

January 30, 2020

City of Toronto launches Black mental health campaign ahead of Black History Month

The City of Toronto, in collaboration with TAIBU Community Health Centre (CHC), has officially revealed the latest Toronto For All campaign focused on the negative impact that anti-Black racism has on the mental health of Black Torontonians. The campaign features three different posters that will appear in transit shelters until February 23 and will culminate with the proclamation of a Black Mental Health Day on March 2.

Anti-Black racism is a historic, pervasive, and systemic issue in Toronto – affecting the life chances of more than 400,000 people of African descent who call Toronto home. Experiencing systemic discrimination and microaggressions are social stressors that increase the risk of negative physical and mental health including anxiety, depression, suicide or suicidal thoughts, cardiovascular disease, breast cancer, high blood pressure and premature mortality.

A day dedicated to Black mental health will shed light on and encourage a deeper social commitment to addressing the profound and systemic harms of anti-Black racism on the mental health of Black Torontonians. An annual day to confront anti-Black racism's negative impact on mental health in Black communities is only the first step, but an important one to rally people to take action. This action can take many forms, for instance:

- seeking help for mental health care or encouraging someone else to do so;
- supporting your organization or institution to adopt a plan for increasing accessibility to culturally-responsive mental health supports;
- inspiring community-led activations that advance existing mental health resources within the community and acknowledge the need for more; or,
- sharing personal stories so others know that they are not alone.

This campaign is part of the Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism. Specifically, the Plan affirms that the City will "Provide public education on how anti-Black racism negatively impacts the health of people of African descent including being a trigger for mental illness". As part of the action plan, and in partnership with the Black Health Alliance, the City of Toronto is also supporting the work of Pathways to Care, a five-year project aimed at removing barriers and improving access to mental health and addiction services for Black children, youth and their families. The campaign was created in consultation with TAIBU's Community Advisory Committee.

Information and resources to educate Torontonians about the effects of anti-Black racism on mental health are available on the campaign website at <https://www.blackmentalhealthday.ca/>.

This is the ninth phase of the City's Toronto for All campaign, which has an overall goal of creating a Toronto that says no to all forms of discrimination. The previous

campaigns can be found at: <https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/get-involved/community/toronto-for-all/>. All phases have been designed to raise awareness among Toronto residents to support the campaign's goal to build an inclusive city.

Quotes:

"As the City worked to develop the Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism, I listened to stories of the racist attitudes and stereotypes that Black Torontonians face every day. Residents in our Black communities should not feel like they can't speak about their pain, or access mental health resources. Improving our mental health care resources to be more inclusive and accessible will benefit all Torontonians."

- Mayor John Tory

"Mental health and wellness is a public health priority and integral component of our overall health. We need to consider current challenges and emerging ones that our residents face, to help us to build healthier and more inclusive communities. Our role in public health is to use current evidence to help create environments and conditions that facilitate good health for all members of our community. I'm pleased that this new campaign is being launched today and I hope that it encourages discussion on the impacts of anti-black racism on mental health, and for residents to learn more about the supports and information available to help improve health in our city."

- Dr. Eileen de Villa, Toronto Medical Officer of Health

"The focus on Black mental health through this awareness campaign is a welcomed and necessary first step. We must take time to heal and recognize this current manifestation of anti-Black racism and its affects on mental health are rooted in traumatic events of slavery, colonization and continued oppression in this country and around the world. I have personally witnessed and experienced the systemic barriers anti-Black racism creates for Torontonians. Only through continued work with the community, the City and other allies will we begin to have an authentic dialogue about the issues of equity, social justice and access to mental health care."

- Liben Gebremikael, Executive Director, TAIBU Community Health Services

TAIBU CHC provides primary health care and related services for Black populations across the Greater Toronto Area as its priority population and residents of the local community of Malvern. Recognizing that systemic oppression has fostered conditions of ill-health with Black communities, TAIBU CHC strives to deliver these services through intersectional, equity based and culturally affirming practices which promote holistic wellness, health education, and prevention. TAIBU is a Kiswahili word used by well-wishers as a greeting that means "Be in good health".

Toronto is home to more than 2.9 million people whose diversity and experiences make this great city Canada's leading economic engine and one of the world's most diverse and livable cities. As the fourth largest city in North America, Toronto is a global leader in technology, finance, film, music, culture, and innovation, and consistently places at the top of international rankings due to investments championed by its government,

residents and businesses. For more information visit <http://www.toronto.ca> or follow us on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/CityofToronto>, on Instagram at <http://www.instagram.com/cityofto> or on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/cityofto>.

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