

Overview

For 15 years, the Sikh Coalition has defended Sikh civil liberties in the courtroom, classroom, community and halls of Congress. Whether it's working to secure safer schools, prevent hate and discrimination, create equal employment opportunities, or empower local Sikh communities, the Sikh Coalition's goal is working towards a world where Sikhs, and other religious minorities in America, may freely practice their faith without bias and discrimination.

Mission

"Through the community, courtroom, classroom and halls of Congress, we are working towards a world where Sikhs, and other religious minorities in America, may freely practice their faith without bias and discrimination. We strive to do this with integrity (sach) and selflessness (seva) – while knowing that our work can require unrelenting perseverance (sangatsh) on campaigns that can last years. We will always strive to do the right thing, even when it is not easy, clear or quick to reach that conclusion." --The Sikh Coalition Website



Constituency

- Asian (Southeast Asian, Arab or Middle Eastern)
- All ages
- LGBTQ
- Undocumented
- Formerly incarcerated

Local Conditions & Critical Issues Impacting 0-5 Childhood Health in New York City

Hate Crimes & Bullying—Sikhs are 1000 times more likely than other Americans to be the victim of a hate crime; 67% of Sikh youth have experienced bullying and 1 in 10 have dropped out or changed schools because of repeated bullying.^{1,2,3}

"The fear of discrimination [starts quite early]—boys start to wear a head covering probably around the age of 2 or 3, so you know, the fear of them being bullied or them being abused, the teachers not knowing what to do, things like that." – Harjot Kaur, Community Development Manager

Loss of Culture

Including the fact that sense of identity is compounded by socio-economic and structural conditions. Between 2011 and 2015, 543,000 children (30%) in New York City lived in high poverty areas.⁴

"The structure for working families, working parents [means that] kids are often either left alone or left in poor environments...everything gets associated with the lack of [cultural] awareness because once they start to feel uncomfortable in their own skin, they just kind of they're kind of driven towards a number of things. Either isolation or secluding themselves...you see them on their screens all the time or not leaving their house and things like that. There's less physical activity, there's less social skills building, [less] friendships building."

Language Access

A quarter (27%) of Sikh non-citizens require assistance to interact with social services, including hospitals, schools, and government agencies. 28% of Punjabi-speaking homes do not have individuals over 14 years of age that speak English "very well", placing burdens on children for translation services. In 2016, 610,000 children (49%) in New York City spoke a language other than English at home.⁶

"Yeah, for 0-5, the discrimination's a big piece. Language and language access is probably also another issue. For younger kids figuring out what language to teach them first. Making sure they don't lose their roots and that kind of stuff. That all falls into a sense of identity for us."

Key Indicators of Childhood Health in New York City



1 in 5



1 in 10

In 2008, an estimated 475,303 kindergarten students, and 1 in 4 Head Start children, is obese in New York City.⁸ Lifetime asthma prevalence was 16.1% and current prevalence was 10.8%. Both higher than the 38 participating states.⁷

Elementary school-aged boys in NYC suffer from a high level of exposure to violence including gunshots (87%), arrests (85%), and killings (25%).⁹ Children in NYC suffer from a serious emotional disturbance. Anxiety and depression often are caused by exposure to violence.¹⁰

Current Wellness & Safety Efforts

“Know Your Rights” Campaigns—Community engagement workshops about hate crimes, workplace discrimination, gurdwara (Sikh place of worship) security and safety.

Tracking Hate Crimes—Advocates for more accurate and complete collection of hate crimes data (successfully got the FBI to add a box for hate crimes against Sikhs).

Safe Schools

“[We work with] parents about how to engage with their kids’ schools, especially if they don’t know English very well, who they can go to, all that kind of stuff. Safe schools is a big goal of ours for the past 6 years... [and includes] doing staff professional development within schools around the awareness of Sikhi and cultural practices and all that or working with the kids themselves, working within classrooms, having kids go out to do presentations with other kids, bringing parents in, handling bullying situations.”

Youth Workshops—peer-to-peer confidence building workshops with middle and high school youth

Sikh Coalition’s Accomplishments in Wellness & Safety

- **“Act to Change” Campaign**—youth empowerment, anti-bullying task force in partnership with the White House Initiative on Asian American and Pacific Islanders.
- **Nirbhau Nirvair (“Without fear, without hate”)**—Confidence building and identity forming campaign centered in the arts; includes poetry and art workshops, open mic nights, and the publication of a coffee table book of stories, paintings, drawings, and photographs from kids ages 5-25 across the country.
- **Textbook Campaign**—Successfully changed textbook standards in 6 states (so far) to correct and/or include proper Sikh history in textbooks.
- **The Games**—Annual sports competition across several states.

“[About 15 years ago] there was a young child, who committed suicide, he was like 15, I think. He had just immigrated from India a few years prior, he was having a hard time fitting in, he didn’t want to cut his hair, lose his identity. He ended up committing suicide. The community came together and they responded to that by saying, ‘We need to get these kids to feel like they have their own community. That they have a belonging even if it’s not always in the school walls.’...all these different gurdwaras came together and were like, ‘We can’t have our kids commit suicide. What do we do?’ They started this thing called The Games which is basically like intramural sports. It’s a competition held every summer [with] hundreds of families and kids. This thing blew up. To the point that now there are ten different types of competitions that are held in one summer in seven different cities here. And in other states as well. This is a huge response to suicide prevention but also community building.”



Community Defined “Best Practices” to Improve Childhood Health

I. Community Empowerment & Leadership Development

“[We try] to build a more sustainable and self-reliable community. Not just having this centralized set of resources that only staff can go out and do. For instance, we have this thing called the Sikh Ambassadors program. We just have volunteers from countless communities across the country- we work with them as volunteers and then they're able [to be] the go-to person in their community to then know if there's a resource that someone needs, may it be a workshop, may it be a hate crime poster or whatever it is. We just use our community potential as much as we can and that's what we also... You know, obviously the empowerment.”

2. Solidarity with Other Groups

“[Although] we work predominantly with the Sikh-American community, we are and are always striving [for] more partnership and knowledge of other communities... we do a lot of work with the Native American community, the African-American community, the Latino community ... it's become a larger focus that we're not just trying to help the Sikh-American community, but ensure that Sikh-Americans are part of the larger racial conversation and... that Sikh-Americans are including themselves and partnering with like, Black Lives Matter campaign.”

Allies/Partnerships Working on Children’s Health

- Jakara Movement—Fresno, CA <http://www.jakara.org/>



Website: <https://www.sikhcoalition.org/>

Address: 50 Broad Street, Suite 504, New York, NY 10004

Telephone: 212-655-3095

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/thesikhcoalition>

Twitter: @sikh_coalition



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