to the ongoing issue for both women and queer individuals. Because there is limited primary research exploring this relationship within the Canadian South Asian community, this study fills an important gap.

To conduct the study, CASSA partnered with the aforementioned organizations for data collection support. After dedicating many months to obtaining ethics approval from the Community Research Ethics Office (CREO), CASSA was pleased to receive the approval. Following this, CASSA designed and conducted training sessions for all partners to ensure they understood their obligations and the materials distributed.

Partners completed primary data collection using a survey instrument and focus groups, conducted either in person or via Zoom. The study incorporated voices from both GBV survivors and past offenders or individuals currently accused to present a holistic understanding. The summer of 2024 was spent analyzing the collected data by the project team.

The team proceeded to write the final report. Starting in the fall, knowledge mobilization and dissemination began. This included:

1. A symposium in December to launch the report, which featured an informative panel and breakout discussions among attendees.
2. A series of workshops, designed for both the public and service providers/academics to facilitate discussions on toxic and healthy masculinities. These workshops were designed as safe spaces for those who identify as men to engage in important conversations and learn from one another.

For more information, please visit [cassa.ca/gtagbvstudy/](https://cassa.ca/gtagbvstudy/)

## Exploitation of South Asian International Students in Ontario

**Project Lead & Researcher:** Tanzina Tahereen

**Volunteer:** Jerry Kallada

**Partner:** University of Toronto

This project, funded by Mitacs and CASSA, began in May 2023 to investigate the experiences of South Asian international students in Ontario's colleges and universities. It examines the existing policies, structures, and practices related to the internationalization of higher education, assessing whether these processes foster an inclusive academic environment or contribute to exploitation and exclusion.

The research investigates three main questions:

1. In what ways do the internationalization policies and practices in universities and colleges in Ontario respond to the requirements for creating an equitable, inclusive, and diverse educational environment for international students?
2. How do South Asian international students perceive and experience the internationalization policies at their institutions? Which specific policies and practices do these students believe require modification to better meet their needs?
3. How do colleges and universities in Ontario differ in their approaches to internationalization, and how do these differences impact the experiences of international students within these institutions?

This study is particularly significant because Ontario hosts the largest number of international students in Canada, and South Asians—who represent a wide range of linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds—make up the largest share of this population. Despite this, there is a paucity of research exploring the experiences of South Asian students in Canadian universities and colleges. While there are some studies focusing on Asian students in Canadian institutions (Housmand et al., 2014), and a few specifically on Indian international students (Marom, 2022; Sondhi, 2013), the distinct experiences of the broader South Asian student population have not been thoroughly investigated within the Canadian context. South Asian students are not a monolithic group; rather, they exhibit significant diversity in terms of nationality, ethnicity, religion, culture, language, and lifestyle. Understanding these variations is crucial, as their strong national, ethnic, and religious identities influence how they experience the Euro-Canadian academic and cultural environment. Currently, no studies have examined these aspects or assessed the internationalization strategies of universities and colleges in relation to these diverse needs. This research aims to address this gap by investigating the experiences of South Asian students through the lens of their cultural frameworks.

This study employs a community-based participatory research approach, addressing the needs of the South Asian international student community by examining the internationalization of higher education in Canada and the experiences of South Asian international students. The research utilizes a qualitative case study methodology to explore the specific experiences of South Asian international students in Ontario. Data will be primarily collected through informal, semi-structured interviews with these students. To ensure comprehensive data triangulation, the study will also incorporate secondary data and published documents from various government and non-government sources, including policy-making documents and reports. Additionally, the research includes a bibliographical component, reviewing scholarly articles and existing research on the internationalization of higher education in North America.

The research is conducted in three phases:

1. **Bibliographical Research and Ethics Approval:** In the initial phase, a bibliographical review was completed, and ethics approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Board at the University of Toronto.
2. **Participant Recruitment and Data Collection:** The current phase focuses on data analysis and report writing, while recruitment of international students for surveys and interviews continues. To date, 22 participants have been recruited and completed the survey. The project aims to recruit a total of 30 participants by December 2025, representing students from various colleges and universities across Ontario.
3. **Community Engagement and Awareness:** CASSA actively raises awareness within the South Asian community and the broader Canadian public. Activities include sharing news and blog posts on social media, collaborating with partner organizations, and producing outreach initiatives. Notably, CASSA launched the short film *Listen*, which highlights the experiences of female international students in Canada, and has organized multiple panel discussions and awareness campaigns targeting this population.



# CASSA 2025 PROJECT UPDATES

## **14th Annual Health Equity Summit**

**Project Manager:** Mahdiba Chowdhury

**Volunteer:** Juwairia Razvi

The Annual Health Equity Summit is a key platform dedicated to addressing health disparities that disproportionately affect marginalized communities, with a particular focus on South Asian and other racialized groups. It serves as a collaborative space where community members, healthcare professionals, policymakers, researchers, and advocates come together to share knowledge, highlight systemic barriers, and develop actionable, culturally-responsive strategies to promote equitable health outcomes.

We are pleased to announce that the 14th Annual Health Equity Summit is titled *“Equity in Focus: Sexual and Reproductive Health for South Asian Newcomer Women.”* The Summit will be a virtual event via Zoom on Tuesday, November 18, 2025 from 10:00 AM – 2:00 PM.

This year, the Summit will explore the social, cultural, and systemic factors shaping sexual and reproductive health (SRH) outcomes for newcomer women, with a focus on addressing barriers to access, culturally responsive care, and stigma. Bringing together policymakers, healthcare providers, researchers, and community leaders, the event will combine keynote presentations and policy-focused discussions with service-oriented breakout sessions. These sessions will provide practical strategies for improving maternal and perinatal care, gynecological care, and sexual health education, leaving them with actionable insights to ensure that South Asian newcomer women receive culturally sensitive, timely, and comprehensive support throughout the critical stages of their reproductive health journey.

### **Proposed Agenda:**

- 10:00 – 10:10 AM: Welcome & Opening Remarks
- 10:10 – 10:55 AM: Keynote Presentation
- 10:55 – 11:55 AM: Panel Discussion
- 11:55 – 12:25 PM: Lunch Break
- 12:25 – 1:25 PM: Breakout Sessions (3 concurrent)
- 1:25 – 1:45 PM: Group Report-Back
- 1:45 – 2:00 PM: Closing Remarks & Next Steps

We look forward to strong participation as we continue to advance health equity within marginalized communities.



## 2025 South Asian Heritage Month

**Project Manager:** Yomna Omar

Every May, CASSA proudly celebrates South Asian Heritage Month (SAHM), a month-long tribute to the rich cultural diversity, history, and heritage of South Asians in Canada. This year's theme, "Celebrating Migrant and Refugee Justice Champions," is especially timely, as support for migrant and refugee communities is more critical than ever across the West, particularly in North America.

The campaign kicked off in the first week of May with a series of dedicated posts, each spotlighting remarkable South Asian Canadians who tirelessly advocate for migrant and refugee justice—both professionally and personally. Their work spans activism, legal support, community organizing, and more, illustrating the diverse ways South Asians contribute to social justice.

The celebration culminated on May 19th with the unveiling of CASSA's 2025 SAHM poster, featuring six inspiring champions:

- **Harsha Walia:** Author and Community Organizer
- **Shalini Konanur:** Executive Director and Senior Lawyer, South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario (SALCO)
- **Syed Hussan:** Executive Director, Migrant Workers Alliance for Change
- **Chris Ramsaroop:** Organizer, Justicia for Migrant Workers; Assistant Professor, University of Toronto; Co-Director, Migrant Farm Worker Legal Clinic
- **Prasanna Balasundaram:** Advocate and Special Advocate
- **Naujawan Support Network (NSN):** Immigrant Worker and International Student Collective, Brampton

We are proud to honor these champions who continue to uplift, support, and shape the future of our vibrant community and beyond. Their dedication inspires us all to work towards a more just and equitable society.

# 2025 SOUTH ASIAN HERITAGE MONTH

## CELEBRATING MIGRANT AND REFUGEE JUSTICE CHAMPIONS



### HARSHA WALIA

Harsha Walia is the award-winning author of *Border and Rule: Global Migration, Capitalism, and the Rise of Racist Nationalism* (2021) and *Undoing Border Imperialism* (2013). She co-authored *Never Home: Legislating Discrimination in Canadian Immigration and Red Women Rising: Indigenous Women Survivors in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside*. A trained lawyer and community organizer, she has built migrant justice movements for two decades.



### SHALINI KONANUR

Shalini Konanur is the Executive Director and Senior Lawyer at South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario (SALCO), where she has spent 25 years advocating for migrants and refugees. She provides legal representation in immigration, gender-based violence, and human rights, and leads national and international advocacy, including at the UN. Shalini champions law reform and access to justice, and has received numerous awards for her work.



### CHRIS RAMSAROOP

Chris Ramsaroop is completing his PhD at OISE, University of Toronto, focusing on migrant farm worker resistance in Canada. He is an organizer with Justicia for Migrant Workers, Assistant Professor at UoT, and Co-Director of the Migrant Farm Worker Legal Clinic at the University of Windsor. Chris has written extensively on migrant labor, contributed to numerous media outlets, and is involved in various advocacy groups, including the Asian Canadian Labour Alliance.



### SYED HUSSAN

Syed Hussan is the Executive Director of the Migrant Workers Alliance for Change and a member of the Migrant Rights Network Secretariat. The Migrant Workers Alliance for Change is Canada's largest membership-based, migrant-led organization bringing together international students, farmworkers, fishery workers, domestic workers and undocumented people to fight for their rights.



### PRASANNA BALASUNDARAM

Prasanna Balasundaram advocates for marginalized communities, including refugees, immigrants, women facing gender-based persecution, and LGBTQIA2S+ individuals. He specializes in immigration and refugee litigation, constitutional challenges, and national security matters. As a Special Advocate, Prasanna protects individuals' interests in confidential proceedings and drives policy reforms through research and community leadership.



### NAUJAWAN SUPPORT NETWORK (NSN)

NSN, based in Brampton, is an organization of immigrant workers and international students formed in June 2021. Through collective direct action, including protests and campaigns to stop deportations, NSN confronts exploitation by employers, landlords, colleges, immigration agents, and governments. Their efforts empower non-unionized immigrant workers to organize and secure their rights.

Official 2025 South Asian Heritage Month Poster by the Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA).

This initiative is part of CASSA's ongoing work to recognize and appreciate South Asian leaders. This year's leaders are champions of migrant and refugee justice, leading with compassion and courage in both their professional and personal lives. Through advocacy, outreach, education, and frontline support, they are shaping a more inclusive and just society for all.

**CASSA**  
www.cassa.ca

### 3rd Annual Social Justice Summit

**Project Managers:** Yomna Omar, Samaha Kureshi, and Nayani Nandakumar

CASSA's 3rd Annual Social Justice Summit convened in person at the Centennial College Event Centre on Monday, February 24th, 2025, from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM. This year's powerful theme, "Solidarity over Saviorism: Feminism Centering Racialized and Indigenous Women," addressed urgent and complex issues facing marginalized communities today, emphasizing the need to shift narratives, build genuine alliances, and amplify the voices of racialized and Indigenous women in feminist movements.

The Summit was designed to tackle a wide range of pressing social justice topics, including the decolonization of feminist narratives that often center whiteness and Western perspectives, the role of allyship in times of political unrest, and the importance of bridging generational and international perspectives within feminist activism. A central focus was on the resilience and strength of Black, Brown, and Indigenous women, who continue to lead and inspire movements for equity despite systemic barriers.

Over the course of the day, participants engaged in four deeply insightful sessions and two panel discussions, all led by a distinguished roster of speakers whose expertise and lived experiences enriched the conversations:

1. **Taking the Honour Out of 'Honour-Based Violence':** Farheen Khan — Muslim Chaplain, Trent University; Author; Former Television Host, The Azeeza Show
2. **Unlearning Harm: Understanding Toxic Masculinity Within the South Asian Community [Panel]:** Dinoba Kirupa — GBV Project Manager, CASSA; Baldev Mutta — Founder and Former CEO, Punjabi Community Health Services; Jeff Perera — Community Organizer and Social Justice Advocate; Sharifa Patel — Postdoctoral Fellow, Institute of Islamic Studies' Structural Islamophobia Research Lab, University of Toronto
3. **Bridging Generational and International Perspectives in Feminist Activism:** Ketty Nivyabandi — Secretary General, Amnesty International Canada
4. **Decolonizing Feminist Narratives and Challenging the Limits of White and Western Feminism:** Dr. Wafaa Hasan — Assistant Professor, Women and Gender Studies Institute, University of Toronto
5. **Allyship in the Face of Political Unrest:** Riley Yesno — Scholar, Writer, and Commentator; Anishinaabe
6. **Her Experience: Challenges of Female South Asian Students [Panel]:** Tanzina Tahereen — Post-Doctoral Researcher, CASSA; Jobanjeet Kaur — Member, Naujawan Support Network; Prabhjot Kaur — Program Manager, Laadliyan

The Summit gathered a diverse audience, including personnel from CASSA's member agencies, social service providers, community leaders, researchers, academics, students, and policymakers. This inclusive environment fostered dynamic exchanges of knowledge, critical reflection, and collaborative strategizing. Attendees engaged deeply with the themes, raising challenging questions and sharing practical solutions to advance social justice for racialized and Indigenous women.



COUNCIL OF  
AGENCIES SERVING  
SOUTH ASIANS

# 3<sup>RD</sup> ANNUAL SOCIAL JUSTICE SUMMIT

## SOLIDARITY OVER SAVIORISM: FEMINISM CENTERING RACIALIZED AND INDIGENOUS WOMEN

**Date:** February 24, 2025

**Time:** 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM

**Location:** Centennial College Progress Campus  
Event Centre: 937 Progress Ave. Scarborough,  
ON M1G 3T8

### MASTER OF CEREMONY



#### FRANCE STOHNER

Mental Health Counsellor &  
Community organizer

### TAKING THE HONOUR OUT OF 'HONOUR- BASED VIOLENCE'



#### FARHEEN KHAN

Chair, South Asian Advisory Council  
United Way Greater Toronto

### HER EXPERIENCE: CHALLENGES OF FEMALE SOUTH ASIAN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS



#### JOBANJEET KAUR

Member & Advocate  
Naujwaan Support Network



#### PRABHJOT KAUR

Program Manager  
Laadliyan



#### MODERATOR

#### TANZINA TAHEREEN

Post-Doctoral Researcher  
CASSA

KEYNOTE ADDRESS:  
BRIDGING GENERATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL  
PERSPECTIVES IN FEMINIST ACTIVISM



#### KETTY NIVYABANDI

Secretary General  
Amnesty International Canada

### DECOLONIZING FEMINIST NARRATIVES AND CHALLENGING THE LIMITS OF WHITE AND WESTERN FEMINISM



#### DR. WAFAA HASAN

Assistant Professor  
University of Toronto

### ALLYSHIP IN THE FACE OF POLITICAL UNREST



#### RILEY YESNO

Indigenous Scholar, Writer, and  
Commentator

### UNLEARNING HARM: UNDERSTANDING TOXIC MASCULINITY WITHIN SOUTH ASIAN COMMUNITIES



#### BALDEV MUTTA

Founder & Former CEO  
Punjabi Community Health Services



#### JEFF PERERA

Speaker and Writer



#### SHARIFA PATEL

Post-Doctoral Fellow  
University of Toronto



#### MODERATOR

#### DINOBA KIRUPA

GBV Project Manager  
CASSA



## Data for Change Project

**Project Manager:** Ridah Asghar [Past: Nayani Nandakumar]

**Project Coordinator:** Qurat Al Ain

**Intern:** Parnika Saxena



### Partners:

- Services & Housing In the Province (SHIP)
- LogicalOutcomes (LO)
- Findhelp| 211

In partnership with SHIP, LO, and Findhelp | 211, CASSA is co-delivering the Data for Change project which aims to support community agencies in Durham, Toronto, York, and Peel Region in collecting and using equitable socio-demographic data. The project focuses on testing the collection of Social Identity Data (SID) — including service users' race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability status, language, and other characteristics — to help agencies better understand the communities they serve and improve outcomes for equity-deserving populations.

The objectives of this project are being implemented in four stages through targeted workshops and Community of Practice (CoP) sessions. Hosted by CASSA, the CoP sessions provide a collaborative space for organizations to share experiences, discuss challenges, and engage in focused conversations on key learnings from the workshops. These sessions help participants strengthen their skills in using data to inform programs, policies, and services, while fostering collaboration and building capacity across the sector. A comprehensive report will be released following the conclusion of the series, summarizing the findings and promoting the approach and tools for wider adaptation across the community social services sector.

The project's activities are organized into four stages, outlined below:

### • PLAN AND BUILD

- **Workshop #1: Organizational Readiness** — Presented by SHIP on April 28, 2025, this session introduced the foundations of data equity, explored why “data for equity” matters, and included an organizational readiness assessment to help participants evaluate their current practices, identify gaps, and plan for equitable organizational approaches.
- **Workshop #2: Ready, Set, Dataset! Planning for Data Equity** — Presented by LO on May 21, 2025, this session guided participants through planning and implementing data projects with equity at the core, highlighting the importance of SID, and outlining key steps for building ethical, inclusive, and actionable data practice.

- **Workshop #3 (COP): Get Ready, Get Set, Practice Together Data Collection!** — Hosted by CASSA on May 28, 2025, this session focused on planning and implementing SID collection. The session included a panel discussion with Jemal Demeke (Wellesley Institute) and Kosal Ky (Findhelp 211), a presentation of SHIP's Equity Assessment Tool, and updates from LO on their Nonprofit AI Workspace for Ontario.
- **COLLECT & STORE**
  - **Workshop #4: Data Equity – Building Impact** — Presented by SHIP on June 19, 2025, this session explored strategies for collecting and applying inclusive data and implemented a Data Equity Training Program.
  - **Workshop #5: Survey Design for Everyone: Collecting and Managing Participant Data** — Presented by LO on July 17, 2025, this session guided participants in designing equitable surveys, implementing ethical data collection practices, and establishing secure systems that protect privacy and give participants control over their information.
  - **Workshop #6 (COP): From Collection to Care: Practicing Data Equity in Every Step** — Hosted by CASSA on July 31, 2025, this session featured tools, panel discussions, and shared experiences on equity-informed data practices. Highlights included SHIP's Power BI dashboard, LO's socio-demographic measures, and a fireside chat with Maksym Chernysh.
- **ANALYSIS & INTERPRET**
  - **Workshop #7: Trauma Informed Practice** — Presented by SHIP on August 14, 2025
  - **Workshop #8: User-Centered Analysis** — Presented by LO on September 18th, 2025
  - This stage is currently in the planning phase.
- **SHARE & USE**
  - This stage is currently in the planning phase.

Data for Change has also soft launched its website [dataforchange.ca](https://dataforchange.ca), which is a community-built digital platform designed to support data-informed decisions for social impact. The site offers video recordings and resources from past workshops, registration for upcoming sessions, and practical equity tools that can be used to support organizations as they collect their own data.

## Exploitation of South Asian International Students in Ontario

**Project Lead & Researcher:** Tanzina Tahereen

**Volunteer:** Maryam Wartan; Karishma Patel

**Partner:** University of Toronto

This project, funded by Mitacs and CASSA, investigates the experiences of South Asian international students in Ontario's colleges and universities. It examines the policies, structures, and practices related to the internationalization of higher education, evaluating whether these processes foster an inclusive academic environment or contribute to exploitation and exclusion.

Phase one, which began in May 2023, focused on bibliographical research and obtaining ethics approval from the Research Ethics Board at the University of Toronto. Phase two of the project is divided into three key components: participant recruitment and data collection, data analysis and report writing, and ongoing community outreach and awareness.

1. **Participant Recruitment and Data Collection (July 2024 – June 2025):** The project focused on recruiting participants and collecting data through surveys and interviews. While the target was to interview 30 South Asian international students, 22 participants had completed interviews by July 2025. CASSA played a pivotal role in raising awareness, both within the South Asian community and among the broader Canadian public. Their efforts included sharing news articles and blog posts via social media and the CASSA website, collaborating with partner organizations, and launching targeted outreach initiatives. A notable milestone during this phase was the release of the short film *Listen* in June 2024, highlighting the experiences of female international students in Canada. CASSA also hosted multiple panel discussions and awareness campaigns, while the researcher actively participated in external panels to share insights gathered from the interviews.
2. **Data Analysis and Report Writing (July 2025 – Ongoing):** The collected data, including 22 completed surveys, is being analyzed, and comprehensive reports are being prepared. The researcher is concurrently working on academic papers based on the findings and developing additional resources to support community awareness.
3. **Community Outreach and Awareness:** Community engagement remains a central component throughout this phase. Efforts continue to ensure that the voices of South Asian international students are amplified and that their experiences inform broader conversations around equity, inclusion, and support in Canadian academic and social contexts.

## Racialized Health Working Group Initiative

**Project Manager:** Mahdiba Chowdhury

**Intern:** Mayeesha Helali

**Volunteer:** Juwairia Razvi

### Partners:

- Roots Community Services (RootsCS)
- Hispanic Development Council (HDC)
- Chinese Canadian National Council – Toronto Chapter (CCNC-TO)
- Canadian Arab Institute (CAI)
- Black Health Alliance (BHA)

Racialized populations in Ontario continue to face significant health inequities, which the COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted and exacerbated. The Racialized Health Working Group (RHWG), funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada, remains committed to addressing these disparities and advancing systemic reforms to build a more equitable healthcare system.

In 2025, RHWG completed all phases of its research examining barriers to healthcare access and systemic inequities affecting five key racialized populations in Ontario: South Asian, Black-African-Caribbean, Latinx Hispanic, Middle Eastern & North African, and East Asian communities. The research involved multiple completed phases:

- **Conduct a Scoping Review:** Carried out a comprehensive review of existing race-based data from Ontario's public health units, government publications, academic literature, and reports from health and social service agencies. This included examining health outcomes, vaccination statistics, and healthcare access pre, during, and post-pandemic to identify systemic inequities and gaps in service for racialized populations.
- **Conduct Community Surveys:** Distributed structured surveys to individuals from racialized communities to assess their healthcare experiences, including barriers, perceived discrimination, and overall satisfaction. Surveys collected key demographic data—such as age, gender, ethnicity, language, income, and immigration status—and were designed to be accessible across languages, literacy levels, and cultural contexts.
- **Facilitate Community Focus Group Discussions:** Organized focus group discussion with members of racialized communities to facilitate open dialogue about shared healthcare experiences, challenges, and collectively identify potential solutions. Focus groups were conducted in multiple languages, including Arabic, Hindi, Urdu, Spanish, and Chinese, to ensure inclusivity.
- **Consult with Subject Matter Experts:** Conducted semi-structured interviews with healthcare providers, researchers, policy experts, and community leaders. These interviews explored systemic barriers, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and opportunities for healthcare reform, providing in-depth insights to complement community perspectives.

- **Present Preliminary Findings:** RHWG shared early insights from the study at CASSA's 13th Annual Health Equity Summit, "United for Health Equity: Collaborative Strategies for Racialized Communities in Ontario," on November 20, 2024. This presentation provided an opportunity to engage community members, service providers, and policymakers in dialogue, gather feedback, and inform the final report.
- **Release Comprehensive Report:** Published a report in April 2025 synthesizing findings from the scoping review, community surveys, community focus group discussions, and subject matter expert interviews. The report highlights systemic barriers, documents lived experiences, and provides actionable recommendations across healthcare systems and policy, community-based interventions, and future research priorities.
- **Launch Social Media Campaign:** Launched a targeted, multilingual campaign in April 2025 to raise awareness of healthcare inequities, highlight key findings from the study, and promote the study's recommendations to relevant stakeholders.

These efforts mark a critical step forward in RHWG's mission to reduce systemic barriers, inform policy reforms, and promote equitable healthcare access for racialized populations in Ontario. To access the full research report, please visit <https://www.cassa.ca/racialized-health-working-group-initiative/>.

# BRIDGING HEALTH DIVIDES

A COLLABORATIVE STUDY ON ADDRESSING HEALTHCARE  
DISPARITIES IN RACIALIZED COMMUNITIES



## Taking the Honour Out of ‘Honour-Based Violence’

**Project Manager:** Mahdiba Chowdhury

### Partners:

- United Way Greater Toronto – South Asian Community Advisory Council (UWGT’s SACAC)
- Women’s Mosque of Canada
- Leading Social Justice Collective (LSJC)

Honour-based violence (HBV), a form of gender-based violence involving social or familial enforcement of ‘honour’ norms, continues to affect the health and well-being of South Asian women in Canada. This study aimed to deepen a survivor-informed understanding of HBV, assess its prevalence and patterns, identify systemic gaps, and develop culturally responsive, equity-focused tools and recommendations to strengthen prevention, intervention, and survivor support.

In 2025, we advanced the project significantly. We completed a comprehensive scoping review of HBV in Canada and internationally, examining prevalence data, mapping service providers, evaluating intervention strategies, and identifying key gaps in prevention and response. Alongside this, we facilitated consultations with survivors, service providers, researchers, advocates, and community leaders to gather first-hand perspectives on the realities of HBV, assess service responsiveness, and explore opportunities for more culturally relevant interventions.

Our preliminary findings were presented at CASSA’s 3rd Annual Social Justice Summit, “Solidarity over Saviorism: Feminism Centering Racialized and Indigenous Women” on February 24, 2025. This platform allowed us to share emerging insights, test our recommendations, and engage in critical dialogue with a diverse audience of community stakeholders.

The summit feedback illuminated two important considerations for our work:

1. **Representation Gaps** – Despite our initial outreach, the voices of LGBTQIA2S+ South Asian individuals were underrepresented in our early consultations.
2. **Language Sensitivity** – Some participants expressed discomfort with the term ‘honour-based violence’, emphasizing the need for a contextual disclaimer to acknowledge its contested nature and potential to stigmatize communities.

In response, we conducted targeted outreach to LGBTQIA2S+ South Asian survivors and professionals, holding dedicated consultations to ensure their experiences were fully integrated into the project’s findings. We also developed a nuanced disclaimer that will accompany all project materials, providing clarity on our use of the term ‘honour-based violence’ and recognizing its limitations.

The HBV training module—adapted from prior work with the Women’s Mosque of Canada and designed with a ‘train-the-trainer’ model—will be released in January 2026. This module will be piloted with government agencies, community organizations, and law enforcement, ensuring relevance for both urban and rural South Asian communities.

Through these steps, we are moving closer to our mission: eliminating systemic barriers, amplifying marginalized voices, and building safer, healthier communities empowered to respond effectively to HBV.



## Breaking Barriers: Improving Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health Services for South Asian Newcomer Women

**Project Manager:** Mahdiba Chowdhury and Samaha Kureshi

**Intern:** Aleena Rakkar

### Partners:

- United Way Greater Toronto
- Newcomer Women's Services Toronto
- South Asian Women's Collective (SAWC)
- Laadliyan

CASSA is leading a three-year community-based research project, funded by United Way Greater Toronto and supported by three community partners. The primary goal is to understand the barriers newcomer South Asian women—particularly refugees and recent immigrants—face in accessing sexual and reproductive health services, with a focus on prenatal and postnatal care.

Findings, informed by the lived experiences of community members and the expertise of professionals, will guide evidence-based recommendations and training for healthcare and service providers, helping to address identified barriers and improve service accessibility and quality.

The project's activities are organized by year, outlined below:

- **Year 1 – Foundations and Preparation**
  - **Research Design and Ethics Approval:** Develop research methodology and tools tailored to the target population, and submit to the Community Ethics Research Office (CREO) to ensure all activities meet ethical standards.
  - **Literature Review:** Conduct a comprehensive review to identify systemic gaps in sexual and reproductive health services for newcomer South Asian women, ensuring subsequent community engagement builds on existing evidence.
- **Year 2 – Community Engagement and Data Collection**
  - **Surveys and Focus Groups:** Engage South Asian women—including immigrants, refugees, and individuals of diverse gender and sexual orientations—to gather lived experiences and identify individual, cultural, and systemic barriers to care.
  - **Subject Matter Expert Consultations:** Consult with academic researchers, healthcare professionals, policymakers, and community leaders to gain insights on service delivery challenges, policy gaps, and opportunities for reform.
  - **Data Analysis and Draft Report:** Analyze findings and prepare a draft recommendations report and training framework that integrates both community perspectives and professional expertise.
- **Year 3 – Advocacy, Training, and Knowledge Sharing**
  - **Policy Engagement:** Share findings and recommendations with relevant stakeholders through conferences and targeted briefings to advocate for systemic change.
  - **Provider Training:** Deliver workshops and webinars for healthcare and social service providers on anti-oppressive, trauma-informed, and culturally safe care practices.
  - **Outreach and Dissemination:** Develop and share accessible, multilingual educational materials through social media, partner organizations, and trusted community networks to reach both service providers and community members.

## The Coalition for Racial Equity in Education Project

**Project Manager:** Samaha Kureshi

**Intern:** Maryam Wartan

### Partners:

- Urban Alliance on Race Relations (UARR)
- Tamil Canadian Centre for Civic Action (TCCCA)
- Chinese Canadian National Council – Toronto Chapter (CCNC-TO)

In this project, Muslim-identifying high school students and their parents were equipped with advocacy skills to actively participate in school board decision-making. By building community capacity and pursuing systemic policy changes, our overarching goal has been to address and counter racism and Islamophobia within Ontario's education system.

In 2024, our work focused on the Durham District School Board (DDSB) and the creation of an anti-Islamophobia strategy. We completed extensive consultations with students, parents, and staff, gaining valuable insight into how Muslim identity is experienced and perceived within DDSB spaces. A major milestone was hosting the first-ever "*Affirming Muslim Identities*" conference, which brought together 21 high schools from the Durham region. This event fostered critical dialogue on how DDSB can better support its Muslim staff, students, and families.

In collaboration with the National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM), the feedback from these consultations helped shape the development of the anti-Islamophobia strategy. By 2025, we consolidated the data collected from students and shared it with NCCM, which led the drafting and implementation process. The DDSB anti-Islamophobia strategy is now in its final editing stages.

In parallel, we began exploring the implementation of an anti-Islamophobia strategy at the provincial level. We were engaging with trustees across Ontario and community members to build support for this initiative. The project concluded in September 2025.

We extend our sincere thanks to everyone who contributed to and participated in this work. We hope this project has helped Muslim students and families feel safe, seen, and heard, and reassured them that they are not alone. We also recognize that this strategy is only the first step and that there remains much more work ahead.



## Alberta South Asian Social Justice Network

**Project Lead:** Amber Qureshi

Over the past two years, CASSA has been leading a national expansion initiative to build a connected and representative network of South Asian organizations across Canada. This work has unfolded through consultations and roundtables in Alberta, British Columbia, and Quebec, bringing together service providers, advocacy groups, academics, and community leaders.

In Alberta, this national vision has been brought to life through the leadership of our local lead, Amber Qureshi, and the active participation of community partners. Efforts have focused on understanding the barriers and opportunities unique to South Asian communities while fostering collaboration among nonprofit organizations, grassroots groups, and community leaders.

With nearly 17 active members, the South Asian Social Justice Network in Alberta has grown into a strong collective driving equity-focused initiatives and community advocacy on issues such as racism in schools and workplaces, barriers to representation in politics and media, and the intersections of race, gender, and religion within the diaspora.

Looking ahead, the third stage of this initiative will focus on strengthening partnerships and building capacity across Alberta. A key upcoming milestone is the Calgary Resource Fair, designed to connect South Asian families with free government programs and culturally grounded supports. Representing nearly every South Asian language group, this event will ensure that diverse voices are recognized and celebrated as we work toward a stronger, more inclusive, and empowered South Asian community across Canada.



## Quebec South Asian Social Justice Network

**Project Lead:** Abdul Majeed

The Quebec South Asian Social Justice Network (SASJN Quebec) officially launched in April 2025 and has since been actively working to build strong relationships with nonprofit organizations and South Asian communities across the province. Our focus is to create a collaborative platform where community voices can shape advocacy efforts, address systemic challenges, and promote equity for South Asians in Quebec.

Since its inception, SASJN Quebec has been engaging with key organizations such as the South Asian Women's Community Center, Kabir Center for Arts & Culture, and the Indian Student Association at Concordia University. Outreach is ongoing with additional organizations to discuss the social justice issues faced by South Asians in Quebec, including discrimination, housing barriers, language access, and economic inequities.

Several organizations have expressed interest in collaborating with SASJN Quebec, including Table de concertation des organismes au service des personnes réfugiées et immigrantes de la région de Québec (TALQ). TALQ's willingness to share its experience and research on language barriers faced by English-speaking communities in Quebec represents a valuable opportunity to strengthen advocacy on this important issue.

Based on consultations and discussions held by SASJN Quebec with various organizations in Quebec in 2024, three priority issues were identified:

1. Anti-Palestinian Racism and Islamophobia
2. Lack of funding for community organizations
3. Language barriers

In the coming months, SASJN Quebec will continue to expand outreach, connect with more community partners, and bring together diverse voices to identify shared priorities. This will culminate in the development of regional policy recommendations to be shared with government officials and relevant institutions. Through these efforts, we aim to contribute to a stronger, more united national network advocating for social justice for South Asian communities across Canada.

We deeply value the contributions of the community leaders, organizations, and volunteers who have already joined this initiative, and we look forward to expanding our reach and impact in the months ahead.



**QUEBEC SOUTH ASIAN  
SOCIAL JUSTICE NETWORK**

## British Columbia South Asian Social Justice Network

**Project Lead:** Noor Fadel

Over the past two years, CASSA has continued to expand its national anti-hate and social justice work, with a strong focus on addressing issues affecting South Asian communities across provinces including British Columbia, Alberta, and Quebec.

As the British Columbia Social Justice Anti-Hate Lead and National Manager for Anti-Hate Initiatives, Noor Fadel has been leading efforts to strengthen partnerships and build a network of support across Canada. In British Columbia, CASSA has collaborated with more than 13 active organizations, including Sher Vancouver, the South Asian Legal Clinic, Mothers Matter, Nisa Homes, and PICS, among many others. This work has centered on issues such as the experiences of international students, the rise of racism and discrimination against marginalized communities, and barriers to accessing essential services.

At the national level, Noor has supported CASSA's anti-hate initiatives through campaigns, events, and community engagement. This includes upgrading the *Eradicate Hate 2.0* app to provide expanded training and resources beyond Ontario, and collaborating with organizations to host workshops and panel discussions on Anti-Palestinian hate, Islamophobia, and the rise of hate incidents targeting international students. Recognizing the additional barriers faced by those navigating language challenges when seeking medical and mental health support, CASSA is also working toward improved access and culturally appropriate resources.

Through this expansion, our goal remains clear: to strengthen community connections, provide meaningful tools and resources, and continue addressing the pressing issues impacting South Asian communities across Canada.



# 2024 AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

**COUNCIL OF AGENCIES SERVING SOUTH ASIANS**

**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**

**DECEMBER 31, 2024**

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# Rashidi LLP

CHARTERED  
PROFESSIONAL  
ACCOUNTANTS

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## INDEPENDENT AUDITORS' REPORT

To the Members of  
Council of Agencies Serving South Asians

### Report on the Audit of the Financial Statements

#### **Opinion**

We have audited the financial statements of Council of Agencies Serving South Asians ("the Organization"), which comprise the statement of financial position as at December 31, 2024, the statement of operations, the statement of changes in net assets, and the statement of cash flows for the year then ended, and notes to the financial statements, including a summary of significant accounting policies.

In our opinion, the accompanying financial statements present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of Council of Agencies Serving South Asians as at December 31, 2024, and the results of its operations and its cash flows for the year then ended in accordance with Canadian accounting standards for not-for-profit organizations.

#### **Basis for Opinion**

We conducted our audit in accordance with Canadian generally accepted auditing standards. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the *Auditors' Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Statements* section of our report. We are independent of the Organization in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of the financial statements in Canada, and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

#### **Responsibilities of Management and Those Charged with Governance for the Financial Statements**

Management is responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of these financial statements in accordance with Canadian accounting standards for not-for-profit organizations, and for such internal control as management determines is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing these financial statements, management is responsible for assessing the Organization's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless management either intends to liquidate the Organization or to cease operations, or has no realistic alternative but to do so.

Those charged with governance are responsible for overseeing the Organization's financial reporting process.



## INDEPENDENT AUDITORS' REPORT (Continued)

### ***Auditors' Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Statements***

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with Canadian generally accepted auditing standards will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

As part of an audit in accordance with Canadian generally accepted auditing standards, we exercise professional judgement and maintain professional skepticism throughout the audit. We also:

- Identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial statements, whether due to fraud or error, design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks, and obtain audit evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control.
- Obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the Organization's internal control.
- Evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates and related disclosures made by management.
- Conclude on the appropriateness of management's use of the going concern basis of accounting and, based on the audit evidence obtained, whether a material uncertainty exists related to events or conditions that may cast significant doubt on the Organization's ability to continue as a going concern. If we conclude that a material uncertainty exists, we are required to draw attention in our auditor's report to the related disclosures in the financial statements or, if such disclosures are inadequate, to modify our opinion. Our conclusions are based on the audit evidence obtained up to the date of our auditor's report. However, future events or conditions may cause the Organization to cease to continue as a going concern.
- Evaluate the overall presentation, structure and content of the financial statements, including the disclosures, and whether the financial statements represent the underlying transactions and events in a manner that achieves fair presentation.

We communicate with those charged with governance regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit and significant audit findings, including any significant deficiencies in internal control that we identify during our audit.

*Rashidi LLP*

Richmond Hill, Ontario  
March 19, 2025

Chartered Professional Accountants  
Licensed Public Accountants

## COUNCIL OF AGENCIES SERVING SOUTH ASIANS

## STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

AS AT DECEMBER 31, 2024


## ASSETS

	<u>2024</u>	<u>2023</u>
<b>Current</b>		
Cash	\$ 149,983	\$ 266,617
Investments (Note 4)	54,691	52,499
Accounts receivable	2,510	2,585
Grants receivable	8,763	26,589
HST recoverable	13,398	12,752
Prepaid expenses	2,392	2,215
	<u>231,737</u>	<u>363,257</u>
<b>Capital assets (Note 3)</b>	<u>953</u>	<u>1,315</u>
	<u><b>\$ 232,690</b></u>	<u><b>\$ 364,572</b></u>

## LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

<b>Current</b>		
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities	\$ 36,490	\$ 21,878
Deferred contributions (Note 5)	69,970	148,076
Deferred revenue	2,150	74,166
	<u>108,610</u>	<u>244,120</u>
<b>Net assets</b>	<u>124,080</u>	<u>120,452</u>
	<u><b>\$ 232,690</b></u>	<u><b>\$ 364,572</b></u>

Approved on behalf of the Board:

  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Director

  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Director

(The accompanying notes are an integral part of these financial statements)

**COUNCIL OF AGENCIES SERVING SOUTH ASIANS**  
**STATEMENT OF CHANGES IN NET ASSETS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2024**

	<u><b>2024</b></u>	<u><b>2023</b></u>
Balance, beginning of year	\$ 120,452	\$ 119,658
Excess of revenue over expenses	3,628	794
Balance, end of year	<u><u><b>\$ 124,080</b></u></u>	<u><u><b>\$ 120,452</b></u></u>

*(The accompanying notes are an integral part of these financial statements)*

**COUNCIL OF AGENCIES SERVING SOUTH ASIANS**

**STATEMENT OF OPERATIONS**

**FOR THE YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2024**

	<b><u>2024</u></b>	<b><u>2023</u></b>
<b>Revenue</b>		
Grants (Note 7)	\$ 752,484	\$ 912,907
Partnerships, expense recoveries and other income	169,917	129,244
Fees for service	29,285	17,175
Membership fees	1,970	2,360
Interest income	2,196	1,898
	<u>955,852</u>	<u>1,063,584</u>
<b>Expenses</b>		
Salaries and benefits (Note 6)	556,385	633,893
Program - project expenses (Note 6)	127,995	268,091
Program - purchased services (Note 6)	131,640	40,168
Office and general (Note 6)	47,552	62,992
Rent and utilities	50,602	36,552
Professional services	7,768	7,515
Insurance	2,856	3,174
Travel and transportation	27,065	9,902
Amortization	361	503
	<u>952,224</u>	<u>1,062,790</u>
<b>Excess of revenue over expenses</b>	<b><u>\$ 3,628</u></b>	<b><u>\$ 794</u></b>

*(The accompanying notes are an integral part of these financial statements)*

## COUNCIL OF AGENCIES SERVING SOUTH ASIANS

## STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS

FOR THE YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2024

	<u>2024</u>	<u>2023</u>
<b>Cash provided by (used in)</b>		
<b>Operating activities</b>		
Excess of revenue over expenses	\$ 3,628	\$ 794
Amortization	361	503
	<u>3,989</u>	<u>1,297</u>
<b>Changes in non-cash working capital items</b>		
Accounts receivable	75	( 188 )
Grants receivable	17,826	( 5,043 )
HST recoverable	( 646 )	( 7,512 )
Prepaid expenses	( 176 )	1,326
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities	14,612	( 17,708 )
Deferred contributions (Note 5)	( 78,106 )	( 123,101 )
Deferred revenue	( 72,016 )	35,707
	<u>( 118,431 )</u>	<u>( 116,519 )</u>
<b>Increase (decrease) in cash during the year</b>	( 114,442 )	( 115,222 )
<b>Cash and cash equivalents, beginning of the year</b>	<u>319,116</u>	<u>434,338</u>
<b>Cash and cash equivalents, end of the year</b>	<u><b>\$ 204,674</b></u>	<u><b>\$ 319,116</b></u>
<b>Cash and cash equivalents represented by:</b>		
Cash	\$ 149,983	\$ 266,617
Investments	54,691	52,499
	<u><b>\$ 204,674</b></u>	<u><b>\$ 319,116</b></u>

*(The accompanying notes are an integral part of these financial statements)*



## COUNCIL OF AGENCIES SERVING SOUTH ASIANS

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

#### FOR THE YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2024

#### INCORPORATION AND PURPOSE OF ORGANIZATION:

The Council of Agencies Serving South Asians ("the Organization") was established to research, identify and analyze the needs of the South Asian communities, to act as a resource centre for government and policy making organizations and to promote understanding of the diverse nature of the said communities.

The Organization incorporated as a not-for-profit organization without share capital in the Province of Ontario on July 29, 1991. The Organization became a registered charity on January 1, 2024 and the charity registration number is 135875599RR0001.

#### 1. SIGNIFICANT ACCOUNTING POLICIES:

These financial statements have been prepared in accordance with Canadian accounting standards for not-for-profit organizations set out in Part III of the CPA Canada Handbook - Accounting. Outlined below are those policies considered particularly significant:

##### a) Revenue recognition

The Organization follows the deferral method of accounting for grants. Grants are recognized as revenue in the same period as the related expenditures. Grants received prior to the year to which they apply are deferred.

Donations and fundraising, and expense recoveries are recorded as revenue when received.

Other revenues such as programming, workshops, interest income, and rentals are recognized as revenue in the period in which they are earned.

##### b) Expense recognition

Expenses are recognized on the accrual basis.

##### c) Financial instruments

The Organization initially records all financial instruments at fair market value, and subsequently records them at amortized cost.

The Organization's financial instruments consist of cash, investments, accounts receivable, accounts payable and accrued liabilities.



## COUNCIL OF AGENCIES SERVING SOUTH ASIANS

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

FOR THE YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2024

#### 1. SIGNIFICANT ACCOUNTING POLICIES: (Continued)

##### d) Use of estimates

The preparation of financial statements in accordance with Canadian accounting standards for not-for-profit organizations requires management to make estimates and assumptions that affect the reported amounts of assets and liabilities and disclosures of contingent liabilities at the date of the financial statements and the reported amounts of revenue and expenditures during the reported period. Significant items subject to such estimates and assumptions include the useful lives of capital assets, and year-end accrued liabilities. Actual results could differ from management's best estimates as additional information becomes available in the future.

##### e) Contributed services

Because of the difficulty of determining the fair value of services provided by volunteers, contributed services are not recognized in these financial statements.

##### f) Income taxes

The organization is a not-for-profit organization under the Income Tax Act (Canada) and, as such, is exempt from income taxes.

##### g) Capital assets

Capital assets are recorded at cost. Amortization is taken annually at rates calculated to write-off the assets over their estimated useful lives as follows:

Furniture and fixtures	20% declining balance
Equipment	20% declining balance
Computer equipment	30% declining balance

A capital asset is tested for impairment whenever events or changes in circumstances indicate that its carrying amount may not be recoverable. An impairment loss is recognized when the carrying amount of the asset exceeds the sum of the undiscounted cash flows resulting from its use and eventual disposition. The impairment loss is measured as the amount by which the carrying amount of the capital assets exceeds its fair value.

## COUNCIL OF AGENCIES SERVING SOUTH ASIANS

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

#### FOR THE YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2024

#### 2. CAPITAL MANAGEMENT AND ECONOMIC DEPENDENCE:

The Organization includes cash, prepaid expenses, accounts payable and accrued liabilities, and net assets in its capital management consideration. The Organization's objectives when managing capital are to safeguard its ability to continue as a going concern and continue to execute its mandate within the restrictions that the organization is not in receipt of core funding.

The Organization monitors these items to assess its ability to fulfil its ongoing financial obligations. The Organization relies primarily on grants, fundraising and self-generated revenues to fund its operations and makes adjustments to its budgeted expenditures in light of changes. The Organization is not subject to externally imposed capital requirements.

The Organization is dependent on grants and self-generated revenues for continued operations.

#### 3. CAPITAL ASSETS:

Capital assets consist of the following:

	<u>2024</u>			<u>2023</u>
	<u>Cost</u>	<u>Accumulated Amortization</u>	<u>Net Book Value</u>	<u>Net Book Value</u>
Office equipment	\$ 15,307	\$ 15,038	\$ 269	\$ 337
Computers	<u>13,800</u>	<u>13,116</u>	<u>684</u>	<u>978</u>
	<u><b>\$ 29,107</b></u>	<u><b>\$ 28,154</b></u>	<u><b>\$ 953</b></u>	<u><b>\$ 1,315</b></u>

#### 4. INVESTMENTS:

Investments consist of a guaranteed investment certificate (GIC) with an annual interest rate of 4.15% (2023 - 3.75%) and a maturity date of January 6, 2025.

**COUNCIL OF AGENCIES SERVING SOUTH ASIANS**

**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**

**FOR THE YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2024**

**5. DEFERRED GRANTS:**

Deferred grants are summarized as follows:

	<u><b>2024</b></u>	<u><b>2023</b></u>
Public Health Agency	\$ 48,584	\$ -
United Way - Gender Based Violence	17,016	14,759
Employment and Social Development Canada	2,851	-
United Way - Community Services Anchor Funding	1,519	-
Canadian Red Cross	-	93,758
Canadian Heritage	-	25,841
United Way - Capacity Building	-	12,497
Urban Alliance of Race Relations	-	1,221
	<u><b>\$ 69,970</b></u>	<u><b>\$ 148,076</b></u>

Continuity of deferred grants for the year is as follows:

Deferred grants, beginning of year	\$ 148,076	\$ 271,177
Add – received/receivable during the year	674,378	789,806
Less - grant revenue recognized in the year	<u>( 752,484 )</u>	<u>( 912,907 )</u>
<b>Deferred grants, end of year</b>	<u><b>\$ 69,970</b></u>	<u><b>\$ 148,076</b></u>

**6. ALLOCATION OF EXPENSES - SALARIES AND BENEFITS:**

Salaries and benefits expenses have been included in program and administration expenses proportionately on the basis of time spent, as follows:

	<u><b>2024</b></u>	<u><b>2023</b></u>
Program - project expenses	\$ 18,700	\$ 45,378
Office and general	11,799	14,002
Program - purchased services	<u>-</u>	<u>1,332</u>
	<u><b>\$ 30,499</b></u>	<u><b>\$ 60,712</b></u>

**COUNCIL OF AGENCIES SERVING SOUTH ASIANS**

**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**

**FOR THE YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2024**

**7. GRANT REVENUE RECOGNIZED IN THE YEAR:**

	<u><b>2024</b></u>	<u><b>2023</b></u>
Public Health Agency of Canada	\$ 199,698	\$ 10,000
Canadian Red Cross	172,721	90,482
City of Toronto	86,921	198,499
United Way - Gender Based Violence	85,295	76,658
United Way - Community Services Sector	73,478	-
Canadian Race Relations Foundation	33,763	64,664
Urban Alliance of Race Relations	30,521	36,339
Canadian Heritage	25,841	34,159
ESDC - New Horizons	15,749	-
United Way - Partnership and Systems Initiatives	15,000	-
United Way - Capacity Building	13,497	151,551
Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism	-	177,968
Canadian Women's Foundation	-	39,606
Minister of Solicitor General	-	28,131
ESDC - Canada Summer Jobs	-	4,850
	<u><b>\$ 752,484</b></u>	<u><b>\$ 912,907</b></u>

**8. FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS:**

The Organization's financial investments are comprised of guaranteed investment certificates (GIC's). The main purpose of these investments is to provide financing for the organization's activities. The Organization has various other financial assets and liabilities such as accounts receivable and accounts payable, which arise directly from operations. The main risks arising from the Organization's financial instruments are interest risk, credit risk and liquidity risk.

**a) Interest Rate Risk**

Interest rate risk is the risk of potential financial loss caused by fluctuations in their fair value of future cash flow of financial instruments due to changes in market interest rates. The Organization is exposed to this risk through its interest bearing investments. The Organization manages this risk through investing in fixed-rate securities of short to medium term maturity and plans to hold the securities to maturity.

**b) Credit Risk**

Credit risk is the potential for financial loss should a counter-party in a transaction fail to meet its obligations. The Organization places its operating and reserve cash and investments with high quality institutions and believes its exposure is not significant.

**COUNCIL OF AGENCIES SERVING SOUTH ASIANS**

**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**

**FOR THE YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2024**

**8. FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS: (Continued)**

**c) Liquidity Risk**

Liquidity risk is the risk that an entity will encounter difficulty in meeting obligations associated with financial liabilities. The Organization manages this risk by preparing and monitoring detailed forecasts of cash flows from operations, anticipating investing and financing activities and holding assets that can be readily converted into cash.

The Organization's financial instruments consist of cash, investments, accounts receivable, accounts payable and accrued liabilities. Unless otherwise noted, it is management's opinion that the organization is not exposed to significant interest, credit or liquidity risks.

The extent of the Organization's exposure to the above risks did not change during 2024.

**9. COMMITMENTS:**

The Organization is committed to a lease for its head office premises at Unit 101 - 705 Progress Avenue located in Toronto, Ontario, which requires the following annual minimum payments:

2024	\$	15,873
2025	\$	15,873
2026	\$	15,873
2027	\$	15,873
2028	\$	5,291

The term of this lease commitment expires on May 31, 2028. In addition to the above minimum lease payments, the Organization is responsible for its portion of occupancy cost and utilities which is estimated at \$33,000 annually.



# CASSA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

## SLATE 2024-2025

### **Bharat Saini – Chair**

Bharat Saini is the inaugural Director of Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) with the Faculty of Arts & Science at the University of Toronto. Bharat is responsible for developing and implementing strategic initiatives aimed at advancing EDI within the learning and working environments across the Faculty of Arts & Science. He provides strategic guidance and advice to the Dean's Executive team on matters of policy interpretation and practice concerning a range of areas, including accessibility, human rights, equity, diversity, inclusion, freedom of speech and freedom of expression.

Bharat has been working in the post-secondary sector for more than 15 years. Prior to joining UofT, he served as the Manager, Human Rights, Equity & Inclusion with the Centre for Human Rights, Equity & Inclusion at Humber College. In this role, he managed the Human Rights Program and provided strategic guidance on Human Rights and EDI related matters. Additionally, he led the College's Employment Equity Program and Co-Chaired the Equity & Inclusion Committee as well as the EDI Taskforce Access & Equity: Employees working group. Bharat continues in the role of Instructor with Humber's Faculty of Business. He has also held roles with Osgoode Professional Development at Osgoode Hall Law School, OCAD University and York University.

Bharat strongly believes in the importance of mentorship along with community work and engagement. For over a decade he had the privilege to serve on the Board of the Canadian Association for the Prevention of Discrimination and Harassment in Higher Education. In addition, since 2020, he has been serving as a Director on CASSA's Board, and during Summer 2022 became the Chair of the Board. Bharat completed his Bachelors of Science Honours, Bachelors of Education and Masters of Education from York University. During his M.Ed., his key areas of focus included human rights, equity and inclusion, competing rights, disability and academic accommodations, policy development, inclusive pedagogy and universal instructional design. He is also an Ontario Certified Teacher. In addition, he has extensive training in Alternative Dispute Resolution as well as workplace investigations focused on human rights and workplace harassment. Bharat is committed to protecting human rights and transformational systemic change to advance anti-racism, equity and inclusion and foster belonging for all.



### **Zeeshan Sumrani – Treasurer**

Zeeshan is an International Development expert with over 20 years' experience in community impact, evaluation, program design and implementation at scale. In his previous role at Skills for Change, Zeeshan worked as the Chief Strategy, Innovation & Growth officer leading work in the key organizational areas of Business Operations, Strategic Planning & Implementation, Organizational Growth and Social Enterprise Development.

Prior to SfC, he worked as the Director of Programs & Operations at The Mississauga Food Bank and led the programs and operations teams that are responsible for client and agency service, capacity building, warehouse and operations aspects of the organization. In his previous roles, he was the Head of Community Impact for United Way India and General Manager - Programs for the Educate Girls Foundation where he designed programs that impacted the lives of over 600,000 children and youth. He was also a part of the team that designed and implemented the World's first Development Impact Bond in education.

He has the experience of working in various non-profit sub-sectors, including education, livelihood support, sports for development and women's empowerment. Zeeshan was also a part of the Skoll and Mastercard Foundation's Emerging Leaders program in 2017. He is also a passionate public speaker who believes in constantly upgrading himself with knowledge and ideas that help the world become a happier place.

### **Tanzina Islam – Secretary**

Tanzina Islam is a public health planner specializing in health promotion strategies within the community health sector. She is currently the Manager of Health Promotion & Community Relations at the East Mississauga Community Health Centre. In her role, she oversees health interventions targeting priority populations, supports strategic planning, and monitors population needs and advocates for the good health of the Mississauga community. She was a former Project Coordinator at CASSA for the CapaCITY Creators Project and is a current member of CASSA's Health Equity Task Force.

Tanzina has worked in the areas of mental health, chronic health, gender-based violence, community engagement, social justice and health equity across institutions such as Humber College, Toronto Public Health, St Michael's Hospital and the Centre for Addiction & Mental Health (CAMH). Tanzina also leads two independent research projects focused on 'understanding honour killing as a form of gender-based violence' and 'identifying risk factors for global sex trafficking'. She is a University of Toronto Alumni and holds a Master of Public Health degree. Her expertise lies in applying evidence-based knowledge when developing, implementing and evaluating health interventions. Central to her focus is integrating equity-focused frameworks when planning health services for marginalized populations. She hopes to be a part of initiatives that empower communities, strengthen community action, and challenge sociopolitical structures that contribute to poor health and health disparities.

### **Jessica Singh – Director**

Jessica is a change agent guided by empathic accuracy; internally driven to work for issues like gender equality, art therapy, access to quality education, and child protection. As a social development professional and research consultant, she offers strategic advice to social enterprises to enable meaningful contribution and provides tools to measure their impact effectively. She works with creativity, consideration and open-mindedness that allows seeing things from unconventional perspectives.

Jessica is a social worker and also holds a specialized degree in evidence-based research from the University of Oxford. She has 12+ years of experience impact assessment, monitoring and evaluation, multi-stakeholder relationships, qualitative research methodologies, strategic partnerships, capacity building and grant-writing both internationally and in Canada. She is currently serving on the board of North York Arts and has had the opportunity to work with organizations like the World Bank, Plan UK, Credit Suisse, GIZ, Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, US Department of State, Centre for Social Innovation, Tedx Toronto and Plan Canada.

### **Thanuya Mohanathas – Director**

Thanuya is a Social Worker who has extensive experience in community and youth development. She attended York University for Human Rights & Equity Studies, Seneca College for Social Service Worker Diploma, and is currently pursuing a degree in Public Administration & Governance at Ryerson University. Thanuya is TESOL certified and teaches ESL. She has learned to combine her roots in Social Work with her passion for music, specifically the piano and teaches a unique curriculum to students through Ruby's School of Music. Thanuya has extensive experience in grant writing, development and facilitation of workshops, community asset building, capacity building, strategic planning, and program evaluation.

Thanuya has shared spaces with vulnerable residents and has sought community partners and stakeholders to take a more collaborative and communal approach in the drafting and implementation of meaningful and impactful programs and services to better suit the needs of the communities they serve. Her desire to improve quality of life and to create better and more meaningful human relations, bring forth a sense of connection and belonging has been the driving force that has propelled her unwavering commitment to social justice and to CASSA.

### **Ayesha Chughtai – Director**

Ayesha Chughtai is a Pakistani-Canadian immigrant living and working in Ottawa. After earning her bachelor's degree from the University of Calgary in Political Science she moved to Ottawa in 2017 to pursue a career with the federal government. She served as a Regional Advisor, and later a Senior Policy Advisor for the Minister of Families, Children, and Social Development working on national housing policy, childcare, and service delivery in Canada. She then moved to the Minister of Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development serving as Director of Operations. In addition to managing a team of Regional Advisors, she worked on broadband policy and the development of new funding programs. Her last role in government was serving as a Regional Advisor to the Prime Minister focusing on the Prairies and North. In this role, she built relationships with provinces and territories, provided strategic advice, and managed the logistics of travel to the region. In July 2022, she left the federal government taking on a new role at Deloitte Canada as a Manager with the Future of Canada Centre (FCC). The FCC is Deloitte's premier thought leadership and public policy hub.

A proud Calgarian who lived her early years in Pickering, Ontario, Ayesha is passionate about the diversity of the South Asian community across the country.

### **Jessica Devi Chandrashekar – Director**

Jessica Devi Chandrashekar works as a Staff Lawyer with the Refugee Law Office where she advocates for immigration detainees. She is also an adjunct instructor at Queen's University and is a research Doctoral student at Osgoode Hall Law School. She completed a B.Sc Honours degree at the University of Toronto, with minors in Women and Gender Studies, as well as South Asian Studies. There she went on to do her Masters in Women and Gender Studies, before pursuing a PhD at York University in Gender, Feminist and Women's Studies. Jessica also completed a Juris Doctor at Osgoode Hall Law School where she focused on immigration, refugee, and administrative law. Her current doctoral work at Osgoode Hall Law School examines the immigration detention regime in Canada. She holds professional memberships with several migrant advocacy organizations including the Canadian Council for Refugees, the Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers, and the Refugee Lawyers Association. Jessica has presented her work at several conferences and workshops, enjoys mentoring and teaching, and is passionate about serving and supporting community organizations.

# STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

## CASSA's Mission:

To facilitate the economic, social, political, and cultural empowerment of South Asians by serving as a resource for information, research, mobilization, coordination, and leadership on social justice issues affecting our communities. Create social change by building alliances and working collaboratively with those who share a vision of empowering all communities to participate in defining Canada's future.

## CASSA's Vision:

We envision and strive for a Canada free of all forms of discrimination in which all communities are free from marginalization and are fully empowered to participate in defining Canada's political, economic, social and cultural future.

## CASSA's Values:

The following values serve as guidelines for our conduct as we implement our mission and work towards our vision:

- **Social Justice:** We are committed to working within a social justice framework, which promotes equity and empowerment for marginalized peoples and communities.
- **Anti-oppression, Anti-racism, Anti-homophobia:** We strive to incorporate anti-oppressive, anti-racist, and anti-homophobic principles and practices in our work.
- **Responsiveness:** We strive to work through a variety of consultative and participatory structures and practices to ensure that our work is grounded in the realities and priorities of our communities.
- **Diversity:** We recognize and respect the diversity among and within South Asian communities and within Canadian society.
- **Collaboration and Solidarity:** We are committed to building alliances in order to work collectively towards common aims.
- **Accountability:** We are committed to maintaining effective governance, measurement and reporting practices.



# STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2026

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*CASSA's 2021-2026 Strategic Plan will allow for a renewed sense of purpose, provide clear and measurable goals, as well as a distinct future-focused strategy and implementation plan to facilitate sustainable organizational growth and development.*

Pillars	Membership Engagement	Growth + Impact	Functional Priorities	Organizational Sustainability
Decision	Cultivate a thriving membership base	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Achieve charitable status</li> <li>2. Expand geographic impact</li> </ol>	Strengthening policy advocacy and research capacity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Diversifying revenue sources and strengthening financial position</li> <li>2. Enhancing talent and development</li> </ol>
Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultivate trust and meaningful relationships.</li> <li>• Expand opportunities for member engagement and capacity building.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research and initiate the process for charity status.</li> <li>• Develop and implement a phased approach for regional and national growth.</li> </ul>	Strengthen collaborative partnerships with equity-focused agencies and allies.	<p>Assess opportunities for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stable, year-over-year funding and</li> <li>• Increase staff complements and professional development</li> </ul>
Activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Membership-informed capacity building opportunities (training, education and professional development)</li> <li>2. Stewardship with membership</li> <li>3. Reciprocal relationship with membership on areas of advocacy.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Explore legal framework, opportunities and risks for charity status.</li> <li>2. Develop the infrastructure to become a charity.</li> <li>3. Cultivate regional and national partners and membership in other jurisdictions within Canada.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Policy Advocacy:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Participate in relevant advocacy tables.</li> <li>b. Foster and expand policy partnerships.</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Research capacity:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Expand research portfolio and strengthen community-based research</li> <li>b. Enhance research infrastructure</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. Design monitoring and evaluation framework for all projects and campaigns</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Recruitment of board members with experience in fundraising, finance, legal and human resources</li> <li>2. Create an organizational financial sustainability plan</li> <li>3. Build capacity to hire and retain permanent staff</li> </ol>

# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2021-2026



## Support Immigration and settlement

Over the next five years, CASSA will commit to the following:

- facilitate processes that aim to build more inclusive and accessible communities in regions where immigrants settle across Canada
- develop tools and resources to support resettlement through community-based research
- advocate on behalf of newcomers collectively to eliminate barriers to decent work
- document and bring awareness to histories of South Asians in Canada
- advocate for elimination of systemic barriers to civic participation of immigrants, and create civic engagement capacity building tools for newcomers and immigrants
- engage newcomers and other South Asian communities in education about the true history of Canada as a settler colonial state and actions towards truth and reconciliation



## Economic Empowerment

Over the next five years, CASSA will commit to the following:

- create awareness about the racialization of poverty and work with networks and coalitions to advocate for systemic changes to alleviate South Asians out of poverty
- advocate for accessible and affordable childcare for low and middle-income South Asians in Canada
- advocate for the right to adequate and safe housing for South Asians and to improve outcomes for those who are unhoused
- support campaigns and movements for workers' rights



## Enhance Health Equity

Over the next five years, CASSA will commit to the following:

- build coalitions with South Asian and other racialized communities focused on health equity to advocate for policies that improve health outcomes
- advocate for the development and implementation of a South Asian Health Strategy for Ontario including culturally and linguistically accessible health services
- support the development of mental health tools, services and resources that are inclusive and tailored to South Asian communities
- advocate for, support, secure, and disseminate health equity focused research initiatives and race-based disaggregated data collection including data on the impact of COVID-19 on South Asian communities
- advocate for rights of South Asian seniors' health and culturally adapted long-term care
- advocate for the rights of South Asians with different abilities and disabilities





## Advance Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression

Over the next five years, CASSA will commit to the following:

- develop and deliver ongoing Anti-racism and Anti-oppression training for CASSA member agencies, partners, groups, government institutions, and private corporations
- create youth leadership training and opportunities grounded in anti-racist and anti-oppressive frameworks
- work with researchers and academics to ensure academic research and community-based research uses anti-oppressive and equity lens and use decolonial practices of consultation and data collection
- advocate for anti-racism, decolonial, and anti-oppressive policies and education at school boards across Canada
- create learning opportunities for South Asian communities on anti-Indigenous, anti-Black, anti-South Asian and anti-Asian racism



## Gender Equity and Empowerment

Over the next five years, CASSA will commit to the following:

- develop and implement race-based data collection based on leading practices in the fields of gender-based violence and intimate partner violence to support evidence-based service delivery
- build awareness about what gender-based violence and intimate partner violence looks in the South Asian communities and advocate for policy and program changes
- partner with organizations and groups to advocate for the rights of gender diverse individuals and communities
- build capacity of South Asian and other racialized women through training, networking, and resource development



## Combat Online Hate, Hate Crimes, and Hate Speech

Over the next five years, CASSA will commit to the following:

- build and sustain collaborations with racialized communities and faith groups to combat hate in all forms
- advocate for legislation to combat the rise of online hate
- work with institutions collecting data to make processes of hate crime reporting accessible and trauma-informed
- build capacity of agencies and groups to combat online hate, hate crimes, and hate speech
- create opportunities for and support interfaith and interracial dialogue

# CASSA STAFF

## 2024-2025

### 2024 Staff

Executive Director – Samya Hasan

Director of Development – Ridah Asghar [On leave]

Director of Operations – Suhail Mubeen [Past]

Manager, Community Development – Nayani Nandakumar

Executive Assistant & Membership Coordinator – Qurat Al Ain

Administrative Assistant & Receptionist – Kazi Fahrina Junaid

Finance Manager – Farhat Hasan

Projects Manager – Yomna Omar

Manager of Partnerships – Ria Arora [Past]

Programs Manager – Lakhdeep Singh Dhaliwal [Past]

Human Resources Generalist – Gurbinder Jaspal Kaur

Communications Coordinator – Samaha Kureshi

IT Specialist – Faizan Zubair

Calgary Lead, South Asian Social Justice Network – Amber Qureshi

Edmonton Lead, South Asian Social Justice Network – Harnoor Kochar

Project Manager, Gender-Based Violence and GTA GBV Study – Dinoba Kirupa

Project Manager, Health Promotion & Equity – Mahdiba Chowdhury

Project Lead, New Horizons for Seniors Program – Kazi Fahrina Junaid

Project Manager, Taking the Honour Out of 'Honour-based Violence' – Mahdiba Chowdhury

Project Manager, Racialized Health Working Group Initiative – Mahdiba Chowdhury

Manager, Anti Hate- Initiative, and BC Outreach Coordinator – Noor Fadel

Project Lead, The International Students Project – Tanzina Tahereen

Project Coordinator, Equity in Education – Samaha Kureshi

Project Associate, GBV Research – Charito Grafil

Co-op Students/Interns – Mayeesha Helali, Ozair Asmal, Aeshah Doorani, Ameen Chaudhry, Hiba Syed, Humza Qureshi, Noorah Umar, Nurefsan Yigit, Nusaybah Akbar, Ruqayya Mulla, Sarah Popal, Zahra Ali, Charito Grafil and Parneet Kaur.

## 2025 Staff

Executive Director – Samya Hasan [Maternity Leave]

Director of Development – Ridah Asghar

Manager, Community Development - Nayani Nandakumar [Past]

Executive Assistant & Membership Coordinator – Qurat Al Ain

Finance Manager -- Farhat Hasan

Projects Manager – Yomna Omar

Human Resources Generalist – Gurbinder Jaspal Kaur

Communications Coordinator – Samaha Kureshi

IT Specialist – Faizan Zubair

Calgary Lead, South Asian Social Justice Network – Amber Qureshi

Edmonton Lead, South Asian Social Justice Network – Harnoor Kochar [Past]

British Columbia Lead, South Asian Social Justice Network – Noor Fadel

Quebec Lead, South Asian Social Justice Network – Abdul Majeed

Project Manager, Gender-Based Violence and GTA GBV Study – Dinoba Kirupa [Past]

Project Manager, Health Promotion & Equity – Mahdiba Chowdhury

Project Manager, Taking the Honour Out of 'Honour-based Violence' – Mahdiba Chowdhury

Project Manager, Racialized Health Working Group Initiative – Mahdiba Chowdhury

Manager, Anti Hate-Initiative – Noor Fadel

Project Lead, The International Students Project – Tanzina Tahereen

Project Coordinator, Equity in Education – Samaha Kureshi

Project Lead, Data For Change – Ridah Asghar

Project Coordinator, Data For Change – Qurat Al Ain

Co-op Students/Interns – Parnika Saxena, Ozair Asmal, Aeshah Doorani, Ameen

Chaudhry, Hiba Syed, Humza Qureshi, Noorah Umar, Nurefsan Yigit, Nusaybah Akbar, Ruqayya Mulla, Sarah Popal, Zahra Ali, Mayeesha Helali, Bengisu Onkal, Deepak Thapa, Karishma Patel, Aleena Rakkar, Maryam Wartan and Charito Grafilo

# CASSA VOLUNTEERS 2024-2025

Juwairia Razvi	Mariam Dar
Parneet Kaur	Charito Grafilo
Maryam Wartan	Wardah Malik
Tom Robert	Nozomi Shirakawa
Manvinder Gill	Rasnat Chowdhury
Shifa Abbas	Anoushka Anoushka
Karishma Patel	

# CASSA ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERS (AGENCIES) 2024-2025

1. Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention (ASAAP)
2. Abhinayakshetra Fine Arts Canada
3. Afghan Women's Organization (AWO)
4. Bangladeshi-Canadian Community Services (BCS)
5. Bangladesh Centre and Community Services (BCCS)
6. Birchmount Bluffs Neighbourhood Centre (BBNC)
7. Breast Cancer Society of Canada (BCSC)
8. Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT)
9. Canadian Council for Muslim Women (CCMW)
10. Canadian Pakistani Support Group Association (CPSG)
11. Canadian Tamil Youth Development Centre (CanTYD)
12. CARE Centre for Internationally Educated Nurses
13. Carefirst Seniors and Community Services Association
14. Centennial College
15. COSTI
16. Committee for Accessible AIDS Treatment (CAAT)
17. Durham Tamil Association
18. Ecovibes
19. Elizabeth Fry Toronto
20. Embrace Agency to End Violence (formerly known as Interim Place)
21. Epilepsy Toronto
22. Evergreen Hospice
23. Family Inter-Generation Link (FIG)
24. Family Service Toronto
25. Findhelp Information Services
26. Family Services York Region (FSYR)
27. Frontline Community Services
28. GTA North West Community Health Services
29. Humber College, Human Rights, Equity & Inclusion
30. Harbhajan Ranauta Legacy Foundation
31. Indo-Canadian Women's Association (ICWA)
32. Job Skills
33. JRS College
34. Labour Education Centre
35. Legal Aid Ontario, (Vanathy Wimalaswaran (SALCO))
36. Markham Arts Council
37. Markham South Asian Seniors Centre

38. [Markham Tamil Organization](#)
39. [Markham Tamil Seniors Association](#)
40. [MCIS Language Solutions](#)
41. [Meadowvale Community Centre](#)
42. [METRAC](#)
43. [Middlefield Seniors Wellness Club](#)
44. [NeighbourLink North York](#)
45. [Newcomer Women's Services](#)
46. [Ontario Caregiver Organization](#)
47. [Ontario Bengali Cultural Society \(OBCS\)](#)
48. [PACE Community](#)
49. [People For Education](#)
50. [Polycultural Immigrant & Community Services](#)
51. [Punjabi Community Health Services \(PCHS\)](#)
52. [Patron Career Staffing Inc.](#)
53. [Reh'ma Community Services](#)
54. [Riverdale Immigrant Women's Centre](#)
55. [SAAAC Autism Centre](#)
56. [Settlement Assistance & Family Support Services \(SAFSS\)](#)
57. [Scarborough Women's Centre](#)
58. [Sandgate Women's Shelter](#)
59. [Scadding Court Community Centre](#)
60. [Scarborough Arts](#)
61. [SEIU Healthcare](#)
62. [Senior Tamils Centre of Ontario](#)
63. [Sherbourne Health](#)
64. [Skills for Change](#)
65. [Social Planning Network of Ontario \(SPNO\)](#)
66. [Social Planning Toronto](#)
67. [Social Services Network](#)
68. [South Asian Heart Health Group \(SAHHG\)](#)
69. [South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario \(SALCO\)](#)
70. [South Asian Network Supporting Awareness & Research \(SANSAR\)](#)
71. [South Asian Visual Arts Centre \(SAVAC\)](#)
72. [South Asian Women's Centre \(SAWC\)](#)
73. [South Riverdale Community Health Centre \(SRCHC\)](#)
74. [Schizophrenia Society of Ontario](#)
75. [South Asian Centre of Windsor](#)
76. [Sindhi Association of North America](#)
77. [South Asian Community Support Canada \(SACSC\)](#)
78. [South Asian Legal History Association](#)
79. [South Asian Health Alliance](#)
80. [South Asian Canadian Access to Justice Association](#)



1. South Asian and Tamil Women's Collective
82. South Asian Cultural Health Association for Youth & Seniors (SACHAYS)
83. Tamil Cultural & Academic Society of Durham
84. TESOC - Multicultural Settlement & Community Services
85. Thamil Poonka School & Daycare Centre
86. The Neighbourhood Organization (TNO)
87. Times Change Women's Employment Service
88. Toronto Centre of Learning & Development
89. Tamil Canadian Centre for Civic Action (TCCCA)
90. Tropicana Community Services Organization
91. TranslateKnowledge
92. Unifor National
93. University of Toronto - Comparative Education Service
94. Vasantham - Tamil Wellness Centre
95. Villa Karuna Home For Seniors
96. We Can Win
97. Women's Health in Women's Hands
98. Women for Women Support Services
99. Workers' Action Centre

# CASSA ASSOCIATE MEMBERS (INDIVIDUALS) 2024-2025

1. Arull Thesomayanathan
2. Abhilash Jayachandran
3. Anujan Rajah
4. Asim Hussain
5. Arun K Garg (Individual)
6. Dr. Mustahid Husain (Individual)
7. Fatima Khan
8. Farwa Zehra
9. Fareeda Yasmeen
10. Jerry Kallada
11. Khadija Ismail
12. Leah
13. Lubaina Fidaali
14. Mohit Arora
15. Rasnat Chowdhury
16. Russell de Souza
17. Sunila Kalkar
18. Shivangi Sawh
19. Sridevi Veluganti Nagasai
20. Sandeep Kaur Marwaha
21. Shreya Menon
22. Shusmita Sharma-Tiwari
23. Tarak Ahmed
24. Zobia Aamir

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF OUR FUNDERS FOR 2024

We would like to appreciate and acknowledge the vital ongoing support for our activities by:

Canadian Race Relations Foundation  
The Canadian Red Cross Society  
City of Toronto : Community Services Partnership  
Government of Canada: Department of Canadian Heritage  
Government of Canada: Employment and Social Development Canada - New Horizons  
Public Health Agency of Canada  
Toronto Non-Profit Network  
United Way of Greater Toronto  
Urban Alliance of Race Relations

We extend our sincere gratitude to all our community partners, volunteers, and board members for their invaluable support throughout our projects. Their contributions have been essential to the achievements we have made in 2024. Without their dedicated assistance, our accomplishments would not have been possible.

**Thank you all for your dedication and  
for believing in CASSA**

**Thank you for attending  
CASSA's 2025 AGM!**

**We look forward to your continued support, guidance and involvement.**

You or your organization can become a member of CASSA, if you wish to support our mission/mandate. Please visit our website [www.cassa.ca](http://www.cassa.ca) for details on our mission, vision, values and strategic priorities. The members will receive regular updates on various happenings in the social services/social justice field that impact Ontario's South Asian communities.

Joining as a member will also keep you informed about job opportunities, volunteer opportunities and community events. Please visit our website for more information about becoming a member of CASSA and its benefits.

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Tel. No for Members: (647) 932 1001 ext. 114**