

Overview

Founded in the mid-90s, the Arab American Action Network (AAAN) strives to empower community members to make decisions about actions and policies that affect their lives and have access to a range of social, political, cultural and economic opportunities in a context of equity and social justice.

Mission

“As a grassroots nonprofit, our strategies include community organizing, advocacy, education, providing social services, leadership development, cultural outreach and forging productive relationships with other communities. Our vision is for a strong Arab American community whose members have the power to make decisions about actions and policies that affect their lives and have access to a range of social, political, cultural and economic opportunities in a context of equity and social justice.” —AAAN website



Constituency

- Asian & Pacific Islanders
- African Americans
- Latinos
- Arab/Middle Eastern
- South Asian
- All ages

Local Conditions & Critical Issues Impacting 0-5 Childhood Health in Chicago

Chicago Proper

Poor Quality Education in Chicago Public Schools

Which includes concerns about children not getting a “good start” or early childhood education—data from 2014 show that only 45% of eligible 3 to 5 year olds are in early childhood education programs.¹

Poor Quality Childcare

Including care provided by unlicensed professionals.

Gang Violence & Recruitment of Youth

Which is also related to the lack of jobs and opportunities for youth. Children exposed to violence suffer increased risk for depression, anxiety and poor school performance.⁷

Poverty, Displacement & Gentrification

Environmental Racism

Which includes pollution in communities of color.

Limited Access to Public Transportation

In particular for communities of color near “the Loop” (downtown Chicago).

Lack of Access to Healthcare

Lack of Healthy Food Options

Over 100,000 Chicago children live in a “food desert.”²

Chicago Suburbs

Institutional & Interpersonal Racism

Including attacks on Arabs/Muslims.³ There was a rise in anti-Arab, anti-Muslim hate crimes in Chicago since 2014 and the trend continues to this day. The Council on American-Islamic Relations reported 400 hate crimes in Chicago for 2016, and as of February 2017, there had already been 175 reported crimes.⁴

Current Wellness & Safety Efforts

Police Racial Profiling and Accountability

Ongoing youth-led campaign to end racial profiling by city, state, and federal law enforcement agencies, in alliance with Arab and Muslim, Black, and Latino organizations.

Access/Linkages to Health and Social Services

This includes a “Family Literacy Program” for children 0 to 5 and a “Family Empowerment Program” to connect families and children to services and health insurance.

Immigrant Rights Organizing/Advocacy

Member of a broader coalition with Chicago’s Latino communities, collectively fighting for immigrants’ rights (e.g., town hall discussions, direct actions, building a grassroots movement for immigrant protections).

Police Accountability and Community Control

Actively involved with the Chicago Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression (the main Black organization working on the police accountability movement in Chicago).

Key Indicators of Childhood Health in Chicago



only 18.3% of high school students eat the recommended number of fruit and vegetable servings per day.⁵



only 19.6% of high school students meet the recommended youth guidelines of 60 minutes of daily exercise.⁵

16.5%

of kindergarteners are overweight and 20% are obese.⁶

1,109

school-aged youth were shot and 216 were killed in 2010; over one-third of the homicides were gang related.⁷

“A lot of the talk in Palestinian support work is about Black/Palestinian solidarity, and it became a really popular hashtag and all of that...that’s not the same as solidarity from Arabs who live in the hood who are working directly with Black people who live in the hood, shoulder to shoulder, youth exchanges, discussions about racism and you know and all of these contradictions within the two communities. They are working together to fight against police violence and police crimes and police brutality. That’s where the real work is happening.”

– Hatem Abudayyeh, Executive Director

AAAN Accomplishments in Wellness & Safety

• Youth-Led Action Research on Racial Profiling

The Youth Leadership Team (ages 13-19) designed and administered a survey to 400 community members, collecting experiences of racial profiling in the community, published a zine with educational information on racial profiling, delivered a letter to the FBI calling for an end to the use of Suspicious Activity Reports, and organized a direct-action protest in downtown Chicago.⁸

“They had heard all kinds of anecdotal evidence of their families being visited by federal law enforcement, of small businesses and churches and mosques being visited...and they wanted to try and figure out what to do about it. The youth edited [the survey] for our community. Then they are the ones who actually went out to the streets and distributed it. They sat with people and had them fill it out and conducted the interviews and all that sort of thing. It was discussions with [youth] about the [findings] that moved us forward in identifying the demands, identifying the targets, and producing the zine campaign materials and moving forward to where we are right now.” – Hatem Abudayyeh, Executive Director

• Health Care Access

In one year, the social services division connected 3,000 community members to health services, such as healthcare insurance, primary and secondary care physicians, and education and health literacy programs.



Community Defined “Best Practices” to Improve Childhood Health

Youth Led Community Organizing

A core group of committed youth identify, research, advocate for, and win change on critical issues of importance to them and their community.

“The youth are leading [the racial profiling campaign] because they realize that this is what is directly affecting the community as a whole. And if you look at it in that context, and knowing that the community as a whole is being affected... the zero to five year olds, of course, [are] affected directly when the father gets pulled out of the house and gets deported, or the father gets accused of “supported terrorism” [and] has to deal with that legal challenge. So yeah I think on that level that [children ages 0-5] are directly affected as well.” – Hatem Abudayyeh, Executive Director

Youth Leadership Development

Youth leaders are identified to become part of the Youth Leadership Team (YLT) by adult staff and by other YLT youth, who then collaboratively work together to support the leadership skills development among youth members.

Program (formative) Evaluation

Intensive organizational evaluations (e.g., one-on-one interviews, focus groups, surveys, etc.) are conducted with current members to gain feedback to help strengthen/improve the work.

Allies/Partnerships Working on Children’s Health

- Desis Rising Up and Moving – New York, NY <http://www.drumnyc.org/>
- Chicago Alliance Against Racists and Political Repression – Chicago, IL <http://naarpr.org/>
- Social Services Sanad – Chicago, IL <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Social-Services-Sanad/155609947810544>
- Mosque Foundation – Bridgeview, IL <http://mosquefoundation.org/>
- Chicago Islamic Center – Chicago, IL <http://cicmasjed.org/>
- Council on American-Islamic Relations – Washington, D.C. <http://www.cair.com/index.php>



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