

Anti-Black Racism Analysis Tool for a Radically Equitable COVID-19 Response

Presented by:
The City of Toronto's
Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit

In developing **effective responses to the COVID-19 pandemic**, governments, non-profit agencies, foundations and community groups should pay particular attention to the **unique and distinct histories, experiences and needs of Black communities**.

To support community stakeholders in this regard, the City of Toronto's Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit has prepared this resource.

The COVID-19 pandemic is having a disproportionate impact on many Black communities and pervasive anti-Black racism not only exacerbates long standing issues people of African descent face in society, it also makes responding to the needs of the Black community during the pandemic more difficult. Through years of research, advocacy, and organizing, Black communities in Toronto have highlighted the impact of direct and systemic anti-Black racism on Black Torontonians and has called on policy-makers and community groups to adopt an Anti-Black Racism Analysis in developing and implementing policies, programs and practices to address the needs of Black communities and achieve transformative change.

The City of Toronto's Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit (CABR) has been leading the implementation of the Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism and has developed an Anti-Black Racism Analysis Tool for the City of Toronto to ensure municipal services, spaces and policies are fully inclusive and accessible to Black Torontonians. Because the COVID-19 pandemic has deepened the social, economic and health crisis in Toronto's Black communities, the Anti-Black Racism Analysis Tool has been adapted to serve as a resource for governments and community organizations that are committed to making their services, planning, practices and programs more responsive to the unique and specific experiences of Black communities.

ANTI-BLACK RACISM ANALYSIS FOR A RADICALLY EQUITABLE COVID-19 RESPONSE

ANTI-BLACK RACISM ANALYSIS APPLIES AN UNDERSTANDING THAT:

Anti-Black racism is rooted in historic injustices that have had a cascading impact through the past and into the present

Anti-Black racism can be:

- **Interpersonal** (as seen in day-to-day interactions between service providers and Torontonians of African descent), and/or
- **Systemic** (as seen in policies, practices and programs)

Anti-Black racism is deeply entrenched in the structures and norms of Canadian institutions, often making it difficult to detect or recognize when responses to the COVID-19 pandemic act as an expression or support the continuation of anti-Black racism in society into the present

Deeply entrenched anti-Black racism can make it difficult to realize the disproportionate impact the COVID-19 pandemic is having on Black Torontonians.

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THE ANTI-BLACK RACISM ANALYSIS TOOL OFFERS AN EQUITY APPROACH OF **TARGETED UNIVERSALISM**

This approach aims to identify and remove systemic barriers to healthcare and other social services affecting people of African descent during the COVID-19 pandemic, which ultimately serves to benefit other disadvantaged communities and the city at large.

Confronting anti-Black racism during the COVID-19 pandemic requires fundamental changes and knowledge in the way individuals and institutions interact with and provide services to Black Torontonians.

Effective, equitable and inclusive responses to the COVID-19 pandemic necessitates that all individuals and institutions utilize an Anti-Black Racism Analysis to target the removal of systemic barriers and leverage the experiences, knowledge, capacities, and talents of diverse Black Torontonians and Black organizations in shared leadership at all levels of planning, policy-making and service-delivery.

ANTI-BLACK RACISM AND HISTORICAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS DISPARITIES IN BLACK COMMUNITIES

Anti-Black racism continues to exacerbate long standing inequities in health outcomes in Black communities in Canada.

Anti-Black racism plays a key role in limiting access to healthy food, employment, healthcare, housing, education and other social services and supports that are vital to the wellbeing of Black populations in Canada. According to a 2017 study, members of Black communities in Canada have the highest odds of experiencing discrimination which is associated with chronic health conditions such as hypertension and diabetes. Anti-Black racism manifested in various ways such as frequent mistrust, overt acts of hostility, increased surveillance and other micro-aggressions, also negatively impacts the mental health of members of Black communities in Canada. Mental health stressors due to anti-Black racism can also increase the risk and severity of chronic illnesses like hypertension, stroke and heart disease faced by members of Black communities. The lack of mental health services tailored to Black communities creates greater levels of vulnerability for Black residents seeking needed support during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to deepen the social, economic and health disparities in Black communities in Toronto. Recent reporting on data from cities in the United States and the UK, show that members of Black communities are dramatically over-represented in rates of infection and death from COVID-19. In addition to the direct health impacts of the virus, long-standing structural issues such as food insecurity, over-policing, poverty, and lack of access to adequate healthcare, as well as safe and affordable housing are being heightened during the pandemic. Because of the lack of specific race-based data on the impact of COVID-19 on Black populations in Canada, it is difficult to understand the full scope of the challenges Black communities are facing during the pandemic. Given what we know about how the pandemic is disproportionately impacting Black communities in cities in other countries, and the long-standing structural challenges Black communities face in Canada, it is crucial that governments and community organizations pay particular attention to the unique and distinct needs of Black communities.

Adopting an anti-Black racism analysis can help governments and community organizations develop and implement policies, programs and practices that effectively respond to the challenges faced by Black communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

ANTI-BLACK RACISM OPERATIONAL PRINCIPALS

The following principles will guide the use of an Anti-Black Racism Analysis to **create, implement, and evaluate** COVID-19 response initiatives/work.

EXTRINSIC

When providing services or doing work from an ABR lens, it is crucial to consider **EXTRINSIC OR OUTSIDE FACTORS**

such as geographic location, income, culture, language, heritage, immigration status and other social differences and how they may impact recipients of your service.

COLLABORATIVE

**NOTHING ABOUT US,
WITHOUT US.**

The Black community is not a monolith, it is thus important to ensure that whenever reasonably possible and practical, Black people from various intersections are actively involved at all levels of decision-making and involved in the delivery of services.

INTRINSIC

Black communities have historically and continue to suffer intrinsic effects of Anti-Black Racism affecting their

**MENTAL, PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL
AND SOCIAL WELLBEING**

The response from other communities have been stereotypes and sometimes a lack of knowledge and understanding of these factors, leading to measures that aggravate the problem. For example: High levels of surveillance and over-policing. As such, any work with Black communities-even during a pandemic- must consider that Black people may require approaches that seek to address the internal without external triggers/hindrances

ACCOUNTABLE

Historically, Black communities were disenfranchised which resulted in a lack of mechanisms to hold others accountable. Accountability measures should always be in place, and include a clear decision-making process and concrete success indicators.

AUTONOMOUS

Due to the paternalistic nature of colonialism that continues to frame and underpin the way Black people are perceived and “managed”, it is important that when providing service, space is created where autonomy is encouraged, respected and not met with hostility.

TRANSPARENT

Black communities have and continue to experience our information being collected and used without our consent and to the benefit of non-Black communities. More often than not, there is a lack of clarity and understanding around intentions which can continue to marginalize Black communities.

ACCESSIBLE

When information is created or disseminated, it is often through mainstream outlets and

OFTEN DOES NOT ACCOUNT FOR THE WAY BLACK PEOPLE COMMUNICATE.

This means considerably high numbers of Black Torontonians will not receive the messages communicated through mainstream forums, or if we do, will receive the information later than the average member of the public and/or will receive the information and probably assume that it does not apply to them. We have seen this with COVID-19 messaging that is not culturally responsive to black communities.

For instance, Black communities have reported confusion over the shifting language of this period when it comes to terms like “coronavirus”, “novel coronavirus”, “COVID-19”, “physical distancing”, “social distancing”, “self-isolation”, “personal protective equipment,” and so on.

RESPONSIVE

Historically, institutions have taken an approach to working with the Black communities that reflects and/or reinforces dynamics of power that disadvantage Black people. This often lead to non-Black individuals or organizations disregarding the solutions to the issues faced by Black communities as articulated by members of members of Black communities. By assuming the needs, interests and desires of Black communities without being from those communities, we deny individuals the

AGENCY, DIGNITY AND RESPECT

of being involved in making decisions about things that impact them most immediately.

CREATIVE & OPEN

Most emergency services are not culturally safe or relevant for members of Black communities. For example, if you reside in an area with a food bank, policy states you would have to access food from this foodbank. However, it has been noted that most food banks do not provide culturally relevant food for Black communities. Therefore, it is necessary to be

**DELIBERATELY THOUGHTFUL
AND FLEXIBLE**

so people can have access to the resources and support that will *actually* help them.

SUSTAINABLE

While COVID-19 emergency measures are likely to be temporary, we know that the impact of COVID-19 will be on-going. Due to persistent systemic discrimination and structural anti-Black racism, the conditions that make Black communities vulnerable to the impacts of pandemics and other major social disruptions remain. COVID-19 response planning should take into account the ongoing

**SUPPORT AND RESOURCES THAT
WILL BE NEEDED TO REBUILD BLACK
COMMUNITIES**

in order to ensure that they are protected from the impacts of future pandemics and disasters.

Anti-Black Racism Operational Questions

ANTI-BLACK RACISM OPERATIONAL QUESTIONS

EXTRINSIC:

- Does your COVID-19 response consider extrinsic factors affecting Toronto's Black communities, such as geographic, income, culture, language, heritage and other social differences?
- Does your organization offer translation services?
- Does your organization appreciate African culture and participate in and or acknowledge African history?
- Does your organization provide transportation, understanding that income disparities could lead to failure to attend sessions due to the lack of access to affordable means of transport?
- Is your organization flexible with the timing of its events/sessions given that some Black single-parents might find it difficult to arrange childcare in order to make it to in-person or on-line meetings on time?
- Are food services providing culturally relevant food options to members of Black communities in Toronto? A study conducted by PROOF Food security and Policy shows Black households have the highest rate of food insecurity in Canada. However, providing food must be culturally relevant and safe and consider many African descendant people are lactose intolerant and have high rates of diabetes
- If providing items for hygiene, is there a consideration for the types of hygienic products Black people require? (shea butter, Black Soap, culturally specific hair care products)

INTRINSIC:

- Does your COVID-19 response ensure the intricate and holistic wellbeing of the recipient, including their mental, emotional, psychosocial and physical wellness during program/service delivery?
- Are services being provided in environments that are free from modes of surveillance and stressors that will affect the mental and physical health of members of Black communities?
- Does the service involve any form of intrusive monitoring, questioning, policing and/or enforcement that can be triggering for members of Black communities?
- Are the mental health support services culturally safe and relevant?
- Are you using or making efforts to use Black service providers?
- Does your COVID-19 response adopt a holistic approach to needs assessment by looking at the intersecting needs of recipients? For example, a housing initiative should take into consideration compounding health issues, disabilities and cultural connections (ie faith communities), when prioritizing the relocation of Black seniors.

COLLABORATIVE

- Does your COVID-19 response prioritize collaboration with Toronto's communities of African descent and include the knowledge and expertise of members of Black communities in Toronto?
- Are Black service providers, Black-serving organizations or Black clients respectfully consulted/engaged in the development or implementation of the COVID-19 pandemic response?
- Do recipients of funding have agency and reasonable autonomy in the planning or execution of their COVID-19 response work?
- Does your initiative/work take into account the historical disinvestment in Black-serving organizations and provide long term funding and/or support for the core administrative and operational functions of organizations serving Black communities in Toronto?

ACCOUNTABLE:

- Does your COVID-19 response demonstrate accountability to Toronto's communities of African descent by maintaining a clear and inclusive decision-making process and concrete success indicators?
- Does your work have performance indicators (e.g. number of clients served, frequency of service access/delivery, geographic reach of service, etc.) that are communicated to the target-communities?
- Does the initiative align with a recent needs assessment of Black communities?
- Is the initiative accountable to a methodology that applies an Afrocentric lens, ensuring that services rendered consider the social and structural determinants of health facing Black communities in Toronto?
- Does the initiative include the collection, use, and dissemination of data, including disaggregated race-based data? Is this data being used to adjust current services/programs and plan for post pandemic equity measures in service delivery? Is there adequate accessibility of the data to ensure accountability?

AUTONOMOUS:

- Does your COVID-19 response create space for Black people to remain autonomous?
- When people refuse what you may perceive to be help or assistance, are they met with hostility, shame or made to feel ungrateful?
- Does your staff have the capacity to act objectively on factors or issues affecting Black people without projecting their own sense of morality?
- Are service users able to make decisions that are informed by an ABR lens?
- Does your organization understand the history of ABR and therefore attempt to provide care in a way that acknowledges this even if that means creating all Black spaces? Such as an All Black Staff Network or Black-led, Black-facilitated programs and services?

TRANSPARENT:

- Is your COVID-19 response transparent to Torontonians of African descent, including resource and political implications?
- Does the initiative/work involve payment deferrals, stringent conditions on reallocations for funding or conditions for accessing loans/emergency funding that can have negative implications on the finances of Black communities in the future?
- Does your response communicate any terms of use/access in a clear and accessible way to recipients, including how their information (if collected) will be used or who it will be shared with?
- Does the initiative/work protect the privacy of recipients and allow for clear and active consent?

ACCESSIBLE:

- Does the COVID-19 response initiative/your work use non-academic and non-bureaucratic language and employ multimedia and alternate formats to communicate with Black Torontonians in accessible ways?
- Is information about COVID-19 or the initiative/your work communicated in the different languages and tones represented in Black communities in Toronto, and are diagrams or pictures reflective of Black people?
- Is the initiative/your work being promoted or advertised using culturally appropriate and relevant imagery?
- Do you use images of Black people or cultural references and images that resonate with Black communities?

CREATIVE AND OPEN:

- Is your COVID-19 response creative and open to change and experimentation to meet the historic, current, and emerging needs of Torontonians of African descent?
- Are you able to work outside of your normal mandate to provide emergency response services and programs catered to members of Black communities?

RESPONSIVE:

- Does your COVID-19 response include conducting ongoing checks, use continuous improvement, and ensure flexibility in response to feedback from Black communities?
- Is your initiative proactive or reactive in responding to the actual needs of Toronto's Black communities as expressed by Black communities?
- Do you intentionally create space to receive feedback or complaints?

SUSTAINABLE:

- Is your COVID-19 response sustainable over time and adaptable to the changing needs of Toronto's Black communities?
- Can your work continue beyond the response phase of the pandemic and provide ongoing service/supports during the stabilization and recovery phase?
- Is there a plan to continue the work with ongoing leadership/input from Black communities beyond the pandemic?
- Does the work include measures that will help to reduce inequalities over the immediate to long-term?
- Does the work challenge systemic anti-Black racism and anti-Black stigma facing Toronto's Black communities?

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CONTACT

For questions about this resource, or to organize learning, development and/or training sessions on how to apply the analysis discussed in this document, please feel free to contact the creator of this resource, Evelyn Amponsah of the Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit. She can be reached at evelyn.amponsah@toronto.ca.