

LETTER FROM BLACK EXPERIENCES IN HEALTHCARE SYMPOSIUM PLANNING COMMITTEE

A CALL FOR JUSTICE: RACE-BASED DATA COLLECTION IN THE COVID-19 CONTEXT

April 29, 2020

Continuing to bring attention to the disproportionately poor health outcomes facing Black populations in Ontario, and the importance of collecting race- and ethnicity-based health data, the Black Experiences in Health Care Symposium's second iteration occurred in January 2020. This convening emphasized the need for health systems and communities to partner to improve health outcomes. When we began this work, we could not have anticipated that we would soon be in the throes of a global emergency, exacerbating existing social, economic and racial justice issues in Canada.

Alarming trends from the United States and the United Kingdom indicate that Black and other racialized populations experience disproportionately higher negative outcomes related to COVID-19 than non-racialized populations. Data from Illinois shows that [43 percent of people who have died](#) from the disease and [28 percent of those who have tested positive](#) are African Americans, who make up just [15 percent of the state's population](#). Despite making up only 14% of the population, one study indicates that Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups account for a [third of critically ill coronavirus patients](#) in UK hospitals. In the UK, of 53 known NHS staff who have died in the pandemic thus far [68% who have died are racialized](#).

The underlying causes of these disparate outcomes are not unique to the COVID-19 context. The novel coronavirus has laid bare already existing rampant inequality, poverty, food and housing insecurity, and difficulties accessing appropriate health and social services that afflict Black populations in Canada and elsewhere. Mantras of us being "All in this together" are proving to be false as we are not hearing about how Black, Brown and Indigenous lives are being impacted by this virus; and it assumes that there was equity in our socio-economic and health status pre-COVID-19.

As it stands now, COVID-19 is affecting our communities; however, we do not have the means to understand the full scope and impact on our communities. This is why, more than ever, the collection of disaggregated race- and ethnicity-based health data is vital.

The time to act is now. The call for race- and ethnicity-based data is a call for justice within our province to adequately and accurately understand who is suffering, how, and why and thus make visible our lives and health status during this pandemic. Race- and ethnicity based data can provide a real time, fulsome picture of how to target support and resources to our communities for the best outcomes.

In the attached report, *Black Experiences in Health Care Symposium: Bringing Together Community and Health Systems for Improved Health Outcomes*, we've highlighted a few key recommendations that emerged from the Black Experiences in Health Care Symposium 2020 that can prove even more impactful to Black health outcomes in Ontario during the COVID-19 public health crisis. We also acknowledge that COVID-19 will have long lasting impacts and our communities will be faced with new sets of challenges post-pandemic. We want to ensure that the structures, policies and responses take an equitable approach towards healing and factor in the needs of our communities in a post-COVID-19 environment.

Sincerely, The Black Experiences in Health Care Symposium Planning Committee

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