



DEPUTATION

To: The Economic and Community Development Committee.
Date: April 9, 2026.
Re: Agenda Item EC27.13 – Addressing Evictions through Disaggregated Race-Based Data in Social Housing.

The Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness (TAEH) is a community-based collective impact initiative committed to ending homelessness in Toronto. Our network includes non-profit organisations that support those living with homelessness and those who are housed and who must spend a disproportionate amount of income on housing, as well as affordable and supportive housing developers, property managers, and landlords. TAEH is also the non-Indigenous Community Advisory Board to the City of Toronto on housing and homelessness.

TAEH acknowledges that the impact of housing precarity, entry into and the length of homelessness, access to shelters, and pathways into housing impact different demographic groups differently. As such, TAEH looks at these issues, and their solutions, through an equity lens, recognising that different groups need different tools and supports to achieve the same outcomes.

TAEH recognises the work already done in these fields that has established that Black households, (and particularly Black refugee households), are one demographic group that is disproportionately impacted, as a result of systemic and individual racial animus and bias, both conscious and unconscious. The recent work by Dr. Nemo Lewis is a salient example of these findings. Likewise, the Ombudsman's 2024 report on Black refugee shelter users was a wakeup call that the City itself needed to do more to counter such inequities. Most recently, TAEH has summarised both this history and some recommended solutions in the attached report and presentation, *The Intersection between Black Refugees, The Toronto Shelter System, and Transitional Housing (Outflow) Challenges*.

Accordingly, TAEH endorses the recommendations in the Report for Action for EC27.13, and advocates for an expansion of the following recommendations:

Recommendations 1,2, and 5: TAEH recommends that these be amended by adding Toronto Seniors Housing Corporation *mutatis mutandis* wherever Toronto Community Housing Corporation is referenced.

Recommendation 4: TAEH recommends clarifying that the scope of this recommendation is not confined to Toronto Community Housing and Toronto Seniors Housing renting households but rather incorporates all renting households in the City of Toronto.

TAEH recommends that the committee include an **additional recommendation** that City staff create updated information addressing anti-Black racism in housing and homelessness in Toronto and report back to the committee with recommendations on how, and to what extent, such updated information would be disseminated to targeted Black households, both homeless and renting.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter G. Martin', with a stylized, flowing script.

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**THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN BLACK REFUGEES,
THE TORONTO SHELTER SYSTEM, AND
TRANSITIONAL HOUSING (OUTFLOW)
CHALLENGES**

SOLOMON MEKUANINT

MARCH , 2026





The Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness ([TAEH](#)) is a community-based collective impact initiative of over 100 partners committed to homelessness being rare, brief, and non-recurring in Toronto. TAEH is the Reaching Home Non-Indigenous Community Advisory Board to the City of Toronto on housing and homelessness.

ABSTRACT

This paper looks at the real challenges faced by Black refugee claimants in Toronto's emergency shelter system. It focuses on why it is so difficult for many of them to move from shelters into transitional or permanent housing. Using findings from the Toronto Ombudsman's 2024 report and research by Nemoy Lewis on Black housing insecurity in Toronto, the paper shows that these challenges are not isolated. Instead, they are part of a long-standing pattern of racial inequality in housing that continues to affect Black communities.

Based on City of Toronto policy reports and council agenda items from 2024 to 2026, the paper finds that Black refugee claimants are especially harmed by anti-Black racism, strict shelter policies, a lack of transitional housing, and high housing costs driven by profit-focused landlords. As a result, shelters often become places where Black refugees remain for long periods rather than steppingstones to stable housing. The paper ends with recommendations that call for fairer policies, better use of data, and services that respond more clearly to the needs of Black refugee communities.

INTRODUCTION

Toronto's emergency shelter system has become an important first point of support for refugee claimants arriving in Canada, especially after the reopening of borders following the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of these newly arrived individuals are Black refugees from African and Caribbean countries. They are using shelters in high numbers, yet they also face some of the greatest difficulties in finding safe and stable housing once they leave the shelter system.

This paper explores how Black refugee claimants move through Toronto's shelter system and why it is so difficult for them to transition into transitional or permanent housing. By examining changes in shelter policies, conditions in the housing market, and race-based eviction data, the study shows how both past and present anti-Black racism continue to shape shelter experiences and housing outcomes. Instead of treating refugee shelter challenges as short-term emergencies, the paper places them within a longer history of housing displacement faced by Black communities in Toronto.

Toronto's shelter system has come under growing pressure as the number of refugee claimants and asylum seekers has increased. In response, the City has introduced emergency measures, policy changes, and special programs to manage this strain. However, these actions have not fully addressed the deeper inequalities faced by Black refugees. The combined impact of race, immigration status, and housing insecurity strongly shapes their experiences in shelters and limits their ability to move into stable housing.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Although the City of Toronto has formally recognized housing as a human right, many Black refugee claimants continue to face serious barriers when trying to move from shelters into transitional or permanent housing. The Toronto Ombudsman's investigation found that City decisions to restrict refugee access to base shelter beds resulted in systemic discrimination, with Black refugees from African countries being disproportionately affected (Toronto Ombudsman, 2024). Even after access to shelters was restored, the harm did not end. Many Black refugees experienced prolonged homelessness, lost important documents, suffered emotional and psychological stress, and faced delays in settlement and integration (Toronto Ombudsman, 2024).

At the same time, housing research in Toronto shows that Black households are more likely to face eviction, unstable rental conditions, and exploitation by large, profit-driven

landlords, regardless of income level (Lewis, 2025). These same housing conditions shape the experiences of Black refugee claimants as they attempt to leave shelters. Transitional housing options are limited, and access to the private rental market is often restricted by high costs and discrimination. This means the problem is not only that shelters are overcrowded, but that there are few fair and realistic pathways for Black refugee claimants to move into secure housing (Lewis, 2025).

Toronto's shelter system is also under ongoing strain due to rising demand and a lack of affordable housing. City reports have documented the growing number of refugee claimants relying on emergency shelters and the system's limited ability to support timely exits into housing (City of Toronto, 2025b). These pressures have been made worse by policy decisions, including the temporary exclusion of refugee claimants from base shelter beds, which further reduced access to safety and stability for many individuals (City of Toronto, 2024a).

Black refugee claimants face additional challenges linked to systemic racism and discrimination in both housing and employment. These barriers often lead to longer shelter stays and fewer opportunities to secure stable housing. In the past, the lack of detailed race-based data has also made it harder to clearly measure these inequities and develop effective solutions. As a result, many Black refugee claimants remain trapped in the shelter system, with limited support and few clear pathways toward safe, permanent housing (Toronto Ombudsman, 2024; Lewis, 2025).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main goal of this study is to understand why Black refugee claimants in Toronto face so many difficulties moving from emergency shelters into stable housing. It looks closely at how shelter rules, policy decisions, racial discrimination, and a lack of transitional housing combine to keep people in shelters for long periods. By examining these factors together, the study aims to show how the shelter system and the housing market work against Black refugees instead of supporting their path to stability.

Another goal of the study is to place these shelter experiences within the broader history of housing displacement faced by Black communities in Toronto. The research seeks to identify gaps in current policies and services, especially those that affect shelter exits and housing access. By doing so, the study aims to highlight where changes are needed to create fairer housing pathways and improve outcomes for Black refugee claimants.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study uses an intersectional approach to better understand the experiences of Black refugee claimants. This approach looks at how refugee status, race, and housing insecurity are connected and reinforce one another. Housing instability is not treated as a personal failure. Instead, it is understood as the result of policies, service systems, and market conditions that disadvantage Black communities. Research on Black housing in Toronto shows that profit-driven housing markets, weak tenant protections, and long-standing racial inequality all contribute to ongoing housing insecurity (Lewis, 2025).

Studies on refugee settlement in Toronto also show that housing challenges are closely tied to how social and settlement services are funded and organized, often leaving refugees with limited long-term housing options (Bachour, 2023). Additionally, the Toronto Ombudsman's investigation demonstrates how City decisions, even when framed as necessary or operational, can cause harm and deepen racial injustice for Black refugee claimants (Toronto Ombudsman, 2024).

Within this framework, the shelter system is viewed as part of a larger housing pathway. Emergency shelters, transitional housing, and permanent housing are closely connected stages within the same system. When barriers exist at any point in this pathway, especially when individuals are trying to exit shelters, the risk of continued housing instability increases. Research has shown that poor coordination between housing and settlement systems can trap refugees in cycles of temporary housing (Bachour, 2023). For Black refugee claimants in particular, these barriers often create a repeating cycle where moving into safe, stable, and permanent housing becomes extremely difficult (Lewis, 2025; Toronto Ombudsman, 2024).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing research shows that refugee housing pathways are rarely simple or straightforward. Many refugees move through a mix of emergency shelters, short-term housing, and unstable living situations before finding permanent housing. City of Toronto reports, including the Shelter Safety Action Plan and Contract Amendments Related to Lodging for Asylum Seekers and Refugees (City of Toronto, 2024b), stress the need for better safety measures, stronger coordination, and improved service delivery within shelter environments to better support people during this process.

The literature also highlights how government policies and systems play a major role in shaping housing outcomes. An investigation by Ombudsman Toronto into service disruptions in housing (City of Toronto, 2025b) points to serious gaps in accountability and service delivery, especially in multi-tenant housing. These gaps often have the greatest impact on vulnerable groups, including refugees, who rely heavily on public systems for housing support.

Emerging research highlights the importance of community-based housing models in supporting refugees to move beyond emergency shelters and into stable housing. Community-based housing emphasizes partnerships with non-profit organizations, culturally responsive services, and long-term housing supports that are better aligned with the needs of refugees. Research from Toronto Metropolitan University shows that these models can improve housing stability and reduce prolonged stays in emergency shelters, particularly for racialized and newcomer populations (Collrin & Dreher, 2024). This literature suggests that reliance on emergency shelters alone is insufficient and that stronger investment in community-based housing is necessary to support successful housing transitions for refugees.

Recent policy discussions have increasingly focused on the use of race-based data to understand and address housing inequities. Reports such as *Addressing Evictions through Disaggregated Race-Based Data in Social Housing* emphasize that collecting and analyzing this data is essential for identifying who is most at risk of housing instability (City of Toronto, 2025a; City of Toronto, 2026). This body of work shows that racialized communities, including Black residents, experience higher rates of eviction and housing insecurity, reinforcing the need for equity-focused housing policies and interventions.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative document-based research approach. It closely reviews existing reports, policies, and research rather than collecting new survey or interview data. The main sources include the Toronto Ombudsman's 2024 report on refugee access to shelters and research by Nemo Lewis on Black housing displacement in Toronto. These materials are reviewed alongside Toronto City Council agenda items from 2024 to 2026 that focus on shelter safety, refugee eligibility, eviction patterns, and housing pressures.

The analysis looks for common themes related to race, policy decisions, and housing outcomes. Special attention is given to barriers that prevent Black refugee claimants from

moving out of shelters and into stable housing. This approach helps highlight how policies and systems shape everyday experiences within the shelter system.

FINDINGS

The findings show that the challenges faced by Black refugee claimants go far beyond access to shelter beds. These challenges are deeply connected to how Toronto's housing system operates overall. Emergency shelters exist within a housing system that already limits stability and opportunity for Black communities. Because of this, changes to shelters alone are not enough to support successful exits into housing. Without addressing broader housing inequalities, barriers to leaving shelters continue to remain in place (Lewis, 2025).

The findings also show that refugee homelessness is often treated as a short-term emergency rather than a predictable result of long-standing structural problems. This makes it difficult to plan effectively for transitional housing and long-term settlement. As a result, many Black refugee claimants become stuck in the shelter system instead of being supported to move forward into stable housing (Toronto Ombudsman, 2024).

National housing research shows that transitions from emergency housing to permanent housing are often blocked by systemic barriers, including limited affordable housing, income insecurity, and inadequate support for newcomers. The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation identifies these barriers as structural rather than individual, noting that marginalized groups, including refugees, are more likely to experience prolonged housing instability due to gaps across the housing system (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation [CMHC], 2024). These findings align with the experiences of Black refugee claimants in Toronto, whose shelter stays are extended not by personal circumstance, but by a lack of clear and supported pathways into stable housing.

The Toronto Ombudsman's investigation found that the City's decision to restrict refugee claimants' access to base shelter beds amounted to systemic discrimination based on race and citizenship. Black refugees were disproportionately affected by this decision (Toronto Ombudsman, 2024). Many were forced to sleep outside or rely on overcrowded church-run shelters, which disrupted access to case management, settlement supports, and housing referrals.

Longer stays in shelters became a common outcome of these disruptions. Even after policy changes were reversed, many Black refugee claimants remained in shelters longer due to

missed housing opportunities, lost documents, and the lasting effects of trauma experienced during periods of homelessness (Toronto Ombudsman, 2024).

Transitional housing is meant to help people move from shelters into permanent housing, but access to these programs is very limited for Black refugee claimants. Many transitional housing programs require proof of income, employment history, or specific documentation that newly arrived refugees often do not yet have. Long waitlists and a shortage of available units further limit access.

Because of these barriers, Black refugee claimants stay in emergency shelters for longer periods, adding pressure to the shelter system while receiving fewer supports to stabilize their housing situations. City reports acknowledge growing challenges with shelter exits, but these issues are often framed as housing supply problems rather than equity concerns (City of Toronto, 2025b). The lack of race-based data in transitional housing systems also makes these inequities harder to identify and address.

Research shows that Black tenants in Toronto face much higher eviction risks than other groups, even in neighbourhoods with higher incomes. This pattern is driven largely by large corporate landlords and profit-focused housing practices (Lewis, 2025). For Black refugee claimants leaving shelters, this housing market creates major barriers to finding and keeping stable housing.

Many newly arrived refugees have limited credit histories and face discrimination in the private rental market. As a result, they are more likely to end up in unstable or unsafe housing, increasing the risk of losing housing and returning to shelters. This turns shelter into temporary solutions rather than permanent transitions (Lewis, 2025).

The Toronto Ombudsman's report also highlights serious problems with policy coordination, data collection, and accountability within the City's shelter response (Toronto Ombudsman, 2024). Key decisions affecting refugee shelter access were made without meaningful consultation with anti-Black racism units, housing rights experts, or refugee-serving organizations.

These administrative gaps created confusion for frontline staff and led to inconsistent decision-making across the shelter system. As a result, Black refugee claimants often faced unclear rules, delays, and unequal treatment, further limiting their ability to move out of shelters and into stable housing (Toronto Ombudsman, 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study shows that Black refugee claimants in Toronto face serious and connected challenges within the shelter and housing system. The Toronto Ombudsman's investigation found that policy decisions, such as limiting access to base shelter beds, caused real harm and had a disproportionate impact on Black refugees, especially those from African countries (Toronto Ombudsman, 2024). Poor planning, weak coordination between governments, and a lack of transparency made these harms worse.

As a result, many Black refugee claimants experienced long shelter stays or were pushed into unsafe and unstable living conditions, including homelessness and reliance on informal support networks.

The findings also show that these challenges are not only about shelter capacity. They are rooted in systemic anti-Black racism, restrictive shelter policies, and a housing market that prioritizes profit over people (Lewis, 2025). Instead of helping people move forward, the shelter system often becomes a place of long-term containment. When race-based data and equity analysis are missing from policy decisions, these patterns continue and deepen (Toronto Ombudsman, 2024). This makes it especially difficult for Black refugees to transition out of shelters and into stable housing.

Addressing shelter outflow challenges requires shifting how refugee housing is understood and addressed. Refugee homelessness should not be treated as a short-term emergency, but as a housing justice and racial equity issue. Without coordinated policies, adequate resources, and action informed by race-based data, Black refugee claimants will continue to face barriers across the housing system. Meaningful change must focus on creating fair and realistic pathways from shelter to permanent housing, supported by policies that actively address systemic inequality (Lewis, 2025; City of Toronto, 2025b).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Expanding community-based housing options is critical for improving housing outcomes for Black refugee claimants. Research shows that community-based and culturally responsive housing models provide better long-term stability than emergency shelters alone and support smoother transitions into permanent housing (Collrin & Dreher, 2024). Investing in these models would help reduce prolonged shelter stays and create more equitable housing pathways for refugees.

This study recommends expanding transitional housing options that are specifically designed for refugee claimants and that reflect the realities of newly arrived individuals. Many Black refugee claimants face barriers such as limited income, lack of employment history, and missing documentation, which current programs often fail to account for. Creating more flexible and accessible transitional housing would make it easier for people to move out of shelters and begin rebuilding their lives.

The city should also strengthen its use of race-disaggregated data across shelter outflow and housing placement systems. Collecting and using this data can help identify where Black refugee claimants are being left behind and allow the city to design more targeted and fair housing solutions. However, data alone is not enough. Stronger tenant protections and clearer regulation of large, profit-driven landlords are needed to reduce evictions and prevent people from cycling back into shelters, particularly in Black-majority communities.

All shelter and housing policy decisions should be reviewed using an anti-Black racism lens and developed in consultation with Black-led and refugee-serving organizations. These groups have direct knowledge of the challenges faced by Black refugees and should be meaningfully involved in decision-making.

In addition, better coordination between municipal, provincial, and federal governments is necessary to ensure consistent funding, clear roles, and effective implementation of housing policies. Investing in culturally responsive, community-based services will further support Black refugee claimants as they navigate the housing system and work toward long-term stability.

REFERENCES

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The Intersection of Black Refugees, the Toronto Shelter System, and Transitional Housing

Solomon Mekuanint

March 31, 2026





Introduction

- Toronto's shelter system is under pressure due to rising refugee arrivals.
- Black refugees face unique challenges due to systemic inequities and racism.
- City reports highlight issues in shelter access, transitional housing, and service quality.



Objectives

1

Examine the impact of policy and system pressures on Black refugees.

2

Identify barriers in moving from shelters to stable housing.

3

Explore anti-Black racism effects in housing access.

4

Draw conclusions for equitable policy solutions.

Problem Statement

1

Shelter capacity crisis due to refugee influx.

2

Black refugees face higher vulnerability and systemic barriers.

3

Limited transitional housing and temporary solutions cause outflow issues.

4

Service gaps and anti-Black racism exacerbate challenges.

Findings

High refugee arrivals strain shelter capacity.

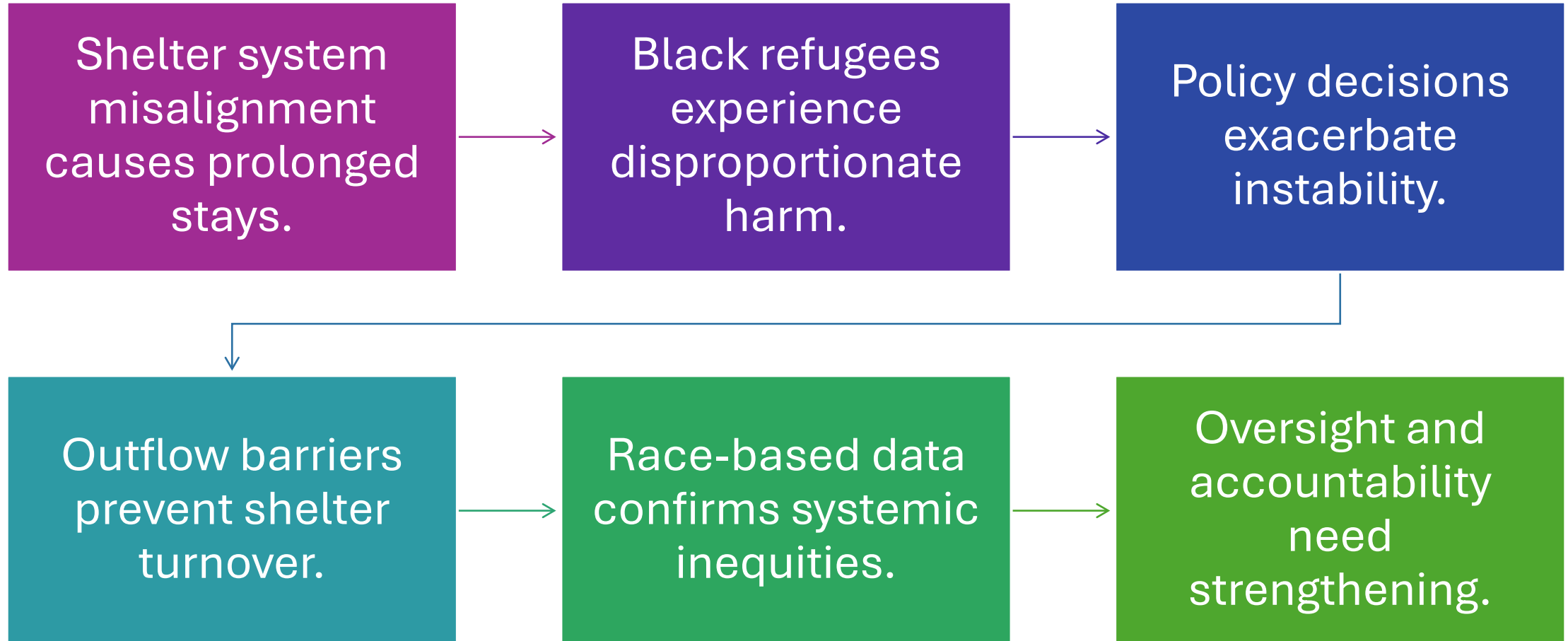
Shelters act as long-term holding spaces.

Black refugees face economic, documentation, and discrimination barriers.

Evictions disproportionately affect Black residents.

Safety and oversight in temporary housing are insufficient.

Conclusions



Recommendations

Expand

- Expand transitional and supportive housing programs.

Integrate

- Integrate Anti-Black Racism strategies in policies.

Increase

- Increase rent supplements and housing supports.

Implement

- Implement eviction prevention guided by race-based data.

Improve

- Improve coordination between shelters, housing, and immigration.

Strengthen

- Strengthen oversight in temporary housing programs.

