

# Top 10 Tips

## *Engaging South Asian communities with health research*



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### Why should I use this tool?

- People from a South Asian background currently make up the largest ethnic 'minority' in the UK. This is a diverse group comprising distinct cultural and religious identities.
- Large observable differences in disease prevalence have been identified for South Asians compared to other ethnic groups, making them an important participant cohort for health research.
- These Top 10 Tips have been produced to help identify ways to engage South Asian communities in health research.



### 1. Clearly define your population

- The South Asian population in the UK comprises multiple diverse communities – a 'one size fits all' approach to research design, methods, resources and outputs, might not be appropriate.
- Giving people the opportunity to self-identify may help define your specific groups of interest.

### 2. Ensure cultural competence from concept to output

- Recruitment and research design should take cultural factors into account – for example, language, accessibility for those who do not read English, and digital, print or in-person routes of engagement.
- Be aware that some words or health concepts may not directly translate; a trusted person in the community may be able to find a culturally appropriate form of words.
- Where possible signpost to appropriate resources.
- Communications and content should be tailored as far as possible (e.g. to age groups, gender, culture or cuisine, or specific concerns).
- Think about who else could benefit from resources – e.g. health or social care professionals who support these communities.
- Engagement with organisations and charities with an interest in South Asian health can help to support the development and testing of resources, or engagement with the community.



### 3. Build trust with your community of interest



- Consider the make-up of the team. People may feel more comfortable or understood if a researcher or health care professional shares a similar background or has a common language.
- Build trust and relationships within the community, for example by attending community events, or drawing on existing personal connections.
- Identify trusted sources of information – this could be a person, organisation or media source.

### 4. Use community networks to reach a diverse group

- Identify 'gatekeepers' - trusted individuals such as community or faith leaders - who can support your work and connect you to local advocates, and other interested and active people in the community.
- Find existing in-person or online groups who may be willing to introduce you to their members.
- Ask contacts to use their networks to 'snowball' information and recruitment.
- Consider the overlap of inequalities in your population of interest, and whether community networks can support you to engage with 'harder to reach' individuals. Written materials and posters may not reach people who cannot read in English or their native language.



### 5. Understand what your target population want to know



- Understand what types of research questions the community want answered, for example lifelong health and child health may be particularly topical.
- Engage with the community to understand their specific concerns, for example how their day-to-day life is impacted.

### 6. Clearly communicate the benefits of taking part in the research

- Communicate clearly what the incentive you are offering is, for example - compensation, an opportunity to speak with an expert, or the wider benefits of research outcomes.
- Explain to people how the research could benefit them as individuals, their friends and family, and the wider community.
- Think about how engaging people in research could also be used an opportunity to resolve misconceptions and promote health.





## 7. Consider people's needs when running a session

- Understand the preferred format for the group – e.g. language and need for a facilitator, timing, location (community-based, travel needs), and the length of the session.
- If your population speak multiple languages, or if you are covering a topic that may be considered embarrassing or stigmatising, individual interviews may work better than large focus groups.
- Try to keep the session fun and engaging, and where appropriate provide refreshments or good quality healthy food.

## 8. Use storytelling to communicate the message

- Sharing lived experiences of people within the community or by drawing on public figures can help people engage with the topic.
- Where appropriate, using examples of public figures that have experienced a health issue can help to normalise the experience and build interest (for example stars from film, cricket, or Asian cooking shows).



## 9. Find innovative ways to for people to engage

- For example, offer people the opportunity to use voice notes, photos or videos instead of written answers.

## 10. Be sensitive to the question of “What would people say?” (*Log Kya Kahenge?*)

- Be aware of concerns around privacy and stigma, and design your engagement appropriately – for example people may be less comfortable openly discussing mental health than physical health.
- Where appropriate, consider using a positive approach, such as health promotion; and appeal to community to encourage people to engage.



These Top 10 Tips were compiled following a workshop with professionals working within South Asian communities to promote health and wellbeing, and with the support of the South Asian Health Foundation. This project was funded by a 'Listen and Learn' grant from UCL.



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