

## Toronto Black Food Sovereignty Plan

**Date:** September 8, 2021

**To:** Economic and Community Development Committee

**From:** Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration

**Wards:** All

### SUMMARY

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Anti-Black racism has negatively impacted key social determinants of health for Black communities, and has been directly linked to increased rates of food insecurity among Black Canadians, leading to adverse mental and physical health outcomes.

This report responds to the need for immediate and comprehensive action to address the problem of food insecurity experienced by many Black Torontonians. It specifically responds to the July 2020 Board of Health direction to develop a Black Food Sovereignty Plan that will increase access to healthy, affordable and culturally appropriate food, and to combat the root causes of food insecurity to build increased resilience and wellbeing for Black communities to advance post-pandemic recovery efforts. This report also responds to the June 2020 Board of Health declaration that recognized anti-Black racism as a public health crisis necessitating targeted action. The recommendations enclosed also seek to advance the realization of [TO Prosperity](#), the City of Toronto's 20-year Poverty Reduction Strategy, and the City's commitment to champion the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent through addressing long-standing Black health disparities to improve development, justice and liberation for Black residents.

The City of Toronto is globally recognized as a food systems and equity leader, yet research continues to show that Black families are 3.5 times more likely to be food insecure compared to white families, with 36.6 percent of Black children living in food insecure households. High food insecurity rates have been linked to poor health outcomes, including an increased likelihood of developing chronic diseases, like diabetes, asthma, cardiovascular disease and depression. Populations most affected by food insecurity have also been identified as being more vulnerable to COVID-19, putting Black populations at greater risk of contracting the virus.

The development of a Black Food Sovereignty Plan will provide a framework to advance these considerations, using a community and public health informed approach to address the issue of chronic Black food insecurity by dismantling systemic socioeconomic barriers, while increasing access, opportunity and Black community ownership over their local food systems. The implementation of this Plan will not only benefit Black residents, but will embed and accelerate an anti-racism and equity-centred approach to benefit all Torontonians and food work at the City.

Using a multi-sectoral, interdivisional and community co-leadership model, the Plan will work toward achieving three primary objectives:

1. Develop City-supported, Black-led initiatives dedicated to addressing food insecurity issues that disproportionately impact Black communities;
2. Identify and establish sustained supports and funding for Black-led, Black-serving, and Black mandated food organizations and Black food sovereignty community infrastructure; and
3. Engage, align, and leverage new and existing City strategies and initiatives to advance systems change and shared goals to realize Black food sovereignty outcomes in neighbourhoods with high Black populations.

The implementation of the Plan will also support the successful delivery of the Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit's year three work plan deliverables and year four priorities. The Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration will report back to City Council, through the Economic and Community Development Committee, on the progress and implementation of the Plan as part of the annual reporting on the delivery of the Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration recommends that:

1. City Council adopt the Toronto Black Food Sovereignty Plan outlined in Appendix A to this report.
2. City Council request the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration, in collaboration with relevant City divisions, to report back to City Council, through the Economic and Community Development Committee, on the progress and implementation of the Toronto Black Food Sovereignty Plan, as part of the annual reporting on the delivery of the Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism.

## **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

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The Toronto Black Food Sovereignty Plan is a comprehensive five-year Plan that includes a mix of initiatives that can be completed within existing corporate resources, with other components requiring new investments. Implementation of the Plan will need dedicated staffing resources to lead implementation, ensure ongoing community leadership, coordinate critical partners, manage engagement and implementation issues, integrate multi-sector data sets, and monitor and report on outcomes.

Successful implementation of the Plan will also require investments to target critical resources and programming to benefit Black residents, Black-led and Black-serving social service agencies and community partners. Identified recommendations and

actions will also point to Provincial and Federal Governments to resource and support priority actions where applicable.

It is anticipated there will be a financial impact in 2022 to deliver year one activities. City divisions have developed supporting business cases for new resources which will resource implementation and will be submitted for funding considerations through the 2022 Budget process. Future financial impacts beyond 2022 will be considered in future year Budget processes.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact statement provided.

## **EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

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Anti-Black racism and systemic discrimination have negatively impacted how Black communities experience food security and positive health outcomes. An intersectional analysis reveals that when Black identity is added to other social identity locations, the extent of discrimination and systemic barriers worsen. This experience is particularly significant for women, 2SLGBTQ+ populations, people with disabilities, seniors, people who experience homelessness, newcomers, residents with precarious immigration status, and people who live on a low income. Efforts to address food insecurity and to create more resilient, healthy and sustainable food systems, must consider outcomes for those most negatively impacted, as well as the systems or structures that impact them.

A cross-cutting analysis also highlights the effect of geographic location on food insecurity, because it can determine proximity to food retailers and food access points, which can impact access to healthy, affordable or culturally relevant food. Similarly, to anti-Black racism, location may impact one's ability to access adequate employment, education, and affordable housing and childcare, which have all been identified as protective factors to limit food insecurity. Understanding how poverty, racism and other structural inequities affect Black residents has informed the need for a targeted food sovereignty response, because existing food policy solutions have not produced equal benefits for Black populations, when compared to their white counterparts.<sup>1</sup>

Through the implementation of the Black Food Sovereignty Plan, Black Torontonians will experience a positive impact through increased access to food and health services, access to training and economic development and employment opportunities; and enhanced opportunities for civic engagement and to shape municipal decisions that impact their lives. Improved access to city services and city spaces will also be achieved. Black communities are also expected to see reduced discrimination and prejudice, improved potential for pay equity, and a strengthened sense of identity, belonging and visibility within Toronto's local food ecosystem.

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<sup>1</sup> There are a number of protective factors that have been linked to decreased rates of food insecurity, including educational attainment, employment status, financial stability and strong social support networks. Research has shown these factors do not equally protect Black populations from an experience of food insecurity, when compared to their white populations. Dhunna, S., Tarasuk, V. [Black-white racial disparities in household food insecurity from 2005 to 2014](#), Canada. Can J Public Health (2021).

## DECISION HISTORY

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### **HL29.1 - Response to COVID-19 - June 2021 Update**

At its meeting on July 14, 15, 16, 2021, City Council approved recommendations from the June 2021 *Response to COVID-19 Report* from the Black Scientists' Task Force on Vaccine Equity. The recommendations adopted proposed that the feedback provided in the report be used to inform the development of the Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit's pending Black Health Services Coordination Plan, for which the Toronto Black Food Sovereignty Plan is a cornerstone initiative.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2021.HL29.1>

### **HL27.2 - Advancing Black Food Sovereignty - Update**

At its meeting on April 12, 2021, the Board of Health adopted the *Advancing Black Food Sovereignty Report* which outlined the issue and impact of food insecurity on Black communities. The report provided clear objectives and a list of community-identified priorities to be advanced in partnership with City divisions, Black residents, Black-led and Black-serving food organizations and businesses, and Black food leaders to realize food sovereignty and improved health outcomes for Black populations in Toronto.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2021.HL27.2>

### **HL17.9 - Addressing Anti-Black Racism as a Public Health Crisis in the City of Toronto**

At its meeting on June 8, 2020, the Board of Health approved direction to address anti-Black racism as a public health crisis and affirmed its commitment to addressing social determinants of health, including the reprioritization of the City of Toronto's resources during the 2021 Budget process and throughout COVID-19 recovery planning to address health inequities shaped by systemic and structural anti-Black racism.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.HL17.9>

### **HL18.1 - Toronto Public Health's Response to COVID-19: Context, Status Update, and Next Steps**

At its meeting on July 2, 2020, the Board of Health requested that the Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit work with various City divisions to explore the creation of the City of Toronto's Black Food Sovereignty Plan to ensure COVID-19 recovery and planning improves access to affordable, healthy, and culturally appropriate food, and report back on progress to create a plan.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewPublishedReport.do?function=getMinutesReport&meetingId=18761>

### **EC17.3 - Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism - Year Two Update**

At its meeting on November 25, 2020, City Council adopted the Confronting Anti-Black Racism year two update, which identified the Black Food Sovereignty Plan as part of its year three work plan priorities to build increased community capacity and resilience in Toronto's Black communities.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.EC17.3>

## **EX29.11 - The Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism**

At its meeting on December 5, 2017, City Council unanimously approved the Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism, which outlined 22 recommendations and 80 actions. Among these recommendations included Action 8 which provided direction to improve food access for Black residents living on a low income and apply an anti-Black racism lens to the work of the Toronto Food Strategy and Toronto Agricultural Program. <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2017.EX29.11>

## **EX9.5 - TO Prosperity - Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy**

At its meeting on November 3, 2015, City Council unanimously adopted *TO Prosperity: Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy*, the City of Toronto's 20-year strategic plan to address poverty. 17 recommendations were adopted across five critical impact areas, including improved food access. <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.EX9.5>

## **COMMENTS**

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### **Toronto's History of Food Leadership: An Opportunity for Targeted Action**

The City of Toronto is recognized globally as a food systems leader and has a long history of initiatives and advocacy to ensure all Torontonians have access to healthy, affordable, and culturally acceptable food, and sustainable and equitable food systems. This leadership has resulted in the development of several strategies and commitments, including the development of the [Toronto Food Charter](#) in 2001, which provides a foundation for the City's food work and promotes the right to food, urban agriculture and community self-reliance. [The Grow TO Action Plan](#), approved in 2012, outlines a strategy to link growers to land and space, strengthen education and training, increase visibility and promotion, and develop supportive policies for urban agriculture in Toronto. Furthermore, the City signed onto the [Milan Urban Food Policy Pact](#) in 2015 and the [C40 Food Systems Network in 2016](#), committing to tackling the most pressing food system challenges and to building a more enabling and economically equitable food environment, and sustainable, healthy and climate resilient food supplies.

These commitments have provided a fertile ground for several equity-focused food projects providing a history of Toronto's commitment to food equity work. Examples include the [Community Food Works Program](#), which focuses on low-income and immigrants populations and connects them with job skills, social networks, and food safety training in settings that facilitate better access to community services. The City's [Student Nutrition Program](#) provides another example of a child-focused institutional and community based partnership, which nutritious and culturally appropriate breakfasts to 211,000 students each day (pre-pandemic). [Grab Some Good Mobile Food Markets](#) highlights an example of a geographic equity focused initiative that facilitates access to low-cost high quality produce in neighbourhoods with poor food access.

In addition to programs, the City of Toronto is also home to one of the oldest Food Policy Councils in the world. The Toronto Food Policy Council is an Advisory Committee to the Board of Health, this citizen body connects diverse food system actors from the food, farming and community sector to develop and inform innovative policies and

projects that support a health-focused food system. Established in 1991, the Toronto Food Policy Council has provided a model for food leaders and community members to inform city actions on food.

Despite the innovative and equity informed programs and initiatives, existing food actions and City strategies have not adequately targeted the unique and specific systemic barriers, and anti-Black racism, experienced by Black residents. As research has noted, “intervening downstream to change behaviors or improve neighborhood food environments may produce measurable benefits to a particular population, but (for the Black community) the effects may be more limited in scale, scope, and duration than if policies were focused on broader social problems, like eliminating class, race, or gender oppression”<sup>2</sup>. In order to be effective, strategies must employ an anti-Black racism lens or they may inadvertently serve as a palliative that reinforces existing structures and diminishes pressure for broader social change.

Toronto's dynamic food landscape and rich history of food systems leadership and innovative action, along with its recent history of commitments to address anti-Black racism and long-standing grassroots Black leadership, have positioned the City as a natural steward and facilitator of North America's first municipally supported and community-driven Black Food Sovereignty Plan. Past food equity projects have evidenced that this work is not only necessary, but it is also possible. COVID-19 has presented a unique opportunity to reimagine our local food systems, and to build back better as a City with community leadership, equity and wellbeing at the centre of action.

## **The Impact of Anti-Black Racism on Black Health Outcomes**

Anti-Black racism is embedded in the policies and practices across Canadian institutions that reflect and reinforce beliefs, attitudes, prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination that is directed at people of African descent, and is rooted in their distinct history and experience of enslavement and colonization here in Canada. The experience of anti-Black racism is one of the greatest predictors of overall health for African, Caribbean and Black communities living in Toronto. This structural discrimination has remained a critical factor that has shaped the Black experience of poverty, access to housing, income, and food insecurity.

Access to adequate income has been identified as one of the best ways to protect against food insecurity, yet Black communities are more than twice as likely to be living on a low-income compared to non-visible minorities, and are overrepresented in Toronto's low-wage workforce<sup>3</sup>. Black children are more likely to live in poverty at a rate of 44 percent, compared to 15 percent of non-racialized children. Inadequate access to income is further compounded by racial profiling, which leads to higher rates of under and unemployment.

Recent research reveals that increased income alone is not enough to equally protect Black populations from food insecurity. The impact of receiving increased income through the Canadian Old Age Pension was studied among different racial groups, and

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2 Odoms-Young, A., & Bruce, M. A. (2018). Examining the Impact of Structural Racism on Food Insecurity: Implications for Addressing Racial/Ethnic Disparities. *Family & community health.*

3 Block, Sheila & Galabuzi, Grace-Edward & Tranjan, Ricardo. (2019). Canada's Colour Coded Income Inequality. 10.13140/RG.2.2.34255.23200.

Black seniors who received a stable monthly pension did not see an equal drop in food insecurity when compared to their white counterparts.<sup>4</sup> These findings point to the fact that Black households are less able to save assets before retirement due to precarious and low-paying work. This study further highlights the distinct impact of the Black-white wealth gap and the need for targeted race-based policy responses to address the distinct challenge of food insecurity in Black communities.

Along with higher rates of precarious unemployment and homeownership wealth gaps, Black populations may also experience greater risk of eviction and displacement from their communities, with 36 percent of Black renters having twice the eviction filing rates compared to census tracts with 2 percent Black households.<sup>5</sup> This occurs even after controlling for poverty and other important factors. These systemic barriers to stable housing, undermines Black communities ability to "grow in place" and build critical physical, social and cultural ties and networks that can guard against food insecurity, leading to a broader pattern of Black displacement across the City. Throughout COVID-19, there's been an increase in the number of homeless populations identifying as Black, and prior to the pandemic, the 2018 Street Needs Assessment<sup>6</sup> reported almost two-thirds of all respondents identified as members of racialized groups, with the largest percentage identifying as Black. Furthermore, Black Torontonians are overrepresented in the criminal justice, mental health, and child welfare systems, which also have implications for their overall health, and access to adequate food.

### **Uneven Impacts: Food Insecurity and COVID-19 in Black Communities**

The intersection of race, income, housing, and other social determinants of health have placed Black Torontonians at consequential risk when it comes to food security and negative health outcomes. A ground-breaking 2019 PROOF study, identified Black families are 3.5 times more likely to be food insecure compared to white families, with 36.6 percent of Black children living in food insecure households.<sup>7</sup> These rates are a direct symptom of inadequate access to income, and are enhanced by other challenges like inadequate access to grocery stores, community gardens, and community kitchens in neighbourhoods with higher Black populations (See maps in Appendix B), ability to secure culturally appropriate food, and excessive policing in grocery stores in low-income neighbourhoods, with greater concentrations of Black residents. High food insecurity rates have also been linked to a variety of outcomes, including an increased likelihood of developing chronic diseases (e.g. diabetes, asthma, and cardiovascular disease), depression, and an increased incidence of contracting COVID-19.

The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted Black communities and has further exposed and exacerbated existing rates of food insecurity. Despite making up just nine percent of Toronto's population, Black residents accounted for 26 percent of COVID-19 cases in the city.<sup>8</sup> Black residents are also suffering a similarly high percentage of serious illnesses due to COVID-19, with Black patients making up 24 percent of Toronto residents hospitalized in winter 2021 with the disease. Many of the

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4 Dhunna, S., Tarasuk, V. (2021) Black–white racial disparities in household food insecurity from 2005 to 2014, Canada. *Can J Public Health*.

5 *Forced Out: Evictions, Race and Poverty in Toronto*, (2019), Wellesley Institute.

6 *Street Needs Assessment Highlights*, (2018), City of Toronto

7 *Black Policy Series: Black Food Security in Canada*, (2020), Broadbent Institute.

8 *COVID-19 Tracker*, (2021), Toronto Public Health Statistics Dashboard



neighbourhoods with the highest rates of COVID-19 infection in 2020, also had higher numbers of Black residents (9 to 17 percent). This demonstrates the disproportionate impact of the virus on Black, racialized and low-income residents and neighbourhoods. COVID-19 has also led to significant job losses for Black residents. In July 2020, four months into the pandemic, Statistic Canada's monthly job survey reported Black women were among the highest unemployment rates at 13.4 percent.<sup>9</sup> These consequences create detrimental impacts on food security for families, as research has shown that women's incomes play a critical role in protecting against household food security. At the same time, Black residents were overrepresented in Toronto's essential workforce, increasing their risk of exposure to COVID-19, when compared to other groups.

Structural challenges facing Black communities are also a product and legacy of the historical lack of support and investment in neighbourhoods with higher Black populations. The pandemic has demonstrated how much place matters in Toronto: there is a clear geography to where we find those most affected by COVID-19. And research has shown that Black people in Toronto are increasingly concentrated in those parts of the city, which are characterized as lower-income, outside of the core, often ill-served by public transit, and underserved by social services. For Black residents this can look like lower walkability rates, lower streetscape greenness, limited tree canopy cover and accessible park space (see maps in Appendix B), and worse traffic-related air pollution. This geographic marginalization comes with serious impacts on health, with links to diabetes, lower physical activity and poorer birth outcomes.

Conversely, these neighbourhoods are also areas of increasing gentrification and development that has led to the rising levels of displacement and disconnection of Black communities -- to land, place and local ties and networks. These realities act as additional barriers to remaining rooted in place and can be directly linked to limited and insecure access to green space.

The concentration of these geographic inequities can be understood as environmental racism<sup>10</sup>. This concept refers to how neighborhoods—populated primarily by people of color and members of low-socioeconomic backgrounds—are burdened with disproportionate numbers environmental pollutions, noise and foul odors and deficits in positive green infrastructure in their neighbourhoods, including parks, trees, and urban agriculture spaces. This situation has left Black communities more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, because they are disproportionately affected by these issues.

The intensifying shift toward growing poverty, unemployment and poor health, coupled with geographical marginalization and environmental racism have impacted food access, healthy local food systems and the overall disproportionate health outcomes for Black residents.

### **A Targeted Policy Response: Developing a Community-Driven Plan**

The recommendation to develop a Black Food Sovereignty Plan to address food insecurity in Toronto's Black neighbourhoods is a place-based approach born out of

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<sup>9</sup> Statistics Canada, (July 2020), Daily Labour Force Survey.

<sup>10</sup> Environmental Racism is defined as systemic and structural policy decisions and practices that differentially affect or disadvantage (where intended or unintended) individuals, groups or communities based on race. (Ingrid Waldron, 2021)



years of community advocacy and engagement to advance action eight in the Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism. Unanimously adopted by City Council on December 5, 2017, it recommends action to improve food security among low-income Black communities, and highlights the need to apply an anti-Black Racism lens to urban agriculture and Toronto Food Strategy work at the City.

In 2019, the Confront Anti-Black Racism Unit partnered with the African Food Basket, a Black-led, Black-serving organization at the forefront of improving culturally appropriate food access for African, Caribbean and Black residents for over 20 years, to incubate the Black Food Sovereignty Initiative Toronto. Partners and participants included Ryerson University, Food Share Toronto, Black Creek Community Farm and Black Creek Community Health Centre, who contributed to conversations to inform a local vision of Black food sovereignty. As part of their work, the Black Food Sovereignty Initiative Toronto hosted a series of community consultations on barriers to food access in Black communities across the city.

In 2020, in response to the rising food needs, the African Food Basket partnered with the Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit to mount an emergency food response called Black Food Toronto, which continues to deliver fresh fruits, vegetables and prepared meals to Black families and seniors at no cost. To date, the initiative has provided over 200,416 pounds of fresh food and prepared meals for over 14 695 households with a team of dedicated volunteers. In an effort to further mobilize community to action and assess needs, in November 2020, the Black Food Sovereignty Initiative Toronto held a conference entitled *Cultivating Black Food Sovereignty*, which gathered more than 250 residents who provided direct feedback on the City-supported Black Food Sovereignty Framework (see Appendix B for a summary of conference feedback).

This emergency response work and community consultation with more than 400 Black residents, food leaders and Black food stakeholders over the last two years has helped identify key community priorities for action, including:

1. *Uneven Access to Sustainable Funding and Resources to respond to food access:* Black-led, Black serving organizations and charities are chronically underfunded, understaffed and are often volunteer run, limiting their capacity to support emergency response in times of crisis which leaves Black communities at greater risk of food shortage. For every 100 dollars donated to a charitable organization in Canada, as little as seven cents goes toward supporting Black charities, with 63 percent of organizations stating they will run out of funding in less than six months.<sup>11</sup>

A Toronto Public Health report [Resilient Food Systems, Resilient Cities: A High Level Vulnerability Assessment of Toronto's Food System](#) highlights that extreme weather events could potentially disrupt Toronto's food supply, and although the risk is low, the most vulnerable areas coincide with the neighbourhoods where we see the highest Black populations in the City. Similarly, Black businesses, entrepreneurs and cultural festivals receive underinvestment, and experience increased barriers to access and navigate economic opportunities, such as grants, work force development training and direct outreach. Unequal support for Black food

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<sup>11</sup> Unfunded: Black Communities Overlooked by Canadian Philanthropy, (2020).

businesses and culture initiatives has direct impacts on the resilience of these businesses and reduces the overall number of culturally relevant food suppliers and visibility and recognition of the contributions of Black food culture to the City.

2. *Limited Access to Green Space:* Legacies of colonialism and vestiges of institutional anti-Black racism have distinctly shaped how Black and Indigenous communities access and relate to land in the city. These legacies have created barriers to accessing land in a self-determining way. Research shows that poor and racialized communities have less access to green space in the city, including access to parks, community gardens, and tree canopy cover, with little to no allotment gardens in the communities with the highest density of Black residents<sup>12</sup>. Residents raised concerns that golf courses in their neighbourhoods were largely unused by local residents and not made accessible for their use and benefit. Black populations are also more vulnerable to food insecurity impacts related to extreme weather events like snow storms and extreme heat alerts, as a result of inequitable asset planning, which can locate important assets further from these communities.
3. *Barriers to Access Infrastructure:* There is a disproportionately low distribution of important food assets, like community kitchens, industrial cooking spaces and incubator kitchens, and food processing sites in neighbourhoods with high percentages of Black residents. Emergency food initiatives experience significant challenges securing adequate space to process and prepare meals. Due to the geographic location of underutilized assets (in private buildings or shared spaces) they are often inaccessible to many Black youth and residents in the community, and residents do not have adequate support to navigate access to these resources.
4. *Food Apartheids and Disconnected Black Food Networks:* Retail food and grocery stores are often located far apart and stock poorer quality produce, with increased security presence and policing (of public space) in neighbourhoods with a higher density of Black Torontonians. Residents in one Black community shared that baby formula and food was often locked up and inaccessible, creating additional barriers and stigma when grocery shopping at food stores. Feedback and research also showed that many Black populations have been displaced from more central neighbourhood hubs, such as Little Jamaica and Regent Park. Residents shared that this is where they had traditionally accessed cultural goods, and where they were able to support local Black businesses. Due to rising housing costs many residents and businesses have dispersed from these areas and have identified that Black food supply chains are no longer accessible. Comments also highlighted that the City's cultural food initiatives like *Summerlicious*, *CaféTO* did not take place in their communities and often did not cater to Black restaurants and businesses that served foods from the African diaspora.
5. *Structural Racism in the Health Care System:* There is a lack of culturally appropriate care, and an underrepresentation of Black doctors in care settings – there are 50 percent fewer Black doctors than the share of the Black population in Ontario<sup>13</sup>. Many non-Black health professionals are not trained to understand that racism itself

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12 Urban Forests in a Changing Climate, (2020), University of Toronto; State of Urban Forests in the Greater Toronto Area Report, (2016), The Green Belt Foundation.

13 The Pervasive Reality of Anti-Black Racism (2020), Civic Action.

is a chronic stressor,<sup>14</sup> and that inequitable outcomes are a result of limited culturally appropriate nutrition, and anti-Black racism-informed food and wellness programs.

In response to these challenges, an interdivisional table of City staff was convened. Eight City divisions were engaged, including: Toronto Public Health; Parks, Forestry and Recreation; Economic Development and Culture; Solid Waste Management Services; City Planning; Energy and Environment, Toronto Water and the Indigenous Affairs Office. Staff consultation identified 56 possible actions and opportunities to leverage and advance more than 20 existing City strategies (see a full list of strategies in Appendix B). The list of possible actions were presented to Black communities and 45 priority actions were identified for implementation. In partnership with the Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit, City divisions will lead the delivery of specific actions to realize the recommendations in the Plan.

In addition to supporting existing strategies, the Black Food Sovereignty Plan will be the cornerstone initiative of the forthcoming CABR-led Black Health Service Coordination Strategy, which aims to strategically coordinate and strengthen social service delivery to better target and address the distinct health disparities experienced by Black communities.

### **A Food Sovereignty Approach: Principles and Recommendations for Action**

*Vision:* Build on self-determination, leadership, legacy, interconnection and health by creating conditions where Black communities can thrive, through the delivery of (1) African-centred health and wellness responses; (2) Place-based, community-rooted collective wealth building opportunities; and (3) Recognition and space for Black arts and culture.

*Principles:* This work will continue to be grounded in the principles of food sovereignty, which draws specifically from the practice of Indigenous food sovereignty. Current food systems are most harmful to racialized residents, Black Food Sovereignty Plan is grounded in "the right of people of African descent to healthy and culturally-appropriate food, produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems and build their own institutions to advance community capacity and resilience for food access". It is focused on a group's ability to control their food systems, including markets, production modes, cultures and environments, and presents a holistic approach to addressing food access challenges. For this reason the work is place-based and will focus on neighbourhoods with the highest density of Black populations (see Appendix B for a map of Black populations in Toronto).

The Plan is also grounded in a human rights framework that upholds the right to food. Defined as one element of the broader and more inclusive right to food sovereignty, the right to food has been recognized in international law since its inclusion in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1947,<sup>15</sup> on which Canada is a signatory. It

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14 A 2013 Toronto Public Health study found that experiencing racial discrimination contributes to poor health outcomes by "triggering harmful biological, psychological and behavioural responses". Racialization and Health Inequities (2013)

15 G.A. Res. 217 (III) A, art. 25 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Dec. 10, 1948).

acknowledges the right of individuals alone, or in community with others, to feed themselves and their families with adequate and culturally desirable food that is produced and consumed in sustainable ways<sup>16</sup>, and places the onus on states – from federal governments, down to municipal governments – to learn how their populations meet their food needs. It also positions states to engage in participatory policy-making to ensure the state and third parties do not impede and adequately facilitate conditions to realize community-led and defined food access.

Pillars for Action: The Plan identifies 45 actions to realize 5 recommendations (see a full list of actions in Appendix A):

**Recommendation #1: Sustainable Funding & Community Capacity Building**

Support Black-led, Black-serving and Black mandated food organizations to effectively serve and respond to community food insecurity through providing access to sustained operating funds, service navigation support, expert advice, and capacity building opportunities to lead long-term food system transformation, community learning and the tracking of progress on outcomes.

**Recommendation #2: Access to Growing Space**

Reimagine public land as an opportunity to advance an inclusive reparative economy approach to build increased community resilience, and land-based learning and healing initiatives through identifying, returning and repurposing land to promote Black environmental stewardship and urban agriculture initiatives.

**Recommendation #3: Accessible Infrastructure**

Improve access to assets that drive economic and social benefit in Black communities, including but not limited to community and incubator kitchen spaces and other facilities to expand equitable access to development and community food education.

**Recommendation #4: Black Food Hubs, Procurement and Cultural Markets**

Create an enabling environment for community wealth building initiatives and for collective Black economic prosperity to emerge through the establishment of food supply chains that support resilient and sustainable Black-owned and Black operated food businesses to advance procurement, workforce development and cultural food access.

**Recommendation #5: Culturally Rooted Community Health & Nutrition Programs**

Cultivate and deliver African-centred nutrition, mental health and health promotion programs informed by African, Caribbean and Black communities' distinct experiences, culture and needs, to deliver responsive, trauma-informed, holistic and supportive healthcare resources and services to address food and diet-related health disparities.

Table 1 outlines the actions that will be led by City divisions, and resourced with new and existing funds in the 2022 budget process, to realize the five recommendations.

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16 United Nations Comm. on Econ., Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment No. 12: The Right to Adequate Food, United Nations Doc. E/C.12/1999/5 (May 12, 1999), at paras. 6-13

## The Road Map to Black Food Sovereignty: Actions for Year One

Table 1: Year One Activities

Pillars	Year 1 Actions	Lead Divisions
<p><b>Sustainable Funding &amp; Community Capacity Building</b></p> <p>Support Black-led, Black-serving and Black mandated food organizations through access to sustained operating funds, service navigation support, expert advice</p>	<p><b>Action 1:</b> Ensure adequate annual operating funds are deployed to Black mandated organizations that address food insecurity</p> <p><b>Action 2:</b> Develop and fund a Black Food Sovereignty Advisory Circle to identify and track progress and to lead ongoing engagement.</p> <p><b>Action 4:</b> Facilitate and fund an annual community-led Black Food Sovereignty Conference to foster knowledge sharing and networking.</p> <p><b>Action 5:</b> Apply learnings and success in urban agriculture from the Community Reduce &amp; Reuse Programs to inform the creation of local community knowledge networks to share learnings gained from COVID-19 digital urban agriculture programming in neighbourhoods with large Black populations</p> <p><b>Action 6:</b> Target access to urban agriculture funding opportunities at the City to Black communities.</p> <p><b>Action 8:</b> Build community capacity to lead land-based youth leadership and urban community-based agriculture for Black and Indigenous youth.</p> <p><b>Action 13:</b> Continue to support Black arts, culture and encourage Black food festivals and Black food businesses and Black entrepreneurs to participate in opportunities.</p>	<p>Social Development, Finance and Administration</p> <p>Social Development, Finance and Administration; Solid Waste Management Services</p> <p>Social Development, Finance and Administration; Parks, Forestry and Recreation</p> <p>Parks, Forestry and Recreation; Social, Development, Finance and Administration; Indigenous Affairs Office</p> <p>Economic Development and Culture</p>

<p><b>Access to Growing Space cont.</b></p> <p>Increase community resilience, land-based learning initiatives and repurposing land to promote stewardship and urban agriculture initiatives</p>	<p><b>Action 15:</b> Update the Community Garden Action Plan and the Community Garden Policy using anti-Black racism lens.</p> <p><b>Action 17:</b> Identify at least two pilot sites for “community land sharing and community land trust models” to be supported by a Black-led food agency.</p> <p><b>Action 18:</b> Identify opportunities for community growing space in development applications in neighbourhoods with high Black populations; and identify where site specific zoning permissions may be required</p> <p><b>Action 19:</b> Facilitate opportunities for community growing space for food on school properties and surplus City land, in neighbourhoods with high Black populations.</p> <p><b>Action 20:</b> Prioritize Community Planting and Stewardship and Pollinate TO grants and climate action funding applications for Black-led, Black serving organizations and groups.</p> <p><b>Action 22:</b> Engage and connect Indigenous treaty and territorial rights holders and Black residents in dialogue when developing land use opportunities.</p> <p><b>Action 23:</b> Facilitate access to green space on City- permitted spaces for Black and Indigenous-led food sovereignty and fresh food access initiatives.</p> <p><b>Action 24:</b> Interpret and share research findings on material flows in Toronto’s food system from the baselining for a Circular Toronto study.</p>	<p>Social, Development, Finance and Administration; Parks, Forestry and Recreation;</p> <p>Social, Development, Finance and Administration; and Economic Development</p> <p>City Planning; Housing Secretariat; Social, Development, Finance and Administration</p> <p>Housing Secretariat; Transportation Services, Corporate Real Estate Management; Social, Development, Finance and Administration; Toronto District School Board</p> <p>Environment and Energy Division</p> <p>Social, Development, Finance and Administration; Indigenous Affairs Office</p> <p>Economic Development and Culture</p> <p>Solid Waste Management Services</p>
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Pillars	Year 1 Actions	Lead Divisions
<p><b>Accessible Infrastructure</b></p> <p>Improve access to assets that drive economic and social benefit and community food education opportunities.</p>	<p><b>Action 26:</b> Develop partnerships and support permit access for Black-led, Black-serving food programs to use community kitchen spaces.</p> <p><b>Action 27:</b> Develop partnerships to fund organizations and provide workforce development and business training supports for Black businesses and facilitate priority access to kitchen space and industrial food production facilities.</p>	<p>Economic Development and Culture; Social, Development, Finance and Administration; Parks, Forestry and Recreation</p> <p>Economic Development and Culture</p>
<p><b>Black Food Hubs, Procurement and Cultural Markets</b></p> <p>Establish local food supply chains, Black business, procurement, workforce development and cultural food access.</p>	<p><b>Action 28:</b> Facilitate the creation of Black Food markets and cultural food activities in neighbourhoods with high Black populations.</p> <p><b>Action 31:</b> Provide targeted support and improved access to opportunities for Black-owned and Black-operated businesses impacted by the pandemic, by connecting and increasing the number of Black food entrepreneurs and businesses on the City's vendor list and other initiatives</p> <p><b>Action 32:</b> Support the development of Black food start-ups, micro-enterprises and Black-led, Black-serving Farmers Markets by providing an equitable amount of (city-owned) space to Black retailers and social enterprises</p> <p><b>Action 34:</b> Increase outreach and understanding of African, Caribbean and Black food business needs through improved data collection to improve customer service delivery, effectively spotlight and promote Black businesses and share economic initiatives.</p>	<p>Social, Development, Finance and Administration</p> <p>Economic Development and Culture</p> <p>Social, Development, Finance and Administration; Economic Development and Culture</p> <p>Economic Development and Culture and Social, Development, Finance and Administration;</p>



Pillars	Year 1 Actions	Lead Divisions
<p><b>Black Food Hubs, Procurement and Cultural Markets (continued)</b></p> <p>Establish local food supply chains, Black business, procurement, workforce development and cultural food access.</p>	<p><b>Action 35:</b> Work with colleges and universities to establish a Centre of Black Food Excellence to increase capacity for Black-led evidence- based policy approaches to address Black food insecurity</p> <p><b>Action 36:</b> Advocate to the Provincial and Federal orders of Government for funding to establish Black food hubs; and deploy the Federal Black Business Entrepreneurship Loan Fund to better target Black food businesses.</p> <p><b>Action 37:</b> Advocate for improved standards of work for food workers, and for Federal agricultural training and funding programs to address barriers faced by Black, Indigenous and racialized immigrant farmers.</p>	<p>Social, Development, Finance and Administration;</p>
<p><b>Culturally Rooted Community Health &amp; Nutrition Programs</b></p> <p>Deliver African-centred nutrition, mental health and health promotion programs</p>	<p><b>Action 40:</b> Spotlight African, Caribbean and Black cultural and ancestral foods and food histories as part of Live Green's "Rethink Food" campaign.</p> <p><b>Action 42:</b> Facilitate resident-led governance models to collect and redistribution surplus fruits and vegetables to support food access and limit food waste.</p> <p><b>Action 43:</b> Advocate to the Federal government to provide the fullest implementation of the right to food.</p> <p><b>Action 44:</b> Advocate to the Province to include food security and equitable access as a pillar in their next five-year anti-racism strategy.</p> <p><b>Action: 45:</b> Facilitate food community education and cultural events and opportunities to celebrate Black food history and contributions.</p>	<p>Environment and Energy Division</p> <p>Solid Waste Management Services</p> <p>Social, Development, Finance and Administration</p> <p>Economic Development and Culture</p>

The Black Food Sovereignty Plan will be implemented over a five-year timeline to coincide with the Confronting Anti-Black Racism Black Health Service Coordination Strategy which is currently under development. This timeline will also align with the

completion of the United Nations Decade for People of African Descent, allowing a unique opportunity to reflect, track and report on lessons learned and progress made to advance food security and food sovereignty outcomes for Black residents. The timeline will also provide distinct opportunities to realize the three programme areas for the United Nations International Decade for People of African descent: Recognition, Justice and Development, and celebrates the United Nations Year of the Creative Economy and the African Union Global Year of Arts, Culture and Heritage.

### **Community-Driven Governance, Monitoring and Evaluation**

A community-informed analysis and governance model is a central component of the Black Food Sovereignty Plan framework. This vision will be achieved through the development of a Black Food Sovereignty Advisory Circle composed of (up to) 15 Black leaders representing different experiences from across the food system. This groups will support the development of indicators, and support the tracking and community reporting of the Plan. To honour and continue to cultivate existing and longstanding leadership, at least one member seat will be reserved for a member of the Black Food Sovereignty Initiative Toronto group. There will also be one seat reserved for one (1) international representative who will bring a global Black food sovereignty perspective, and strengthen Toronto's presence and connection to the international Black Food Sovereignty movements. See Appendix B to see the mandate of the Black Food Sovereignty Advisory Circle.

The monitoring and evaluation of activities will be informed by two guiding documents. The Plan will draw on food system indicators informed by the Toronto Food Policy Council's Food Lens. Developed to leverage divisional work to support the objectives of eliminating food insecurity and to address the climate emergency this tool provides a structure to understand food systems change across six areas of the food system: Economic Development; Food Security and Food Justice; Food Procurement; Land Use Planning and Food Infrastructure; and Food Loss, Waste and Circular Economy.

This framework is also grounded in the Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit's UBUNTU African-Centred Impact Assessment Model, which is used to evaluate the delivery of the Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism. Grounded in a targeted universalism approach, the framework represents and honours a new way of assessing systems change by embedding an anti-Black racism lens to evaluate impact in Black communities. It uses a decolonized approach to add value to community-defined metrics, and is informed by an understanding of how Black communities experience change across different spheres to assess social transformation and systems change. Evaluation in this model is understood at four levels, the personal, group, institutional and societal levels.

### **Next Steps**

Moving forward, the Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit will begin recruitment, review and selection of the Black Food Sovereignty Advisory Circle members. Set to launch in fall 2021, the Advisory Circle will help to inform the development of targets, indicators for the monitoring and evaluation framework. Members will also support the community-facing launch of the Plan, as part of the second annual community-led Black Food Sovereignty Conference, scheduled to take place in winter 2021. The Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit will also be reconvening the interdivisional City staff working group in

Q1 2022 to support the planning and implementation of deliverables for year 1 of the Plan.

Working with community partners, agencies and City divisions, the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration will report back to the Economic and Community Development Committee on the progress and implementation of the Plan in Q1 2023, as part of the Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit annual reporting.

## **CONTACT**

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Melana Roberts, Policy Development Officer, Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit, Social Development, Finance and Administration, 416-278-4351, [melana.roberts2@toronto.ca](mailto:melana.roberts2@toronto.ca)

Anthony Morgan, Manager, Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit, Social Development, Finance and Administration, 416-668-0641, [anthony.morgan@toronto.ca](mailto:anthony.morgan@toronto.ca)

Aina-Nia Grant, Director, Community Resources, Social Development, Finance and Administration, 416-392-8608, [aina-nia.grant@toronto.ca](mailto:aina-nia.grant@toronto.ca)

## **SIGNATURE**

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Denise Andrea Campbell  
Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration

## **ATTACHMENTS**

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Appendix A - Toronto Black Food Sovereignty Plan

Appendix B - Black Food Sovereignty (BFS) Conference: Cultivating Black Food Sovereignty in Toronto, November 27-28, 2020 - Summary Report