

## **Advancing Black Food Sovereignty - Update**

**Date:** March 25, 2021

**To:** Board of Health

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

**Wards:** All

### **SUMMARY**

---

The experience of anti-Black racism is one of the greatest predictors of food insecurity for African, Caribbean and Black communities living in Toronto. Anti-Black racism has shaped key social determinants of health for Black communities, including their overall experience of poverty, access to housing and income. This situation has created detrimental impacts, and a situation of chronic food insecurity for Black Torontonians.

This report responds to the Board of Health direction from July 2020 to provide an update on the creation of a Black Food Sovereignty Plan to improve access to affordable, healthy, and culturally appropriate food as part of the City of Toronto's COVID-19 response and planning. It also responds to the June 2020 Board of Health direction to address anti-Black racism as a public health crisis and demonstrate commitment and action to addressing social determinants of health that negatively impact Black communities.

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>1</sup>. High food insecurity rates have also been linked to negative 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 most vulnerable to COVID-19<sup>2</sup>, putting Black populations at greater risk of contracting the virus.

The development of a Black Food Sovereignty Plan will provide a comprehensive approach to address the chronic food insecurity faced by Black residents through addressing systemic barriers, while increasing access, opportunity and ownership over their local food systems. More specifically, the Black Food Sovereignty Plan will work to advance three interlocking goals:

---

1 Black Policy Series: Black Food Security in Canada, [https://www.broadbentinstitute.ca/black\\_food\\_insecurity\\_in\\_canada](https://www.broadbentinstitute.ca/black_food_insecurity_in_canada), (2020), Broadbent Institute.

2 Fighting Food Security During and After the Pandemic, <https://healthydebate.ca/opinions/fighting-food-insecurity-covid-19/>, (2020), Healthy Debate.

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 food focused Black-led, Black-serving, and Black mandated 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.

Realizing a Black Food Sovereignty Plan is a priority deliverable in the year three work plan for the Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism. The Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration will bring forward the Black Food Sovereignty Plan to the Economic and Community Development Committee in September 2021.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

---

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

1. The Board of Health receive this report for information.

## **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

---

There is no financial impact resulting from the adoption of the recommendation in this report.

## **DECISION HISTORY**

---

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 COVID-19 recovery planning to address health incomes impacted by anti-Black racism.

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

At its meeting on July 2, 2020, the Board of Health requested that the Social Development, Finance and Administration 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 to report back on progress to create a plan.

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

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>

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 in the Black community.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2017.EX29.11>

## COMMENTS

---

### Background

#### 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 food insecurity for African, Caribbean and Black communities living in Toronto. Anti-Black racism has been a determining factor shaping outcomes for these communities, and impacts their overall health outcomes by shaping their experience of poverty, access to housing, and income – and three primary social determinants of health affecting food insecurity for Black residents.

Access to adequate income is 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. Black children are also 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.

Along with higher rates of precarious employment and unemployment, Black populations may be at higher risk of eviction, with 36 percent of Black renter households having twice the eviction filing rates compared to census tracts with 2 percent Black households<sup>3</sup>. This occurs even after controlling for poverty and other important factors, increasing barriers to secure sufficient food. 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>4</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

---

<sup>3</sup> Forced Out: Evictions, Race and Poverty in Toronto, (2019), Wellesley Institute.

<sup>4</sup> Street Needs Assessment Highlights, (2018), City of Toronto.

for their overall health, and access to adequate and culturally appropriate foods.

### **Disproportionate Impacts: COVID-19 and Food Insecurity 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>5</sup>. These rates are a direct symptom of inadequate access to income, and are enhanced by other challenges like inadequate access to grocery stores in Black neighbourhoods, the ability to secure culturally appropriate food and excessive policing in grocery stores in Black neighbourhoods. 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 disproportionately impacts Black communities and further exposed and exacerbated existing rates of food insecurity. Despite making up just nine percent of Toronto's population, Black residents have accounted for 26 percent of COVID-19 cases in the city<sup>6</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 currently hospitalized with the disease. Many of the 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>7</sup> At the same time, Black residents were overrepresented in Toronto's essential workforce, increasing their risk of exposure to COVID-19, compared to other groups.

The increasing shift toward intensifying poverty, unemployment and poor health, coupled with geographical marginalization have impacted food access and the overall disproportionate health outcomes for Black residents.

### **The Creation of 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 years of community advocacy and engagement to advance recommendation 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 in Toronto's Black communities.

---

5 Black Policy Series: Black Food Security in Canada, [https://www.broadbentinstitute.ca/black\\_food\\_insecurity\\_in\\_canada](https://www.broadbentinstitute.ca/black_food_insecurity_in_canada), (2020), Broadbent Institute.

6 COVID-19 Tracker, (2021), Toronto Public Health Statistics Dashboard.

7 Statistics Canada, (July 2020), Daily Labour Force Survey.

In 2019, to advance this recommendation, 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. This partnership supports pivotal community conversations that bring together Black residents, Black food leaders and activists to develop a framework to advance food sovereignty in Toronto. Partners and participants have included Ryerson University, FoodShare Toronto, Black Creek Community Farm and Black Creek Community Health Centre. 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. In 2020, in partnership with the Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit, they also mounted an emergency food response called Black Food Toronto, which delivers 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 to 14,500 households with a team of dedicated volunteers.

This emergency response work and community consultation helped the Black Food Sovereignty Initiative Toronto to identify the key priorities and challenges that a Black Food Sovereignty Plan needs to address, priorities include:

1. Uneven Access to Sustainable Funding and Resources:

Studies have shown that Black-led, Black serving organizations and charities are chronically underfunded and are often volunteer-run. For every 100 dollars donated to a charitable organization in Canada, as little as seven cents goes toward supporting Black charities<sup>8</sup>. Among the organizations surveyed, 63 percent of organizations said they will run out of funding in less than six months. As a result of this chronic underinvestment, Black-led and Black serving organizations are less resourced to respond to crises and have less capacity to mitigate, sustain and proactively plan their services and supports to reach the most vulnerable groups.

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 in Toronto 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<sup>9</sup>. They 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.

---

8 Unfunded: Black Communities Overlooked by Canadian Philanthropy, <https://www.forblackcommunities.org/assets/docs/Unfunded-Report.pdf>, (2020).

9 Urban Forests in a Changing Climate, [https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/greenbelt/pages/14604/attachments/original/1600457503/UrbanForestsChangingClimate\\_REPORT\\_E-ver\\_REV.pdf?1600457503](https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/greenbelt/pages/14604/attachments/original/1600457503/UrbanForestsChangingClimate_REPORT_E-ver_REV.pdf?1600457503), (2020), University of Toronto; State of Urban Forests in the Greater Toronto Area Report, (2016), The Green Belt Foundation.

### 3. Barriers to Access Infrastructure:

There is a disproportionately low distribution of important food assets, like community kitchens, industrial cooking spaces, and community market spaces in neighbourhoods with high percentages of Black residents. Due to the location of assets (in private buildings or shared spaces) they are often inaccessible to many Black youth and residents in the community.

### 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 in neighbourhoods with a higher density of Black Torontonians, which creates additional barriers to access healthy food.

### 5. Structural Racism in the Health Care System:

There is a lack of culturally appropriate care, and underrepresentation of Black doctors in care settings – there are 50 percent fewer Black doctors than the Black share of the population in Ontario<sup>10</sup>. Many non-Black health professionals are not trained to understand that racism itself is a chronic stressor<sup>11</sup>, and that inequitable outcomes are a result of limited culturally appropriate nutrition, and anti-Black racism-informed food and wellness programs.

## **A Food Sovereignty Approach: Advancing Black Communities' Right to Food**

To respond to these challenges, Social Development, Finance and Administration, in partnership with multiple City divisions, proposes to implement a Black Food Sovereignty Plan, which will be rooted in the achievement of five core objectives. These objectives were informed and developed in partnership with Black food leaders and through extensive community consultation with more than 100 Black residents participating in the Cultivating Black Food Sovereignty Conference, hosted by the Black Food Sovereignty Initiative Toronto in November 2020.

The five objectives of the Black Food Sovereignty Plan will be:

1. Increasing sustainable funding and building community capacity;
2. Improving access to growing space;
3. Increasing availability of accessible infrastructure;
4. Increasing investment in Black food hubs and cultural markets; and
5. Increasing support for culturally-rooted community health & nutrition programs

The Black Food Sovereignty Plan will be implemented over a five-year timeline to coincide with the Confronting Anti-Black Racism Black Health 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

---

10 The Pervasive Reality of Anti-Black Racism, <https://www.bcg.com/en-ca/publications/2020/reality-of-anti-black-racism-in-canada> (2020), Civic Action.

11 A 2013 Toronto Public Health study found that experiencing racial discrimination contributes to poor health outcomes by “triggering harmful biological, psychological and behavioural responses”. <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2013/hl/bgrd/backgroundfile-62904.pdf>.



and food sovereignty outcomes for Black residents. The timeline will demonstrate the City's commitment to facilitating Black food leadership through the United Nations Decade for People of African Descent thematic program lenses of recognition and justice, while learning from the expertise and initiatives being championed by other cities.

### **Iterative Co-Design and Implementation Process**

Staff from the City of Toronto's Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit will work in collaboration with residents, including the Black Food Sovereignty Initiative Toronto, over the next several months to establish a formal Black Food Sovereignty Advisory body to further refine, prioritize and co-develop final recommendations and actions to advance these objectives.

To ensure a comprehensive plan is developed, the Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit will also continue to work together with eight City divisions, 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 to inform recommendations, streamline interdivisional coordination of activities and determine resource requirements to implement the Plan.

### **Grounded in the Principle of Food Sovereignty and the Right to Food**

This work will continue to be grounded in the principles of food sovereignty, which draws specifically from the practice of Indigenous food sovereignty. In this case, implementation of the 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." It focuses 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.

The Black food sovereignty work 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>12</sup>, on which Canada is a signatory. It 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>13</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.

---

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

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

## **Next Steps**

The realization of a Black Food Sovereignty Plan will require shared leadership. The Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit will work to establish an Advisory Body composed of Black food leaders and stakeholders to inform next steps to finalize the plan and provide a strong, inclusive foundation for coordination and implementation. The Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit will also support a community-led Black food sovereignty conference in Fall 2021 to create opportunities to build community capacity, share best practices and ensure a broad range of perspectives are included in the launch of the Black Food Sovereignty Plan.

The Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration will bring forward the Black Food Sovereignty Plan to the Economic and Community Development Committee in September 2021, which will include recommendations, actions and key budget priorities to ensure the Plan's implementation.

## **CONTACT**

---

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**

---

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