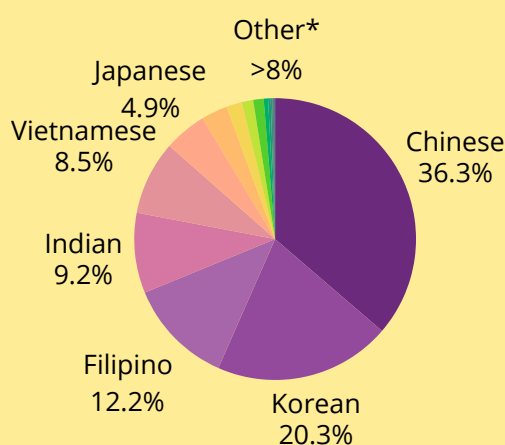




Study Updates

2012

ASPIRE participants completed their first survey



754

ASPIRE participants completed their second survey

ASPIRE Study Participants
(as of 7/24/2026)

Celebrating South Asians

July is South Asian Heritage Month, a time to celebrate the rich cultures, histories, and contributions of South Asian communities across the United States. This month, we're proud to spotlight Dr. Salma Shariff-Marco, a Sri Lankan American epidemiologist, UC San Francisco professor, and ASPIRE principal investigator whose work is helping make cancer research more inclusive and representative of Asian American communities.

We're also celebrating an exciting milestone: more than 2,000 people have joined the ASPIRE study! Thank you to every participant who has shared their time and experiences to help advance cancer research.

NEWSFLASH

Research on breast cancer in Asian Americans featured by Newsweek this month in an article titled:
"Breast Cancer Is Rising Fast in One Group of American Women"

*Other groups include Cambodian, Thai, Bangladeshi, Hmong, Burmese, Laotian, Indonesian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, and Malay.

Staff Spotlight:

Dr. Salma Shariff-Marco

Dr. Salma Shariff-Marco was born in Colombo, Sri Lanka, and moved to Southern California with her family when she was almost 10 years old. Like many families, hers was affected by cancer. But because cancer was rarely talked about, she grew up seeing the stigma and silence surrounding the disease.

As a young public health student, she became interested in helping immigrant communities access health information and learn about cancer prevention including the importance of early detection. That path led her to the American Cancer Society, where she worked with South Asian communities to raise awareness about breast and colorectal cancer screening.

Today, as a professor at the University of California, San Francisco and a leader of the ASPIRE Asian American Cohort Study, she continues that mission by ensuring Asian American communities are represented in cancer research. As Dr. Shariff-Marco explains,

“Too often our communities have been invisible in cancer research,” yet meaningful data are essential to reduce cancer risk for future generations.



Salma Shariff-Marco
and her family

New research shows why this work is so important. A UCSF-led study found that invasive **breast cancer rates among Asian American women increased 2.34% per year from 2012 to 2022**, a faster rise than in any other U.S. racial or ethnic group. Even more concerning, the greatest increases were seen in cancers that had already spread. **Among Asian Indian and Pakistani women, distant-stage breast cancer increased 4.02% per year, while Chinese women experienced a 4.52% annual increase.** Researchers also found that breast cancer is rising rapidly among women under age 50, highlighting an urgent need to better understand the causes and improve prevention.

For Dr. Shariff-Marco, ASPIRE more than a research study, “it’s a chance for Asian Americans to tell our stories to inform future cancer prevention strategies.” By learning from people with diverse cultures, immigration histories, and life experiences, we can better understand cancer risk and benefit all populations.

References

1. Gomez SL, et al. Breast Cancer Incidence in Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Populations, 2000-2022. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2026 Jun 1;9(6):e2621250.
2. Calip GS, et al. Breast Cancer Incidence in Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Populations. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2026 Jun 1;9(6):e2621259.



Learn more about the
ASPIRE Cohort Study



<https://aspirecohort.ucsf.edu/>

Have any questions about the study?
Reach out!



aspirecohort@ucsf.edu



833-501-0598