

Dismantling Anti-Black Racism Strategy (2023–2026)

Toronto's Infant, Child, and
Youth Mental Health Sector

December 2022



We Commit to Action on Anti-Black Racism

In 2020, leaders of infant, child and youth mental health sector in the city of Toronto, shared our collective outrage and sadness at the violent incidents of anti-Black racism that have occurred in the last few weeks. The murder of George Floyd and instances of police brutality against members of Toronto's Black community have shaken our clients, families, communities and organizations. We acknowledge that these events are only the most recent manifestations of systemic anti-Black racism that has existed for generations, having devastating impact and persistently traumatizing Black communities.

These events have given us a rare moment to reflect and decide to change. As leaders, agencies, a service network and as a society, we have the responsibility to be active allies in making the changes required to create a just and equitable society.

We continue to stand firmly with the Black community and our colleagues to condemn all forms of racism. We recognize racism as a public health crisis that reveals itself in many ways: from microaggressions to physical violence to systemic perpetuation of power and privilege. These societal, structural and individual aggressions have had a significant impact on the mental health and life outcomes of Black community members.

This strategy helps us move this statement of commitment into action. This strategy serves as the sector's multi-year road map to make a measurable impact in relation to anti-Black racism. It recognizes that small, incremental steps will not be sufficient to make the system change needed. We commit to taking the bold steps needed to change the mindsets of sector staff, management, and boards of directors, and aligning our policies, programs, and practices with best practices in anti-racism and anti-oppression.

This strategy also reflects our commitment to working across sectors and in society to raise awareness of the impact of anti-Black racism on Black infants, children, youth, and families. We will support initiatives aimed at changing the systems and policies that enable anti-Black racism today, including increased accountability and transparency in systems that have historically oppressed the Black community. We are committed to collective action to address anti-Black racism in our organizations and in our city.

We call on those within Toronto's infant, child and youth mental health sector and our community partners to work with us as we embrace the urgent need for transformation. It is our duty to those harmed by anti-Black racism in the past, to those suffering in the present, and to all the Black infants, children, and youth in Toronto who have a right to a bright and safe future.



Goal

Black infants, children, and youth in Toronto have access to culturally appropriate and responsive mental health services where and when they need them.

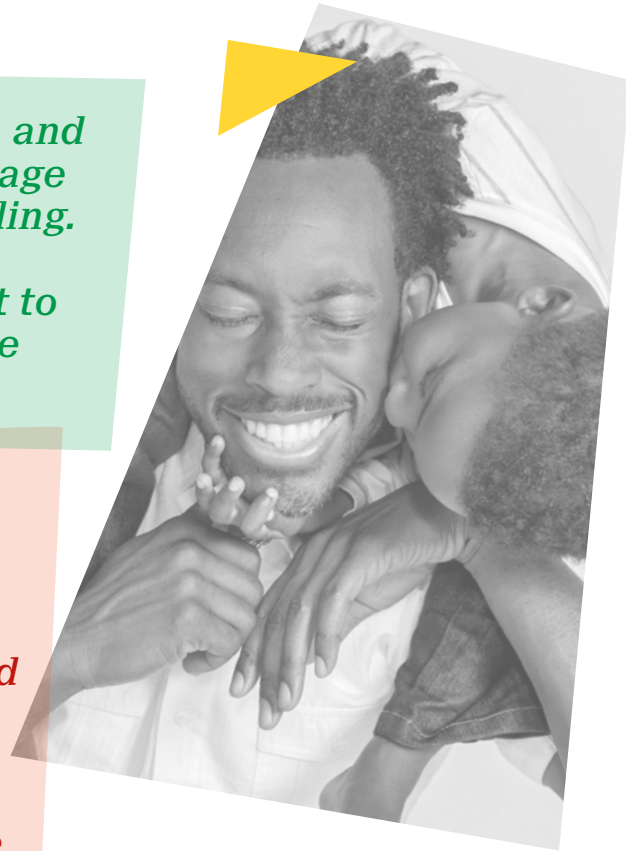
Strategic Priorities

1. Provide leadership and advocate for systems change to dismantle anti-Black racism.
2. Improve access to culturally appropriate and responsive programs and services where and when people need them.
3. Promote mental wellness and reduce stigma within Toronto's Black communities.
4. Hire and support the well-being, success, and advancement of Black staff.
5. Engage African Canadian parents/caregivers and communities.

"I am leading an organization, and not everyone is on the same page in terms of where we are heading. We need to provide a strong vision of where we want to get to and a good strategy of how we are going to get there."

"I think we need to move from this performative checkbox. We did the training. Now it is time to operationalize and embed it into the work. When I say embed it into the work, it is actually the work. That's what people need to understand. It isn't something that goes on top of what it is we do. It should be embedded and be part of what we do."

"Mental health can at times gets stuck in very traditional ways of thinking about mental health and not evolving and progressing."



Guiding Principles

These principles have guided the development of the Dismantling Anti-Black Racism Strategy (DABR) strategy and will also be used to guide its implementation:

- *Anti-Black racism impacts the lives of Black infants, children, and youth:* Anti-Black racism not only negatively impacts the mental health of Black infants, children, and youth, it also creates barriers to accessing timely and appropriate mental health services.
- *Services will be culturally appropriate and responsive:* In order to be effective, services for Black infants, children, and youth need to be culturally appropriate and responsive and delivered through an anti-racist lens.
- *Services will centre the family and its strengths:* The role and needs of parents/ caregivers and families in promoting the well-being of infants, children, and youth will be recognized and supported through a family-centred, strengths-based approach.
- *Agencies will work collaboratively:* Agencies in the sector will work collaboratively to develop strategies, share resources, and exchange learnings.
- *The sector will be accountable to the public:* Clear accountabilities for implementing the strategy and achieving the intended goals will be established.



Implementation Through a Multi-agency DABR Collective

A multi-agency DABR collective will be formed to guide the implementation of this strategy. The collaborative will create and deliver training, tools, and resources and provide ongoing guidance to ensure that the strategy is implemented and achieves the intended outcomes. The collective will inspire change, exchange knowledge, and encourage collaboration at all levels.

This collective will:

- Build agency capacity through the development and ongoing support of communities of practice (executive directors/chief executive officers, clinical supervisors, human resources) to support learning and application of knowledge in the workplace.
- Build competence, confidence, and courage among staff by providing ongoing training, tools, resources, and support.
- Support each agency to develop and implement a strategy to dismantle anti-Black racism.
- Create a knowledge exchange that will gather the best knowledge, tools, and resources available and make it accessible to staff so that it can be acted on.
- Develop performance indicators and a data collection protocol to help monitor progress in achieving the strategy's vision.
- Develop an advisory committee comprising staff and community members to guide this work.



Priorities & Actions

Strategic Priority 1: Provide leadership and advocate for systems change to dismantle anti-Black racism

MULTI-AGENCY DABR COLLECTIVE

- 1.1 Actively advocate for systems change across all sectors to dismantle anti-Black racism, address the social determinants of health, and improve access to mental health services.
- 1.2 Advocate with partners in the health care, child welfare, education, public safety, and settlement sectors to dismantle anti-Black racism.
- 1.3 Report annually to the public on plans, activities, and outcomes from implementing this strategy.



“The average age kids are in our care is 14-15. They have fourteen years of experience prior to coming through our doors and generations sometimes of trauma. I think about the Iceberg Analysis. What they experience is deep rooted; we may not be able to see it. As a system, we have to do much better with social determinants of health. When we look at equity in jobs, the basic needs, poverty, housing, etc., all of these contribute to mental health.”

Strategic Priority 2: Improve access to culturally appropriate and responsive programs and services where and when people need them

MULTI-AGENCY DABR COLLECTIVE

- 2.1 Work with partners in other sectors to improve access to early intervention and prevention programs and services that encourage and support mental well-being and positive mental health.
- 2.2 Design and make available ongoing training and education on anti-oppressive practice, culturally responsive service delivery, and anti-Black racism for board members, executive directors/chief executive officers, human resources, managers, supervisors, and employees at all agencies.
- 2.3 Identify, summarize, and share best practices and the most innovative thinking in order to develop concrete, actionable strategies for agencies and staff.

AGENCIES

- 2.4 Improve access to programs, services, treatments, and supports where and when they are needed by Black infants, children, and youth.
- 2.5 Review and redesign programs and services to ensure that they are culturally appropriate and responsive and delivered through an anti-racist lens.
- 2.6 Review and revise clinical practices to reflect current best practices in delivering care to Black infants, children, and youth.
- 2.7 Embed equity and anti-racist competencies within job descriptions and job ads, relevant to the role.
- 2.8 Embed anti-racism in day-to-day supervision of staff by supporting staff to reflect on their own biases, ask the right questions, assess systemic issues and the impact on families, and assess the language they use to document conversations and interactions with Black infants, children, youth, and their families.
- 2.9 Collect and analyze identity-based data from clients and service users to identify disparities in access to services and service outcomes and develop strategies to address any disparities identified.
- 2.10 Connect members of the Black community to other community services and supports to address the social determinants of health.

Strategic Priority 3: Promote mental wellness and reduce stigma within Toronto's Black communities

MULTI-AGENCY DABR COLLECTIVE

- 3.1 Increase the Black community's awareness of mental well-being and mental illness and reduce stigma around mental health issues in a culturally responsive manner, encouraging public understanding and help-seeking behaviours.
- 3.2 Provide information to Black parents/caregivers and families to help them know about infant, child, and youth mental health services and how to access them.

"Some of these youth don't even want to go into these agencies because they're afraid who they're going to see or who they might run into."



"One father told me that his son told him all these issues that he was having and the father felt he would "grow out of it." It seems as if he did not want to confront it and hoped that the son would get well. But in delaying and procrastinating, the son got worse. In this society, you've got to confront it very early so that the appropriate measures can be taken to give these young people some help. If it's looked after early, maybe they can get help, but not paying attention, that's when it gets worse and worse."

Strategic Priority 4: Hire and support the well-being, success, and advancement of Black staff

MULTI-AGENCY DABR COLLECTIVE

- 4.1 Develop a sector-wide Employee Resource Group to allow Black staff to gather, support each other, and heal.
- 4.2 Create a peer support model for Black staff across all agencies.
- 4.3 Develop tools and resources to support agencies to address workplace equity, diversity, and inclusion.
- 4.4 Establish mechanisms to anonymously collect information from staff to identify issues affecting Black staff and to develop strategies to address the identified issues.

AGENCIES

- 4.5 Identify and remove any barriers to the hiring and retention of Black staff.
- 4.6 Proactively hire more Black staff and support their retention and progression.
- 4.7 Foster psychologically safe working environments that are free from anti-Black racism and ensure that processes are in place to address issues when they do occur.

“Young people and families very often want to see themselves reflected in the service and those helping them.”

“We are hiring people from the communities that we serve. It means staff themselves are experiencing trauma and some of the challenges that our clients are experiencing.”

“We are sadly in need of the right resources—people who represent the community and have the skills and knowledge to be able to provide the service. Make it sustainable and inviting to staff to be part of the organization. It is not just about hiring; it is also about sustaining people; people who can work together. There is a gap when it comes to the connection to the community itself.”



Strategic Priority 5: Engage African Canadian Parents/ Caregivers and Communities

MULTI-AGENCY DABR COLLECTIVE

- 5.1 Convene an African Canadian Advisory Committee to provide input into the implementation of this strategy.
- 5.2 Create a list of resources guiding agencies on where to purchase culturally appropriate skin care, hair care, books, and toys for African Canadian children and youth, ideally from Black service providers.

AGENCIES

- 5.3 Engage in regular outreach to the African Canadian community to recruit staff, volunteers, and board members. Ensure outreach is conducted to the various African Canadian communities, including the LGBTQ2S+ community and various cultural communities.
- 5.4 Work with Black community agencies to ensure that referrals can be made to culturally appropriate wraparound services that address the various needs of African Canadian families.

