

Advancing Black Health Strategy in Ontario

SUMMARY

In November 2020, the Black Health Committee (BHC) recognized the importance of advancing a Black health strategy to address the structural barriers and social determinants of health for Black Ontarians. Focus was given to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, anti-Black racism, and its impact on Black communities in accessing health services and maintaining good health. Having done a preliminary scoping study, the Black Health Committee endorsed the development of a multi-year strategy to address Black health issues in the health system planning, the design of health services, and policies to improve Black health outcomes. The strategy, a culmination of months of consultation and research, will be launched in September 2021. It will outline the principles, goals and strategies the committee will take to advance sustainable long-term action to improve the health and wellbeing of all Black Ontarians.

CONTEXT

Across every measurable indicator, Black communities continue to buckle under the strain of anti-Black racism, and this is affecting their health in profound ways. The Black Health Committee was constituted out of a pressing need to have a strategic body that provides community oversight and accountability to the Black community and advance efforts that improve Black population health. Since its inception, its primary focus has been to address the social determinants of health and health equity through a health services model informed by the committee's membership, which comprises health leaders, CEOs, and Executive Directors of community health centres across Ontario.

This strategy intends to augment and reinforce existing Black population health programs, especially in programs and policies implemented by the community health centres that are partners to the Black Health Committee.

SCOPE

The BHC acknowledges that this is not the first attempt to systematically and comprehensively advance Black Health in Ontario and Canada. This strategy seeks a roadmap to identify the strategic priority areas and targets for championing Black health in Ontario. By developing this strategy, the committee considers:

- the absolute and relative inequalities in health outcomes for Black populations
- the impact of anti-Black racism in the design and implementation of health services,
- the social determinants of health for Black Ontarians, and
- the impact of structural inequalities on the population level.

THE BLACK HEALTH COMMITTEE VISION AND MANDATE

The Black Health Committee exists to advance a comprehensive Black Health strategy grounded in health equity. Through its work, the committee aims to increase access to appropriate healthcare for Black communities. The Black Health Committee is hosted by the Alliance for Healthier Communities. It is chaired by Francis Garwe, CEO, Carea Community Health Centre and its members are Angela Robertson, Executive Director, Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre, Cheryl Prescod, Executive Director, Black Creek Community Health Centre, Florence Ngenzebuhoro, Executive Director, Centre Francophone du Grand Toronto, Keddone Dias, Executive Director, LAMP Community Health Centres, Liben Gebremikael, Executive Director, TAIBU Community Health Centre, Lori-Ann Green Walker, Executive Director, Women's Health In Women's Hands Community Health Centre, Paulos Gebreyesus, Executive Director, Regent Park Community Health Centre, Safia Ahmed, Executive Director, Rexdale Community Health Centre and Simone Atungo, Chief Executive Officer, Vibrant Healthcare Alliance, Nhlaloenhle Ndawana, Interim CEO, Hamilton Urban Core Community Health Centre.

WHAT'S NEXT?

The BHC is now considering the final report and strategy. It will be launched at a community focused Black Health town hall in September 2021.

OVERARCHING STRATEGIC FOCUS AREAS

Based on a survey consultation and a strategic planning meeting, three strategic focus areas were identified

POLICY AND ADVOCACY (S1)

Systemic focus: Removing systemic barriers and root causes of racial inequities in health outcomes

System Impact and Approach:

Recognizing the diversity of Ontario's Black population (language, immigration, income, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and ethnic background), the BHC emphasized the need for system-based strategies that have an impact beyond health.

Advancing transparent, evidence-based approaches: Advocating for race-based data can be used as evidence to shape healthcare agenda setting and develop measurable goals and outcomes that can be tracked and publicly reported.

PUBLIC EDUCATION (S2)

Centring Blackness: Strategies should aim to center and affirm Blackness and eliminate anti-Black racism as pivotal to advancing health and wellbeing for Black communities.

Distinctness and intersectionality of anti-Black racism: Acknowledging that discrimination is experienced differently by various racialized groups and within groups along intersectional lines, including gender identity, immigration, class, sexual orientation, and history of colonization.

SUSTAINABILITY AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS (S3)

Partnerships: The BHC recognizes that anti-Black racism is a galvanizing movement and will seek to partner with social and political groups that share a common goal of ending anti-Black racism and improving Black health outcomes.

Sustainability: The BHC will use this strategy as a first in the long term approach to advancing Black health in Ontario.

Urgent Targets

Medium Term Targets

Long Term Goals

Addressing Anti-Black Racism (S1 and S2)

Increase efforts and action to address Anti-Black racism as a structural impediment to health

Advocate for the adoption of race-based data and race stratification of existing health data

Promote more holistic responses on the impact of Anti-Black racism in access to health services

Help to sustain and strengthen existing and emerging efforts addressing anti-Black racism

Advocate for equity-based approaches to health system planning which acknowledges that improving Black Health as a pressing priority

Social Determinants and Holistic Approaches to Black Health (S1 and S2)

Place the health needs of Black communities at the centre of COVID-19 health responses

Expand efforts to link the effects of income, immigration, gender, housing language and sexual orientation as key drivers affecting health outcomes for Black communities

Promote the adoption of best practices in health service delivery that respond to Black health demands and care needs

Advocate for the use of innovative methods to identify underserved and overburdened populations, gaps in community and health systems and areas needing service saturation

Ensure that investments made in research and development addresses, improves, and responds to the health needs of Black Ontarians

Promote policy change and capacity-strengthening initiatives that focus on elevating the status of community health workers to deliver integrated services that fully address the health needs of Black communities

Community-Focused Approaches to Black Health (S1 and S3)

Amplify community-led efforts and actions to improve Black health to ensure the meaningful action on Black Health

Advocate and promote programmatic mapping projects and initiatives to guide health planners to develop services and programs which focus on Black specific health and social needs

Develop a robust communication plan that galvanizes and coalesces support on Black health

Community Accountability and Oversight (S2 and S3)

Advocate for the use of timely, appropriate, and reliable strategic information to prioritize action in the COVID-19/post-Covid-19 response to foster a stronger sense of accountability to Black communities

Promote action that improves the capacity of the health providers to respond provide tailored person-centred care for Ontario's Black community

Provide, support and the use of strategic information, research, and targets to lead action that elevates Black health as a political and economic priority

Leverage the BHC's voice as a community-driven body informing the delivery of health services and in health systems planning

Promote localized populations needs and focus on interventions and delivery mechanisms that will provide the most significant impact and efficiency

Provide support to Black health leaders and community-led groups that are working to improve Black health outcomes

Funding and Sustainability (S1 and S3)

Support post-Covid 19 preparedness and capacity-building to Black health organizations and programs to respond to the health and social care needs of Black communities

Strengthen and further formalize the organizational relationships which support the BHC

Leverage the attention to anti-Black racism and COVID-19 pandemic to advocate for more investments and support to CHC's to deliver health and social services for the Black community