

Black Scientists' Task Force on Vaccine Equity

*A Final Reporting on Lessons Learnt from
the Pandemic & the Early Stages of
Recovery*

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Thanks to the City of Toronto

A special note of thanks to:

- Toronto Public Health
- SDFA
- TAIBU Community Health Centre

The Black Scientists' Task Force on Vaccine Equity (BSTF)

- Toronto had Canada's largest Black population at 36.9 per cent in 2016
- BSTF was established as part of the City of Toronto's response to continued evidence that the highest rates of COVID-19 cases and vaccine hesitancy were among the Black population

BSTF Accomplishments

- 75 engagement sessions with 10,000+ participants (townhalls, fireside chats, faith-based community, roundtable etc.)
- Successful Black Health Fair and Summit model replicated across the GTA – with health expert panels, health services, information sessions, and activities – that valued a holistic approach to health, wellbeing and addressing illnesses including COVID-19
- Over 21,000 people reached through Instagram in January
- Partnered with Black-owned businesses and faith-based groups to share reliable COVID-19 information and promote preventative actions, including vaccination
- Increased education, reduction of vaccine hesitancy and increased vaccine roll-out in Black community

Ongoing Challenges for Black Toronto Communities

- Systemic racism and socio-economic inequities underlie health disparities in Black communities
- Black Torontonians report experiencing:
 - discrimination, microaggressions, and racism when accessing services
 - language barriers and misinformation
- All leading to vaccine hesitation, delayed help seeking and devastating health outcomes

Equity Works: BSTF Lessons

- Services must be supported to address systemic barriers
- Race-based data is needed to inform strategy, action, and assess quality and efficacy
- Equity efforts worked to increase vaccine uptake and should be initiated at the outset of crises
- Prioritizing racialized communities' access to services for chronic conditions can promote help-seeking and protect those at highest risk for severe illness and death
- Equity-focused approaches can mitigate the health harms of anti-Black racism and promote community well-being, not only during the pandemic but in the long term

Equity Works: BSTF Lessons

- **Black and racialized community organizations played a critical role in reducing disparities in testing and vaccination rates**
- **Culturally responsive and tailored public health messages and programming improved outcomes**
- **Future vaccine distribution/health service delivery sites need to be immediately accessible to high-density Black neighbourhoods, through mobile clinics, community centers, and partnerships with community organizations**
- **Targeted outreach and health education to Black communities must be a minimal public health expectation of future health endeavours**

Recommendations

- Increased investment in community-led research on epidemiology gaps and anti-racist health interventions that center the experiences and needs of Black communities would ensuring long-term and sustainable community engagement and socio-economic recovery
- Collaboration/partnership with Black communities as stewards in addressing health issues is essential for ensuring that interventions are culturally appropriate, community-driven, and sustainable over time.
- Equity-based data collection is crucial to understanding the pandemic's impact on Black communities, identifying areas of need, and creating targeted interventions and policies. Toronto must continue to exercise leadership in this regard as progress is lost without such data.
- Long COVID-19 must be prioritized in the 2023-24 health agenda. The city must continue to address long-term health outcomes of COVID-19 for Black Toronto communities, which has shown to have lasting effects on physical and mental health and impacts on childhood development.
- Black mental health has historically been overlooked and under-resourced and the City's support services should be continued. Wrap around community services made a huge difference during the pandemic. Creating a dedicated stream at the proposed national mental health conference summit will help raise awareness, share best practices, and build a community of support for this important issue.



**Race and health equity is
efficient and effective.**

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