

Addressing Anti-Black Racism in Ottawa

Forum Summary Report

Executive Summary

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FOREWORD

Ottawa Local Immigration Partnership (OLIP), City for All Women Initiative (CAWI), and local Black community members came together in August 2016 to hold a forum to explore the perspectives of Ottawa residents on how anti-Black racism affects their lives. This report summarizes what we heard.

Organizations



City for All Women Initiative (CAWI), www.cawi-ivtf.org, is a partnership among women from diverse communities, community organizations, academics, and the City of Ottawa. CAWI promotes and creates systemic change, using participatory and creative processes that draw upon the strengths, cultural expression, values, and knowledge that women across diversity have to offer.

For more information on Ottawa's black communities visit Profiles on CAWI sub-site: equityandinclusion.ca.



Ottawa Local Immigration Partnership (OLIP), www.olip-plio.ca, is a multi-sectoral partnership involving 60 organizations working together to strengthen local capacity to attract, settle, and integrate immigrants. Our vision is a vibrant, prosperous, and inclusive national capital that is strengthened by the contribution of immigrants.

Equity Ottawa is a multi-sectoral partnership, co-founded by OLIP and Centretown Community Health Centre, working to build organizations' capacities for equity of immigrants and racialized people. Engaging with Ottawa's diverse communities, service providers and other stakeholders, and with Ontario Trillium Foundation support, we seek to advance equity in Ottawa through collective action.

View the complete report online at www.olip-plio.ca.

Forum Contributors, August 2016

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ottawa Local Immigration Partnership (OLIP), City for All Women Initiative (CAWI), and local Black community members came together in August 2016 at a community forum to discuss how anti-Black racism affects the lives of Ottawa's Black residents. This report summarizes what we heard.

Our purpose in documenting participants' discussions, concerns and recommendations is to support continued reflection on anti-Black racism and to contribute to a collective effort to identify priorities and actions that advance racial equity in Ottawa.

Ottawa is home to an increasing number of Black residents, who account for more than one-quarter of Ottawa's racialized population. There is strong evidence that members of Black communities in Ottawa, Ontario, and Canada face major inequities. Numerous government reports and community recommendations have articulated these inequities. On top of these generalized and at times normalized equity gaps, concerns about anti-Black racism have gained greater public attention in recent months following the visibility of protests by the Black Lives Matter movement and the recent death of Abdirahman Abdi, a 37 year old refugee from Somalia, during an arrest by Ottawa police officers.

More than 300 people participated in the Anti-Black Racism Forum, held at Ottawa City Hall. Most attendees identified as members of Ottawa's diverse Black communities. One-quarter of the participants were young people, with many being university students. With regards to their professions, participants said they worked in social and settlement services organizations, social policy institutes, the field of law, and community development initiatives or agencies. Non-Black attendees included executives of social service organizations, members of the Ottawa police, provincial and municipal government representatives, and citizens.

Through eleven small group discussions, each led by experts from Ottawa's Black communities, participants identified many shared concerns that have persisted over time. They put forward recommendations for addressing anti-Black racism in education, employment, social services (focusing on mental health and gender-based violence), policing (including courts and prisons), community and civic engagement, Islamophobia, and media representation.

Remarkably, we found that two major concerns were put forward by all of the small group discussions. These two concerns, identified in the report as overarching, are: 1) Recognition of Anti-Black racism and institutional accountability for addressing it; and 2) Effective civic engagement of Ottawa's diverse Black community members.

1. Recognition of Anti-Black Racism, Accountability, and Oversight of Institutions

Participants see key institutions as insufficiently responsive to Black community concerns. Denial of anti-Black racism affects people's ability to trust certain institutions, such as police and the justice system. Participants want institutions' leaders to understand how anti-Black racism is systemic and how it affects their access to services and employment, their treatment in the education system, their well-being, and their safety and security. Participants also want institutions to understand how gender, age, abilities, sexual orientation, and other social categories affect people's experiences of anti-Black racism.

Participants want institutions to be accountable to Black communities and the public for addressing anti-Black racism. One important recommendation that arose in multiple sessions is for institutions to collect and make public racially disaggregated data, and set performance indicators to monitor progress in addressing racism and differential outcomes along race lines.

Participants are concerned about the lack of effective oversight of key institutions, for example in law enforcement, justice, and education. The City of Ottawa, the Province of Ontario, oversight bodies, and other institutions were identified as having key roles to play in ensuring accountability for addressing anti-Black racism.

2. Effective Civic Engagement of Ottawa's Diverse Black Community

The diversity within Ottawa's Black community and related difficulties of connectivity across cultures, combined with the varied experiences of anti-Black racism linked to individuals' social locations, were raised as obstacles hindering effective engagement and effective measures to hold key institutions accountable to the community.

The significance of this over-arching concern is elevated by the fact that Black people tend to be under-represented in staff and leadership ranks of most organizations that greatly affect their lives. Thus successful civic engagement by the members of Ottawa's Black community is essential in Ottawa's strategies to counter anti-Black racism. Participants identified the need for a well-connected, well-informed, and diverse population of Black community members who can provide a common, strong voice on issues of systemic anti-Black racism and promote positive change.

The Anti-Black Racism Forum was a clear manifestation of the strong engagement of Black community members. Most participants expressed a desire to hold follow-up forums to continue meeting and sharing with a wide diversity of Black community members.

While preparing this summary report, we have learned that Black community members who did not previously know each other have come together after the Forum to create new community initiatives, such as the **Young Leaders Advisory Council**, to engage Black youth.

Summary of Forum Recommendations

1. SOCIAL SERVICES, WITH FOCUS ON MENTAL HEALTH AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Participants identified anti-Black racism, stigma and related barriers that prevent people from seeking or obtaining mental health services and services for survivors of gender-based violence. They noted that Black community members are more often frontline workers than in management, policy-making, or research.

Participants recommend that social service organizations acknowledge the impact of systemic anti-Black racism on clients and staff; address the barriers that Black community members, including those facing multiple forms of marginalization, experience; implement employment equity and anti-racism training; and improve engagement with and accountability to service users and the public.

Participants recommend that Black community members come together to hold social service organizations accountable for addressing anti-Black racism; participate in organizations' governance; create spaces for healing; and create coalitions for promoting Black people's voices and leadership.

2. EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Black students' and families' experiences in navigating Ottawa's school system indicate that systemic and individual racism are impacting the quality and outcomes of education for Black students, affecting Black youths' life outcomes, including access to higher education and employment.

For example, many Black students feel excluded or face low expectations and high dropout rates. Another concern was that Ottawa's Black population is not adequately represented in or engaged with local school systems, teaching staff, management, and elected boards.

Beyond education, Black residents face barriers to employment, including systemic racism and lack of representation at management and policy levels.

Participants recommend that school boards, trustees, and governments acknowledge and address anti-Black racism and its effects on students' well-being, academic and career prospects. Participants call for collection of disaggregated data, extension of successful equity programs, and improved engagement and support of Black communities.

Participants recommend that Black community members work across the diversity of their communities to hold school boards and the provincial government accountable for addressing anti-Black racism. They want Black communities to support members navigating the education system, provide mentorship, and learn from diverse experiences.

Participants recommend that employers address barriers and implement employment equity.

3. POLICING AND JUSTICE

Despite measures that the Ottawa Police Service (OPS) has put forward in recent years, such as the Racial Profiling Policy and the Traffic Stop Race Data Collection Project, participants expressed major concerns with policing.

These concerns include a lack of trust in police, resulting from over-policing, public denial of racism, and lack of disciplinary actions against officers who exhibit racism or discrimination. Participants want the OPS's Community Police Action Committee (COMPAC) and Youth Action Committee (YAC) to be more transparent and accountable. Participants emphasized the need for more in-depth discussions around racism and racial profiling, in addition to community engagement events such as basketball games.

Participants raised concerns about the oversight roles of the Ottawa Police Services Board and of Ontario's Special Investigations Unit.

Participants recommend that the OPS acknowledge that issues of systemic racism exist within the OPS. They want the OPS to hire and promote racialized officers, address officer discipline for racist behaviour, extend race data collection to on-foot street checks, and monitor performance on key equity measures. They also want to see improved community engagement and accountability.

Participants recommend that the Ottawa Police Services Board hold the Chief of Police and OPS accountable for equitable policing. They also want the OPS Board to improve community consultation.

Participants recommend that the Ontario Provincial Government support and fund police services to address concerns around racial profiling, recruit more racialized community members, and improve community engagement. Participants want the Government of Ontario to hold police services accountable for addressing systemic racism and racial profiling, and make the Special Investigations Unit more publicly accountable.

4. MEDIA REPRESENTATION

Participants felt that Black communities were under-represented, particularly in Francophone mainstream media, and that stories often stigmatize Black communities. Participants raised concerns about the quality of community-based media programs, noting that opportunities to explore social issues and bring diverse Black communities together were not being utilized.

Participants recommend that Radio-Canada and mainstream media acknowledge that lack of positive coverage of Black communities and lack of engagement of Black experts on stories are part of institutional anti-Black racism. They recommend that mainstream media engage communities in order to address this.

Participants recommend that Black community-based media producers network with journalists, bloggers, podcasters, and journalism students in order to improve programming, connect Ottawa's Black communities, and strengthen the community's voice to counter anti-Black racism.

Participants recommend that Black community members strategize on how to improve representation of Black communities in Ottawa media, for example by engaging the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), media ombudsmen, and the federal Minister of Heritage.

In conclusion, we believe the Ottawa Forum on Anti-Black Racism provided an important public space for giving visibility to anti-Black racism and its effects, and for putting forward ideas to address the challenges. These ideas will be of interest to the Ottawa public at large as well as the institutions named in the report, including social service providers, the Ottawa Police Service, school boards, media, the Government of Ontario, the City of Ottawa, and others.

A working group of forum organizers has taken on the tasks of informing stakeholders of the forum outcomes and furthering effective Black community building. Local institutions, leaders, and communities will need to work together to deal with the complex and historically rooted nature of anti-Black racism.

Our collective responsibility—to the Ottawa community and to future generations—is to consider and act on these recommendations and take other steps necessary to eliminate anti-Black racism and create an equitable society. Forum organizers, CAWI, OLIP, and Equity Ottawa invite others to join them in this endeavour.