

JULY 2022

ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY: WHAT WE LEARNED SO FAR

Historical Discrimination against People of South Asian Canadian Descent

The following is a summary of what we learned from the Community Advisory Group of key stakeholders from South Asian Canadian communities who met between January and May 2022. We asked the Community Advisory Group for input and recommendations to guide the City of Vancouver's work on Historical Discrimination against People of South Asian Canadian Descent (HDSA). This information will guide broader research and community engagement.

For more detailed information, read the [interim report](#) passed by City Council in July 2022.

1. Building a Strong Foundation for Our Work

1.1. What is Cultural Redress for South Asian Canadian communities?

This cultural redress process aims to recognize and address the harms of systemic discrimination and historic wrongs experienced by South Asian Canadian communities from the actions, policies, or programs of the City of Vancouver.

1.2. What does Cultural Redress look like?

We understand that cultural redress for South Asian Canadian communities is a long-term process that must include tangible commitments and actions for years to come. As we move forward, we will do our best to adopt a trauma informed lens and address the impacts of historical wrongs at the pace of community to allow time for relationship building and reconnection.

The City has a responsibility to build trust through accountability, transparency, and collaboration; to centre community voices and lived experiences; and to provide options, direction, and the resources necessary to make meaningful change.

Under it all, the path to cultural redress is rooted in intercultural collaboration with Indigenous and other cultural communities, especially in recognizing shared histories and our collective presence on unceded Indigenous lands.

1.3. What does an official City apology look like?

We have heard that an official City apology will only be meaningful if cultural redress is initiated through actions, funding, and real commitment.

We also heard that it is important for South Asian Canadian communities and the broader public to be aware of historical and ongoing discrimination against South Asian Canadians and the reasons why an official apology is needed.

The City needs to speak to the various groups within South Asian Canadian communities to provide a list of actions that the community would like the City to commit to before an official apology is offered.

2. What We Heard: Ongoing Impacts and Potential Recommendations

2.1. Ongoing Impact of Discrimination Towards South Asian Canadians

The Advisory Group shared current stories and examples of discrimination, highlighting the harm that continues to affect South Asian Canadian communities today.

In developing future recommendations and an official apology, we will aim to centre lived experience to help tie our actions to meaningful outcomes.

Below are some of the examples of discrimination experienced by South Asian Canadian communities:

- Harmful stereotypes perpetuated by media and society
- Inadequate cultural awareness and knowledge of South Asian social stratification, caste systems, and their socioeconomic impacts
- Limited preservation of South Asian Canadian cultural heritage
- Gentrification of South Asian Canadian businesses and communities
- Generational loss and disconnect from cultural traditions, heritage, and languages
- Exclusion of South Asian Canadian stories and history from public archives, including history of minority groups within South Asian communities
- Lack of support and education around mental health and intergenerational trauma
- Lack of support for vulnerable groups including international students, migrant workers, and others
- Police brutality and systemic racism in law enforcement
- Systemic racism in City bureaucracy and processes and lack of meaningful relationship between community and City

2.2. Potential Recommendations for Further Community Discussion

We have started the engagement process and received some initial feedback on areas that the City may need to explore further during future community engagement.

The following is not a list of commitments, instead, it shares some potential actions that we have heard to date for the broader community to discuss, expand, and prioritize.

Here are some suggestions for further exploration:

A. City Representation, Engagement & Cross-Governmental Collaboration

- Addressing barriers to South Asian representation in City leadership and staff recruitment, hiring, promotion, and training
- Addressing systemic racism within Vancouver's at-large electoral system and advocate for municipal electoral reform
- Establishing and maintaining ongoing communication and engagement between City and community, including, but not limited to, utilizing and engaging South Asian media
- Creating a permanent City team for South Asian redress, final report implementation, and relationship-building with community
- Communicating limitations and expectations on what the City can deliver and advocate for solutions outside of the City's jurisdiction
- Collaborating with other municipalities (e.g. City of Surrey, City of Abbotsford)

B. Preserving History & Heritage

- Preserving South Asian history and cultural heritage including artifacts, buildings, traditions, and language, etc.
- Protecting and preserving the history, culture, and future of Punjabi Market including through land use policy changes

C. Commemoration

- Commemorating South Asian heroes and historical places such as Kitsilano and 2nd Avenue Gurdwara

D. Community & Public Education

- Raising awareness in community and with the broader public on South Asian Canadian history through public art, a South Asian library, museum, informational campaigns, etc.

E. Social & Economic Wellbeing

- Addressing poverty and financial stress, for example, by increasing grants for South Asian non-profits and businesses, and advocating for housing affordability

- Creating equitable opportunities for South Asian Canadian communities to succeed including career opportunities for newcomers, international students, and immigrants
- Providing resources and support for vulnerable groups including international students, LGBTQ youth, migrant workers, seniors and others
- Expanding and improving delivery of culturally safe and language-accessible services including daycare, library services, and support for seniors
- Investing in new and existing South Asian community organizations, businesses, non-profits, artists, and art spaces including by increasing grant support and awareness
- Revitalizing and protecting South Asian businesses, Punjabi Market, and other cultural districts through walking tours, tax relief, and protections against gentrification and displacement

F. Community Spaces

- Funding and advocating for a South Asian cultural centre, museum, open markets, and additional cultural spaces across the City, including spaces and programs to learn history and heritage, cultivate artists and entrepreneurs, and build community
- Increasing support for cultural and community events in part by providing streamlined, barrier-free event permits
- Investing in capacity building for community groups, including non-profits, to maintain and operate existing spaces
- Creating safe in-person community spaces that are queer-friendly, women-only, disability-only, etc.

G. Policing

- Creating a South Asian liaison group to communicate with the VPD and establish commitments to address police brutality against South Asian communities
- Calling on VPD to acknowledge its legacy and culture of racism against the South Asian community in the past and present

3. Next Steps of Our Work

3.1. What should engagement look like?

We heard the need to broaden our engagement to gather different perspectives within the large and diverse South Asian communities. In response, we will be

distributing surveys, mapping activities, holding large open community sessions and smaller focus groups to reach as many people as possible.

Along with re-convening the Community Advisory Group, we will be reaching out to the broader community through online channels, traditional media, and in-person gatherings to ensure our engagement is accessible to those who want to participate.

After we hear from the broader community, staff will be finalizing a list of top priorities that will be included in a report back to Council.

3.2. What will research focus on?

The City needs to do further research to uncover decades of discrimination, hear lived experiences from community, and learn about the generational impact to this day.

Below were some suggestions for areas of further research:

- Stories of strength, resilience, and mutual aid
- Shared histories across immigrant settlers in South Asian and other racialized communities
- Discriminatory laws that restricted participation in society and economy, e.g., denying voting rights, restricting access to public and private services, lack of labour rights and restrictions on careers, restrictions on property ownership and use
- Immigration, movement, and displacement in Vancouver, e.g., discriminatory immigration policies including the quota system, displacement from Kitsilano
- Harms caused by colonial system that does not recognize Indigenous governance
- Generational loss and impact of assimilation
- Cultural and religious exclusion, e.g., City ban on cremation
- Discrimination in law enforcement
- Highlighting historical leaders or heroes