

South Asian Health Fair

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Organizer : Naushad Hirji Chairperson Social Service Network of York Region

They may be one of the largest visible minority groups in York Region, but South Asians can sometimes be overlooked when it comes to health care.

Language and cultural barriers can stand in the way of good health, says Charanjit Bambra, executive director of the Social Services Network. Studies show 17 per cent of South Asians in the region do not speak either English or French. Some cultural practices – Muslim women seeking female caregivers, for example – can also limit access to health care, he says.

And for an ethnic group that suffers a disproportionate incidence of diabetes and cardiovascular disease, that's a serious problem. Which is why the South Asian Health Coalition of York Region will hold its third annual Health Fair on Saturday, December 6 at Alexander Mackenzie High School in Richmond Hill.

More than 2,000 residents are expected to attend the event, which will include a flu clinic, interactive booths, healthy cooking demonstrations, public speakers and displays designed to promote a healthy lifestyle and reduce the risk of chronic disease.

The South Asian population in Markham in 2006 was the second largest in the country, according to Statistics Canada. The numbers across York Region as a whole are increasing dramatically. Mr. Bambra says the number of South Asians in the region is expected to increase 11 per cent each year over the next several years, with predictions that in four or five years, the region will have the largest South Asian population in the country.

But along with that growth comes health problems, he says. South Asians in Canada are a diverse group with a variety of ethnic origins, religious affiliations and languages, but they have one thing in common: they are three times more susceptible to diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

That can be blamed on increased stress associated with immigration, finding employment and changing diet that involves more fast food consumption.

The South Asian Health Coalition of York Region was formed to provide the South Asian residents with information to promote healthy lifestyles. The not-for-profit group includes Blue Hills Child and Family Centre, Community Living York South, Canadian Cancer Society, Canadian Diabetes Assoc., Family Services York Region, Heart and Stroke Foundation, Kinark Child and Family Services, Social Services Network, and York Region Health Services.

The Health Fair will be held on Saturday Dec 6 from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m., at Alexander High School 300 Major Mackenzie Dr. West

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