



DEFEND | INFORM | EMPOWER

 **SALDEF** 15

15 YEARS OF PROTECTING CIVIL RIGHTS

2010–2011 REPORT

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## ABOUT US & MISSION

Founded in 1996, SALDEF is the oldest Sikh American civil rights advocacy and educational organization. We empower the Sikh American community through legal defense and advocacy, educational outreach, and media engagement.

# OUR MISSION: TO PROTECT THE CIVIL RIGHTS OF SIKH AMERICANS AND ENSURE A FOSTERING ENVIRONMENT IN THE UNITED STATES FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.

## WHAT WE DO

Provide **legal referral services** for issues including workplace and housing discrimination, protecting Sikh articles of faith, and public accommodation.

Lead the effort to formulate and support **legislation** directly benefiting the community.

Conduct **community outreach** programs to empower Sikh Americans to exercise their constitutional civil rights.

Conduct cultural **awareness training** for government, law enforcement agencies, and private businesses.

Create and distribute **educational resources** to inform media, schools, and government agencies about Sikhs.

Monitor the **media** and respond to misrepresentations of the Sikh faith and Sikhs.



## LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Dear Supporter,

*Vaheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Vaheguru Ji Ki Fateh!*

It is with great honor and excitement that we commemorate SALDEF's fifteenth anniversary. Looking back at our organizational history, we are humbled by the many victories made on behalf of the Sikh American community. Undoubtedly, our success as

the nation's oldest Sikh American civil rights organization could not have happened without the generous and unwavering support of our community and partners.

Since 1996, SALDEF has been committed to defending, informing, and empowering Sikh Americans. We have furthered our mission with significant accomplishments in the fields of advocacy, education, and media relations. This year is especially significant as it is the tenth anniversary of the attacks of 9/11, an event which impacted all of us tremendously. Despite the hardships our community has had to face, we are encouraged by our collective progress in the arena of civil rights.

The most notable legislative accomplishment came in Oregon, where we overturned an 87-year old ban on religious garb in the classroom. This law, created by supporters of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) in the 1920s, had prevented not only Sikh Americans from pursuing a teaching profession in Oregon public schools, but countless others as well. In helping to lead the effort, SALDEF furthered our organizational mission of protecting the rights of our community, as well as the rights of others. We launched a similar campaign to overturn the same law in Pennsylvania with much promise. We continue to advocate for federal laws that protect the Sikh American community and ensure government officials are aware of our issues.

In the arena of education, we focused on ensuring the law enforcement community is informed about Sikh Americans. Since the establishment of our Law Enforcement Partnership Program (LEPP) in 1999 we have trained over 100,000 federal, state and local law enforcement officers, and produced a training video, in collaboration with the Department of Justice, which is part of the mandatory training curriculum for over 45,000 Security Officers from the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). We also launched a unique program called SikhLEAD, which inspires, trains, and supports Sikh youth as they prepare for a lifetime of community engagement and leadership.

With our extensive experience in media watch, we continue to monitor misrepresentations and inaccuracies of Sikhs and are especially vigilant of the portrayal of sikhs in new forms of social media including Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Concurrently, we have been proactively encouraging producers and editors to develop positive media stories for our community.

We sincerely thank you for your continued support, which has enabled the aforementioned achievements and which encourage us to further serve our community in increasing capacities.

Sincerely,

MANJIT SINGH

Co-Founder, Chairman, SALDEF



# DEFEND:

SALDEF is committed to addressing and remedying all infringements to the rights of Sikh Americans. By defending our rights around the nation, we are continuing to set precedents for Sikh Americans achieving the promise of equal opportunity, equal protection, and equal freedom.

SALDEF has protected the freedoms of hundreds of individuals across the nation. We have successfully defended the rights of Sikh Americans of all ages to freely practice their faith without compromising their Sikh identity.

# DEFENDING INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS



SAHAJ SINGH KHALSA

## A CASE STUDY: COMBATING EMPLOYMENT DISCRIMINATION

SAHAJ SINGH KHALSA, a Sikh American paramedic from New Mexico, had been discriminated against by his employer because of his religious identity. Mr. Khalsa had endured disparaging remarks and threats, and, in one incident, was even physically assaulted. The hospital administration targeted him by suddenly implementing a “no-beards” policy in retaliation for his complaints, telling Mr. Khalsa that he must either shave his beard or lose his job. SALDEF connected Sahaj with the American Civil Liberties Union of New Mexico, who filed charges in May 2010 with the New Mexico Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) against the hospital and hospital administration.

# PROTECTED THE FREEDOMS OF HUNDREDS OF SIKH AMERICANS ACROSS THE NATION

*“All I wanted was to do my job helping people in my community get the urgent medical care they needed. My Sikh religion did not prevent me from performing that job, but the prejudice of my supervisors did. I am thankful that organizations like the ACLU and SALDEF are safeguarding our basic freedoms.”*

—SAHAJ SINGH KHALSA



*“The commitment and effort of the Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund played a key role in ensuring that every Oregon citizen has the right to teach in our classrooms while maintaining religious free exercise.”*

—OREGON SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE, DAVE HUNT

**SAFEGUARD THE RIGHTS OF SIKH AMERICAN EMPLOYEES, STUDENTS, AND CITIZENS**



**OREGON CAMPAIGN**

In the summer of 2009, SALDEF initiated a national campaign to overturn ORS 342.650, an 87-year old law preventing public school teachers in Oregon from wearing religious clothing and articles of faith. This problematic law, spearheaded by the Ku Klux Klan at a time of overt hostility toward racial and religious minorities, forbade teachers who wore religious garb from working in Oregon public schools. On April 2, 2010, Oregon Governor Ted Kulongoski signed legislation reversing the long standing law. Now, observant Americans from Sikh, Jewish, Muslim, and other faith groups who wear religious clothing can teach in Oregon public schools.



**PENNSYLVANIA CAMPAIGN**

With its repeal in Oregon in April 2010, SALDEF has now turned its attention to Pennsylvania and has launched a promising campaign to repeal its Garb Statute.



OREGON GOVERNOR SIGNING LEGISLATION

**ADVOCATING AT STATE & FEDERAL LEVELS**



With our roots in DC, SALDEF has developed a presence in the nation’s capital advocating for legislation that protects our community. In the past year we have worked with peer organizations to support the passage of the Workplace Religious Freedom Act, the Safe Schools Improvement Act, and the End Racial Profiling Act, as well as ensuring that these and other pieces of legislation include language that safeguards the rights of Sikh American employees, students, and citizens.



More than ever, Sikhs have been encountering challenges to their identity in various aspects of their day to day life. SALDEF noticed a rise in complaints from community members against various Department of Motor Vehicles for asking Sikhs to remove their turbans before taking their driver's license photographs.

In these instances, SALDEF contacted the DMV to inform them about Sikhs and the significance of the Sikh turban. SALDEF worked with the DMV to amend their policies, obtain formal apologies and ensure the Sikh individuals were allowed to acquire their license. Lastly, SALDEF provided the DMV with resources to distribute to their personnel and conducted awareness presentations about Sikhs and the Sikh faith.

# PROTECTING THE SIKH IDENTITY

We have worked on similar issues with DMVs in the following states:

- Oklahoma
- Maryland
- Minnesota
- Michigan
- Nevada
- California

In Georgia, a Sikh boy was told that he would have to remove his *patka* before he could take his State ID picture. Additionally, his father was told that he would not be able to wear his turban when he renewed his driver's license. SALDEF contacted the Georgia Department of Driver Services (DDS) to secure an apology, advocated that they change their policy, and secured an agreement to have their staff trained by SALDEF on Sikhs. In April 2010, SALDEF conducted a Sikh awareness presentation for approximately 120 customer service representatives and supervisors from all over the state.

## CHANGED THE DMV'S POLICY AND TRAINED 120 REPRESENTATIVES

*"The presentation was exceptionally beneficial for our staff. We all have a much better understanding of who Sikh Americans are and what they believe in. Specifically, we understand the importance of the Sikh Turban."*

—ALAN WATSON, DIVISION DIRECTOR OF GEORGIA DDS

# CORRECT INACCURACIES AND PROACTIVELY ENGAGE THE MEDIA

SALDEF's media efforts include monitoring the media and responding to stories that mention Sikhism and Sikh Americans. If there are inaccuracies or misrepresentations, we seek to correct them; if the story is accurate, we thank the reporter. We routinely offer reporters resources to enhance their stories and ensure accurate information is disseminated.

Over time, SALDEF has obtained retractions and apologies from numerous media outlets for their misrepresentation of the Sikh faith and Sikhs.

## MONITORING THE MEDIA

For instance, two major news outlets, CNN and Financial Times (FT), published online articles about the death of Osama bin Laden using a completely unrelated image of a Sikh to supplement the news stories. Both images were featured on the outlets' homepages and were likely viewed by millions of readers.

Within minutes of the images being published, SALDEF contacted editors at both outlets and alerted them to the inappropriate use of the image, who promptly removed the images.



In April 2011, the Arizona legislature sought to remove the name of Balbir Singh Sodhi from the state's 9/11 memorial. Stating that Mr. Sodhi did not have a connection to 9/11, the legislators had failed to recognize that in fact, Mr. Sodhi was the first hate crime fatality after the 9/11 attacks.

# SIKH AMERICAN HISTORY PRESERVING



RANA SODHI AT ARIZONA 9/11 MEMORIAL

SALDEF engaged the Sikh community nationwide and launched a campaign to prevent the bill from becoming law. We proactively pitched this story to the national and local Arizona press resulting in the **Arizona Governor's office receiving over 7,500 letters in less than three days asking that she veto the bill.** On April 29, 2011, with the family of Balbir Singh Sodhi in attendance, Arizona Governor Jan Brewer vetoed the bill.

## ARIZONA GOVERNOR'S OFFICE RECEIVED OVER 7,500 LETTERS IN LESS THAN 3 DAYS

*"This is why we love this country. The leadership is responsive. When we met with the Governor and Representative Kavanaugh they each honored my brother, our family, and our Sikh community with caring concern. We humbly requested that they help us so that our brother's part in the local and national 9/11 history would not be denied. Our brother represents all 9/11 backlash victims."*

—HARJIT SODHI, BROTHER OF BALBIR SODHI



GURDWARA, SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA

# INFORM:

The majority of challenges Sikh Americans face today stem from assumptions about religious or ethnic affiliation. SALDEF works to counter these misconceptions and inform the public about Sikh beliefs, articles of faith, and practices.

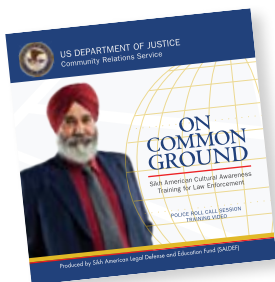


### LAW ENFORCEMENT PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

The Law Enforcement community is one of the most important groups for the Sikh American community to engage with, as these men and women are responsible for our protection, investigate incidents of bias against us, and are charged with the task of identifying suspicious or threatening behavior.

Since the inception of SALDEF's Law Enforcement Partnership Program (LEPP) in 1999, SALDEF has provided training to over 100,000 law enforcement officials on Sikhs and the Sikh faith. SALDEF continues to lead the way in developing strong relationships with law enforcement agencies across the country through our pioneering LEPP.

# PARTNERING WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT



### ON COMMON GROUND

With the release of *On Common Ground* in January 2007, a Sikh American cultural awareness training video for law enforcement officials, the impact of our LEPP program expanded ten-fold as we can now ensure more agencies have a resource that introduces them to the Sikh faith. The video, co-produced by SALDEF and the U.S. Department of Justice, has been distributed to federal, state, and local law enforcement officials across the country.

## PROVIDED TRAINING FOR OVER 100,000 LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS ON SIKHISM





CONNECT WITH  
GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AT  
LOCAL, STATE & FEDERAL LEVELS

Conceived as a counterweight to ethnic and racial profiling of Sikhs in the post-9/11 environment, this groundbreaking video has been incorporated into the mandatory training curriculum for all 45,000 Transportation Security Officers at airports throughout the United States.

#### OPEN INVITATIONS FROM POLICE DEPARTMENTS

As a result of SALDEF's engagement with the law enforcement community over the past several years, seven police departments have issued open invitations to Sikh Americans to join their force. This commitment is significant because just five years ago the Sikh American community had to sue for the right to be a Traffic Officer in New York City. We have come a long way since then and will continue to expand this initiative.

The seven police departments, all located in California, are:

Yuba City  
San Pablo  
Richmond  
Hercules  
Sutter  
Walnut Creek  
Marysville

# ENSURING YOUR VOICE IS HEARD

#### GOVERNMENT

SALDEF staff and representatives regularly meet with government officials at the local, state, and federal level. These efforts allow for consistent dialogue on issues affecting the community at the local and federal level. In order to effectively address many of the issues it receives, SALDEF serves on inter-agency working groups that meet regularly with officials from the Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Homeland Security, Transport Security Administration, White House, and other federal agencies to address issues affecting our community.





# EMPOWER:

The Sikh American community continues to face serious challenges in the post 9–11 era. Sikh Americans are disproportionately affected by hate crimes, racial profiling, employment discrimination, and school bullying, among other issues. With a view towards empowering the community, SALDEF has pioneered several unique initiatives.



Knowing your rights is one of the most important steps you can take as an American to protect yourself from unfair treatment.

The purpose of a *Know Your Rights* Forum is to introduce community members to agencies and groups that can address complaints, incidents, or issues; and provide local, state and federal governmental agencies the opportunity to build relationships with and address the specific needs of their local Sikh American community. SALDEF organized the first *Know Your Rights* Forum in 2002. Since then, we have organized forums in over 23 cities across the country and educated countless Sikh Americans about their rights.

# KNOWING YOUR RIGHTS

Just this past year, we have conducted Know Your Rights Forums in:

- Fresno, CA
- Los Angeles, CA
- Las Vegas, NV
- Atlanta, GA
- Buena Park, CA

## AGENCIES REPRESENTED AT FORUMS:

- U.S. Department of Homeland Security
- U.S. Department of Justice
- Local Law Enforcement Officials
- U.S. Attorney's Office
- Federal Bureau of Investigation
- Transportation Security Administration
- U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
- Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
- Department of Education



# ORGANIZED FORUMS IN OVER 23 CITIES EDUCATING SIKH AMERICANS ABOUT THEIR RIGHTS



## SikhLEAD

This year, SALDEF launched a unique initiative called Sikh Leadership Empowerment and Development (SikhLEAD) to inspire, develop, and support young Sikh Americans as they prepare for a lifetime of community engagement and leadership. SikhLEAD's goal is to increase civic engagement and encourage public service among young Sikh Americans. SikhLEAD launched with two first of their kind programs—the Congressional Internship Program and the Leadership Development Program.

The website, [www.sikhlead.org](http://www.sikhlead.org), serves as a portal for Sikh youth to find opportunities to strengthen their professional and personal development.

# EMPOWERING OUR YOUTH

### CONGRESSIONAL INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

The Congressional Internship Program (CIP) partners with congressional offices to place Sikh American college students in internship positions on Capitol Hill. Through this program, students are afforded first-hand perspective into the functioning of the federal government and legislative process. The first CIP summer included intern placements in the offices of Rep. Judy Chu (CA) and Rep. David Wu (OR) / Rep. Peter Defazio (OR).

### LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The Leadership Development Program (LDP) is a leadership training program held in Washington, DC bringing together Sikh American youth for a weekend of leadership training, personal development, and networking opportunities. Our inaugural LDP session brought together 15 Sikh American Youth leaders from around the country to DC from October 7–10.



INSPIRE, TRAIN & SUPPORT  
EMERGING SIKH AMERICAN LEADERS

# MEET THE REMARKABLE INDIVIDUALS WE HONORED IN 2010



**WADE HENDERSON** was honored with the Dorothy Height Coalition Building Award for his leadership as the President and CEO of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights (LCCR), the nation's premier civil rights coalition.



**AJEET SINGH**, a young scholar, activist and inspiration to young Sikhs around the country was posthumously awarded the SALDEF Youth Leadership Award.



**DAVE HUNT**, Speaker of the Oregon House of Representatives, was recognized with the Dalip Singh Saund Legislative Award for his pivotal role in repealing the ban on religious garb for teachers in Oregon public schools.

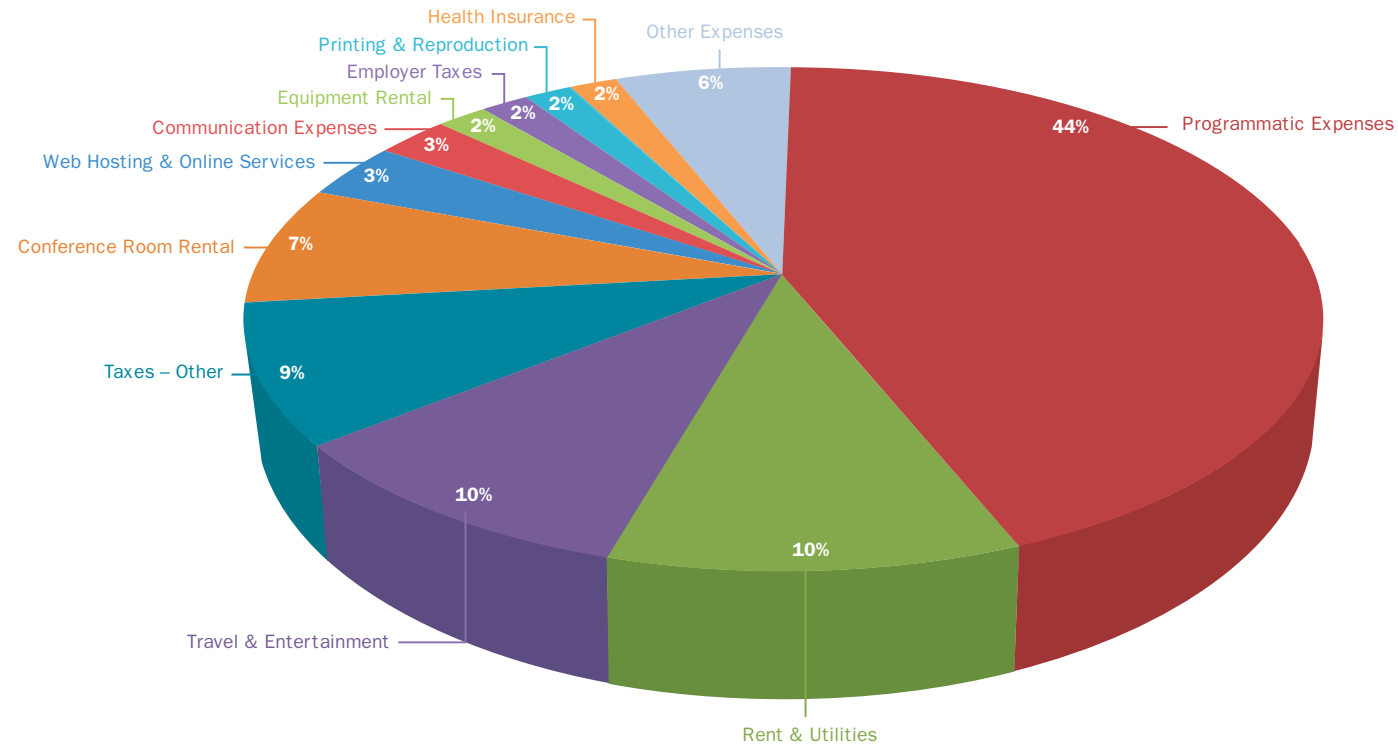


**KP SINGH** was given the Bhagat Singh Thind Community Empowerment Award for his decades of community service and interfaith work in Indianapolis

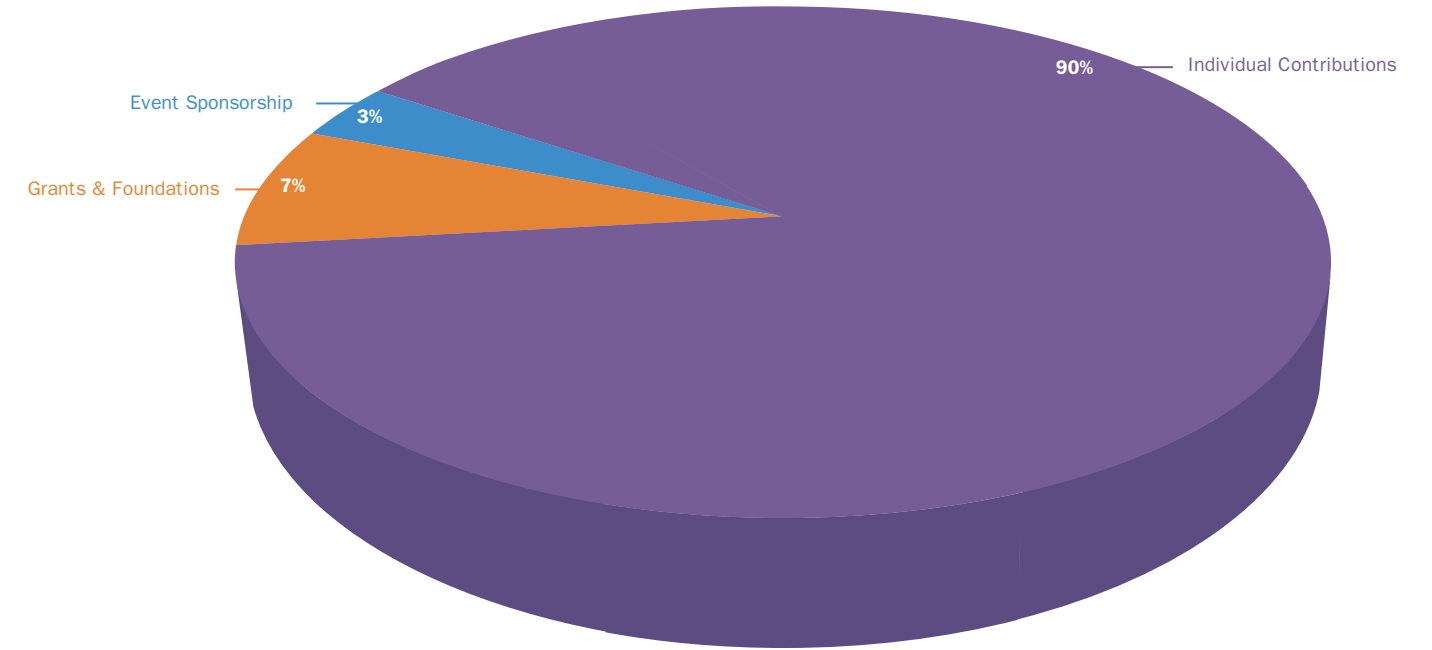


**SABA AHMED** and **RAVITEJ KHALSA** were awarded the Public Service Award for mobilizing their communities in overturning the ban on religious garb for teachers in Oregon public schools.

# FINANCIAL SUMMARY



## 2010 EXPENSES



## 2010 INCOME

## THANK YOU

SALDEF recognizes the following foundations and corporate sponsors for their partnerships and generous support of our organization.

Cleveland Foundation  
 Comcast  
 Genworth Financial  
*Ik Manzil*  
 South Asian Bar Association – Southern California Public Interest Foundation  
 Southwest Airlines

Additionally, we thank our countless supporters and volunteers from across the country who have helped us further our mission. Your contributions and support enhance the lives of thousands of Sikh Americans across the country. We look forward to your continued support in 2012 and beyond.

## SALDEF TEAM

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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## EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

Education and outreach form a major component of SALDEF's work. Through increased awareness and understanding of the Sikh American community, SALDEF ensures that the community continues to project a positive and productive image within the United States.

SALDEF educational publications include:

- A Sikh Parents Guide to School Bullying
- Know Your Rights Pocket Guide
- Who Are The Sikhs Brochure
- Visiting a Gurdwara Booklet for Non-Sikhs
- Sikh Awareness Pocket Calendars
- Law Enforcement Reference Card
- *On Common Ground* – Sikh American Cultural Awareness Training DVD
- An Educator's Guide to Sikh Americans
- A Healthcare Provider's Guide to Sikh Americans

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Learn more about SALDEF, join our mailing list, and download available resources by visiting [www.saldef.org](http://www.saldef.org).

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