Item 5 - TCHC's Confronting Anti-Black Racism Strategy Development
TCHC February 26, 2021 Board Meeting
Report #: TCHC:2021-07
**Attachment 1**

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**Toronto
Community
Housing**

# Confronting Anti-Black Racism Strategy

**February 2021**

Anique Jordan, 2020

**We have done enough.**

We have protested, we have rallied, we have cried, we have grieved, we have made art and have offered you models of difference, we have begged and held arms, we have shown love and kindness, we have been angry, we have taught our children they are beautiful, to try and offer themselves to the world in spite of it.

You have taken our tools, our music, our rituals, our labour, yet we have written and taught and organized and prayed, we have offered evidence, facts and history and still are denied. We have given hope when we shouldn't have any left. We have done it all, and right now, for many of us, there are no words left for the exhaustion, the fear, the grief, the hurt. Our mothers have told you they are scared. We are scared.

We are tired, so tired.
**We have done enough.**

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# Land acknowledgement

We acknowledge that Toronto Community Housing is on the traditional territory of many Nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. We also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit.

We further acknowledge all Treaty peoples, including those who came here as settlers – as migrants either in this generation or in generations past – and those who came here involuntarily, particularly Africans brought here as a result of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.

This report discusses racism and our commitments to challenge anti-Black racism. We must recognize the lands from which we gather and recognize the historical impact and multi-generational effects of colonization, oppressive laws and broken treaties that have occurred here and are an ongoing dimension of our collective responsibilities. Therefore, this work is done in solidarity with First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. We also endeavour to go beyond land acknowledgments to material support and advocacy to forward Indigenous people's interests.

# Summary

**Over 600 tenants and staff contributed to this strategy's development, and their input and wisdom have guided the document to follow**.

This strategy outlines clear goals while providing actions on how to reach them, including:

- Creating conditions for the success of the Toronto Community Housing Corporation's (TCHC) Confronting Anti-Black Racism (CABR) Strategy by focusing on several interventions, including:
    - TCHC Anti-Black racism action plans
    - Cultural redress initiatives

- o Competency in an anti-Black racism analysis
- o Public engagement
- o Ethical use and collection of race-based data
- o Human resources transformation
- o Advocacy work

- Implementing an eight-point plan that places TCHC's focus on eight major outcomes:
  - o Decent and fair housing
  - o Meaningful economic investment
  - o Healthy children, youth and families
  - o Access to culturally responsive health and mental health services
  - o Community-centered safety
  - o Divesting from police culture
  - o Uplifting social support networks
  - o Addressing anti-Black racism and cultural redress

- Implementing four central recommendations that capture the overarching pieces that will allow for the CABR Strategy to be executed:
  - o Approve the Confronting Anti-Black Racism Strategy and its 8-Point Plan for implementation.
  - o Authorize the establishment of a new TCHC Centre for Advancing the Interests of Black People and staff to develop and implement the Centre.
  - o Authorize the appropriate staff to take the necessary actions to give effect to the above recommendations.
  - o Require semi-annual reporting to the TCHC Board of Directors.

We acknowledge that our work will have limitations, but through advocacy and action we will work to eliminate the barriers we face. We will support the efforts and calls for the system changes necessary to confront anti-Black racism.

The City of Toronto is mandated to confront anti-Black racism through The Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism.[i] TCHC, as an extension of the City, is implicated by this mandate, with a focus on social housing.

This document acknowledges how TCHC's inactions and actions contribute to anti-Black racism. We recognize that for us to effect change, we must begin by taking an honest look at ourselves and invest in change by locating our work in this conversation. This situational analysis report and strategy is our commitment to our Black tenants and staff. We located our inactions and actions and created a plan to move us forward.

Our goal is for the CABR strategy to capture the changes needed to systematically address the realities and experiences of anti-Black racism across TCHC, both as an employer and as a social housing provider. Real change must be realized in the experiences of Black tenants and Black staff at TCHC – this is the benchmark for success. This strategy is a reflection of the collection of the Black voices we heard. The solutions come directly from them, as they experience the reality of anti-Black racism at TCHC.

"[We must precisely name] the roots of ABR and how it intersects with income inequality, the ways in which ABR intrudes upon the daily lives of TCHC residents, a forceful naming of TCHC's culpability in aiding and abetting structural racism, and the context that informs the ABR work that is now occurring"

- Community Stakeholder

## Our commitment

**Moving forward, TCHC is committing to advance the interests of Black staff and tenants.**

By advancing Black staff and tenants' interests, we will create systems, policies, programs, and initiatives that result in better outcomes for Black people. TCHC will be an organization that proactively tackles anti-Black racism and dismantles policies, systems and procedures that reinforce it.

In recognition of and honouring the work that has been done historically and continues to be done today across Canada, our vision reflects the Anti-racism and Equity Unit's contributions in the City of Vancouver[ii] and the Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit in the City of Toronto[iii]. The vision also has been influenced by the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario[iv], the Centre for Social Innovation[v] and Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services[vi]. Finally, our vision has also been shaped by many American initiatives, including the Othering and Belonging Institute[vii] in Berkeley, California, the Race Forward: The Center for Racial Justice Innovation[viii] in Oakland, California and The Government Alliance on Race and Equity[ix].

## Our commitments to advancing the interests of Black staff and tenants

Our commitments are directly informed and inspired by the Anti-racism and Equity unit's work at the City of Vancouver.

**"We will be a leader by being a learner first:** As an institution and individuals, we will learn how anti-Black racism shapes our processes, procedures, policies, investments, and choices with openness and humility.

**We will be less defensive, more receptive:** We commit to listen receptively and actively work to advance change rather than defending or justifying the current practice.

**We will amplify, connect and prioritize:** We work to amplify the expertise that Black communities have already offered to us, connect work where appropriate, and prioritize efforts to address anti-Black racism.

**We will commit to resources and action:** We seek ongoing funding to support the necessary financial resources, dedicated staff, and integration across work plans."[x]

**We will be transparent and consistent:** We commit to regular updates on progress and engagement with communities, including:

1. A web page
2. A tenant and staff-led oversight and accountability mechanism
3. A steering committee for the strategy implementation
4. Working closely with the Black Staff Caucus
5. Ongoing public dialogue to be outlined through the strategy to address anti-Black racism

**We will "fail forward":** We acknowledge that there is a high likelihood that mistakes will be made in the course of our work. We commit to the principle of "failing forward." We will accept the premise that mistakes are inevitable, but we account for them, expect them, and hold ourselves responsible for responding to them.

# Background

**The Confronting Anti-Black Racism Strategy Team at Toronto Community Housing (TCHC) began in September of 2020. TCHC acknowledged it has failed to address the realities of anti-Black racism in its communities and organization.**

This team was created through the advocacy work that took place over the summer of 2020 from the Black staff at TCHC, who engaged in an open dialogue with the Executive Leadership Team and several Black staff in management on how the organization can commit to dismantling anti-Black racism.

We acknowledge that these conversations were inspired by and happened parallel to the Black Lives Matter movement's valiant efforts in Toronto and globally to bring awareness to the social injustices of Black people worldwide. Through staff healing circles, TCHC began its commitment to a long-term engagement in confronting anti-Black racism by creating an internal CABR Strategy team to investigate, diagnose, and prescribe solutions to address the condition of Black tenants and staff that was underpinned by anti-Black racism.

As of December 2020, the CABR Strategy Team comprised:

- Three full-time staff members: Nadia Gouveia, Director Programs and Partnerships, Evelyn Amponsah, Manager Strategy Development CABR and Safia Hirsi, Business Planner;
- Two part-time staff members: Brianna Plummer, Communications Consultant and Zainab Godwin, Community Services Coordinator; and
- Six interns: K'Mesha Maloney, Stephen Mensah, Nafisa Mohamed, Vanessa Oraekwe, Charles Ozzoude, and Natalie Redda.

The team worked to build on much of the information and insight garnered through the Black Staff Caucus-led healing sessions in the summer of 2020. One hundred Black staff from across the organization participated in the four healing circle sessions. The all-staff session brought in 88 participants, including several Black employees.

Through additional tenant and staff focus groups held from November 2020 to January 2021, the CABR Strategy team gathered strategic insights, stories, and solutions to inform a long-term, transformational strategy to confront anti-Black racism at Toronto Community Housing directly. The focus group sessions informed the CABR Strategy through an examination of tailored case studies and group dialogue. Session facilitators worked to capture the transformations tenants and staff wanted to see in TCHC to make it a place where Black tenants and staff are proud to live and work.

The focus group sessions were created for three audience groups: all-staff, Black staff and Black tenants, consisting of current and former TCHC tenants. Over 50 two-hour, small group consultations were conducted in November and December 2020, and numerous one-on-one sessions with past TCHC staff also occurred. The CABR Strategy unit provided payments to current and former TCHC tenants and Black community groups to facilitate sessions across the City of Toronto.

Throughout the focus groups, the CABR Strategy team consulted with more than 600 tenants and staff. The team also researched to understand the landscape of anti-Black racism initiatives in Canada and abroad and consulted with subject matter experts in Toronto to gather critical feedback on the work being done. Together, these conversations informed the CABR strategy.

## How to read this document

When you are reading this document, pay attention to the parts that trigger you. The feeling you may have that wants you to question what you are reading, the need to want more proof, the inclination to challenge Black people's experience or feelings to justify these experiences by blaming Black people – the guilt, the surprise, the anxiousness, and the fear. Pay attention to these feelings and before continuing to read the document, ask yourself why you are feeling these things and are these feelings helpful to improving Black people's lives. To Black readers, who are tired and frustrated over the many anti-Black racism reports, strategies, consultations, conversations, approaches, dialogues, we quote Toronto-based award-winning artist and curator Anique Jordan, who writes, "We have done enough." Anything else we do is above and beyond. We did not create the problem, and it is not ours alone to solve.

Read this document as a reflection of the 600 Black tenants and staff who participated in the consultation sessions. This is a grassroots reflection that centers on staff and tenants' qualitative experiences, which should be enough to require change. Full stop. This report is not an attempt to represent the totality of the TCHC experience. This report describes the

part of the TCHC experience that is impacted by anti-Black racism. We recognize that other people, both staff and tenants, have positive experiences that look different from what is stated. This strategy does not aim to minimize those experiences, but it seeks to ensure all tenants and staff can have those positive experiences. What is shared here is likely nothing new for many; however, we aim to connect these experiences and the outcomes that exist for Black people that interact with Toronto Community Housing.

Our goal is to ensure that our work at TCHC is in line with our mission and gets us to our vision. We asked tenants and staff to come forward to speak about anti-Black racism, and that is exactly what they did. You will get from this document the various ways anti-Black racism impacts TCHC through tenants, staff and stakeholders.

It is imperative to note that this document is long and heavy, reflecting Black people's history. The work to diagnose the issues was also heavy and taxing, and thus the work ahead to rectify the issues will be hard, heavy and taxing. The document must be read comprehensively to effectively capture the recommendations and actions necessary, as they may not be immediately easy to digest.

You might notice that the document is written in both past and present tense. This is an intentional decision to capture the Black experience's flux and capture that work has already begun. It will continue until we can guarantee better outcomes for Black people.

There are two parts to this document. Part I, which is a situational analysis, comprises a summary of what we heard from tenants and staff and our diagnosis of how anti-Black racism manifests in TCHC. Part II comprises the strategy and recommendations on how TCHC can move forward to confront anti-Black racism.

# Why an anti-Black racism strategy?

**The term anti-Black racism is defined by the City of Toronto's Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit as policies and practices that are embedded in Canadian institutions that reflect and/or reinforce prejudice, attitudes, beliefs, stereotyping and/or discrimination directed at people of African descent and is rooted in their unique history and experience of enslavement and colonization.[xi]**

The dominant negative stereotypes, attitudes and beliefs about Black people today were popularized during enslavement and used to justify and excuse the practice of anti-Black racism and they live with us today as a legacy of that time period that lasted more than two centuries.

> "Conceptualize the failure to address ABR as an existential risk to TCHC's mandate that requires profound transformation."
> -Community Stakeholder

A critical expression of anti-Black racism is the inability to see how negative ideas about Black people impact the way Black people experience life, have access to services and get treated by others. Anti-Black racism is also when Black people are blamed for the disparities their communities face instead of the systems, policies and practices being blamed for these disparities. Anti-Black racism is learned behaviour.

To understand anti-Black racism, it is important to understand that racism and racist ideas are created, mobilized and weaponized to create privilege or protect privilege. This historical and ongoing process has led to Black people being disadvantaged. This leads to anti-Black racism as learned behaviour, learned from histories and practices of generations before us.[xii]

Despite the disenfranchisement that has occurred and continues to occur because of anti-Black racism, Black communities continue to innovate and create new ways to counter systemic oppression. Black communities have been at the forefront of equity, creating safe spaces and support systems to ensure our survival. The conversations that have resulted in TCHC's

confronting anti-Black racism strategy are evidence of how Black people are committed to the difficult work of challenging organizations, speaking truth to power and holding people in power accountable. It takes a lot of courage to believe that change is possible. The Black people and activists who protest, raise issues, advocate, and complain are doing so from a place of love and have the courage to dream and work toward positive outcomes and change.

An anti-Black racism strategy at Toronto Community Housing will allow us to be intentional about acknowledging how Black people continue to be impacted by racist ideas and action, toward confronting anti-Black racism in our work, and to create safer realities in and outside of Black communities. This strategy allows TCHC to have the courage to work toward positive outcomes.

> "It is important that TCHC recognizes it operates in a critical position to ameliorate [combat] many of the stigmas surrounding Black people in the city. The brand of TCHC is [seen] as steeped in ideas of poverty, mismanagement, failure to act, laziness, disarray, financial mismanagement – countless negative, unhelpful ideas that, in a structural form, mirror how racism sees Black people." -Community Stakeholder

## Doing things differently

In the past, reports about TCHC have come from external bodies. While external feedback is important and valued, we intentionally decided it was integral to this work that this time, we do things differently. We wanted to reflect on our actions and inactions, own our stuff and be accountable. We wanted to take the time to reflect, ask questions, and meaningfully connect with tenants and staff who are impacted by anti-Black racism.

We wanted to come up with solutions by taking ownership of these matters and centering our culpability. Recognizing the experience of Black tenants

and staff is not binary, but fluid. We acknowledge that the continuum of the anti-Black racism doesn't stop at work or when you leave your home. We chose to create a strategy that takes on anti-Black racism for staff and our tenants.

First of all, we want to acknowledge the way we do our work and its impact on Black tenants and staff is disconnected from the [mission and vision of TCHC](). We want to acknowledge that our policies and procedures have made it difficult for our tenants and staff, specifically our Black tenants and staff, to feel safe, supported and valued. We want to say that our colourblind approach has not allowed us to see the impact of our work through an anti-Black racism lens. Due to our reporting relationship to the City of Toronto, our ability to be autonomous is limited. While we must work to see the ways we can do better internally, we must also negotiate external pressures in a way that does not harm our staff and tenants. Finally, we must be ready to advocate for our stakeholders and ourselves when we see the harmful impacts of requests and policies from other orders of government.

As the largest social housing provider in Canada, TCHC holds a unique position to reduce negative outcomes for Black Canadians grounded in anti-Black racism. We will do this by acknowledging and understanding how anti-Black racism operates at TCHC and beyond. We will manage anti-Black racism as a risk, see how our policies, programs and services can work to mitigate the impacts of anti-Black racism, as well as honour and advance the recommendations provided by Black tenants and staff.

# Part I

# Situational analysis

To understand the current reality of TCHC, it's important to situate it within a history of various disjointed decisions, directions and oversights made by various levels of government. These decisions individually and from an external perspective may have been seen as being in the best interest of tenants and organizational effectiveness. For example, concerns about financial oversight and accountability were addressed by moving TCHC from a decentralized model to a centralized model, unintentionally producing a move away from community development approaches to being more focused on risk. Over time, these decisions consolidated in a way that removed power away from those closest to the ground and therefore taking power away from those who most understood TCHC from a tenant perspective. In this section, you will see how this context has resulted in entrenching anti-Black racism in TCHC's operations and organizational culture.

> "Because of the chronic lack of economic opportunities, Black people are overwhelmingly the folks who will require this type of state support. TCHC is then in a unique and critical position – one unlike any other major city infrastructure – to have a massive influence on how the stigmas thrown on Black people are taken up."
> -Community Stakeholder

As a landlord, TCHC must manage risk. There are traditional risks that all landlords must manage; however, as a social housing provider, TCHC has additional risks to consider. Beyond the traditional landlord risks (e.g., slips and falls, maintenance of buildings), TCHC must also think about social and political risks, for example the effects of poverty or funding restrictions by the Federal, Provincial and Municipal governments (e.g., funding cuts can foster conditions of crime which result in unit takeovers). While we must protect property, we must also protect our staff and tenants – which includes being able to respond to and support them with the social and political issues they face. The "social" in social housing provider is not an option. The current reality of TCHC is a product of the "social" being treated

as a choice and a bonus rather than it being seen as part of our mandate. When making decisions, the condition of our buildings and the social realities of our tenants need to be seen by all of us in the social and political arena as equal priorities. The current assessments of risk are offered in a way that suggests neutrality and objectivity but these assessments are imbedded with assumptions, values and standards that are impacted by racially bias values, attitudes, beliefs, preferences and ideas. We need a critical race approach to "risk," one that moves against these assumptions, prejudices, and stereotypes.

The social realities of our tenants can be captured by the ways in which our society assumes that those who live in social housing and experience poverty are makers of their own realities. Low-income people are viewed as choosing laziness and social handouts as opposed to hard work and financial independence.

> "The handymen crew won't respect people's households or cultures. They refuse to take their shoes off when they enter our houses and then step on our prayer mats even when we tell them not to. These same staff that will disrespect people's homes then try and scare us with the threat of reporting us as difficult."
>
> -Tenant

As a social housing provider, it should be our intention to mitigate this assumption and the material effects of it, namely the stigma that paints people experiencing poverty as less than and undeserving of meaningful care. If we are to recognize the systemic oppression that has generationally placed Black communities in poverty, we have to go a step further to deviate from the narrative that demonizes and criminalizes poverty. The social aspect of how TCHC chooses to engage tenants must have a commitment to countering discrimination and unfair treatment of tenants who experience poverty. In TCHC, this work looks like reworking our policies and interpersonal interactions to mirror a practice of valuing those who have been economically undervalued, especially because of their

race. We recognize that we must center this approach. However, for this to be truly transformational there also needs to be synergy between TCHC and our municipal, provincial and federal partners.

Statistically, we know that Black people in Toronto disproportionately experience lower rates of income.[xiii] In addition to the stigmatization of people who live in poverty, Black people are also faced with racist ideas about what it means to be Black, such as being criminals, dangerous and suspicious.[xiv] Therefore, Black people including our tenants are viewed through both of these classist and racist stereotypes and the risks associated with them. These attitudes and behaviours grounded in anti-Black racism, coupled with the choices we make as a social housing landlord, means that being a "good landlord" can and often has meant being anti-Black – especially when we start to look at these decisions through an anti-Black racism analysis.

The experiences mentioned here have long been documented. Reports such as The Black Experience Project[xv], along with reports on racial profiling by the Ontario Human Rights Commission like Under Suspicion[xvi], Social Determinants and Inequities in Health for Black Canadians[xvii] by the Government of Canada, are just a few of the reports have detailed in depth the experiences of Black Canadians.

An anti-Black racism analysis asks us to consider how the history of slavery and colonialism that resulted in the disenfranchisement of Black people continues to show up in our systems, practices and behaviours today. With this analysis in mind, we begin to see and understand how what and whom we consider as risks is underpinned by anti-Blackness and how our approach to risk can have anti-Black implications. Through our consultations with staff and tenants we can conclude that the way TCHC manages risks and its approach to being a landlord has anti-Black implications for tenants and staff.

Anti-Black racism is a risk and threat that impacts how our tenants and staff experience TCHC. TCHC has failed to adequately address anti-Black racism as a threat or a risk. Instead our approach historically has been colourblind, as a result anti-Black racism is embedded throughout our organization. This results in anti-Black racism being a risk that threatens our staff, our tenants and our mandate. Due to our colourblind approach our legal responses don't consider anti-Black racism as a risk to be managed. An understanding of anti-Black racism and its detrimental impacts will mean we can develop policies and procedures that manage anti-Black racism as a risk. By doing this we advance the interests of those that anti-Black racism impacts. Historically, we have not done this and our inactions and actions have harmed Black staff and tenants.

> "My family had to move to a smaller unit because TCHC re-assessed our situation and said we're overhoused. My mom didn't report my information for years for this same reason, but once they found out they immediately took our home away. We can't afford market rent so it's a sticky situation. Right now it's 5 of us living in a two bedroom, we even have to hide sometimes because housing isn't supposed to know that me and my sister still live with my mom."
>
> -Tenant

What we heard during our consultation sessions spoke to what can happen when a risk adverse approach impacts the day-to-day experiences of tenants and staff. We heard that this approach depletes the capacity of all staff and the corporation as a whole, while also producing what one participant described as an "erosion" of skillset. The erosion of skillset affects the work of staff across the organization, from front-line staff and superintendents to business planners and managers, all the way up to the Board of Directors.

Over time, this erosion leads to a greater disconnection between those who work for TCHC and those who live in TCHC. It creates a corporate culture where people are working in a way that leads to poor outcomes in communities. People have grown used to working in a way that is disconnected from the real experiences and without a real understanding of the people they are serving. For example, multiple Muslim tenants shared stories of superintendents or contractors entering their units and stepping on prayer mats. When you believe your job is to just fix something, rather than your job being about the whole tenant experience, then a person's prayer mat is not your concern. When you think your job is only to provide livable units, you don't consider exercise rooms or afterschool programs as essential. This is illustrated when tenants in the social housing side of revitalization buildings can see their neighbours exercising inside, while they are forced to work out outside. It is by addressing this erosion of skillet that our organization can make inroads for staff to see themselves reconnect with the people who they serve.

We heard that the disconnected way in which we work, means staff do not know nor do they make it their business to know that young people trying to save for post-secondary education are strategically left off the lease because of the impacts of rent-geared to income (RGI), but then due to not being on the lease, these same young people are charged with trespassing when hanging out in the hallway of their building. But also the spaces where they could hang out, tenants are not given access to because of lack of staff and perceptions around safety and protection of property.

When TCHC believes that their responsibility is to "watch tenants" rather than *watch out for tenants,* then we fail to consider what being safe in a community means to those who live there. Being removed from our tenants means there is an unawareness that they are forced to think about scheduling their work shifts so that they don't have to come home at night and walk through a poorly lit neighbourhood feeling scared.

This feeling of fear makes it so that tenants are forced into doing safety audits of their community that end up being ignored by TCHC. The centralization of power at the top leaves the well-intentioned, but under-resourced frontline staff having to advocate for tenants without the proper resources or support to respond to their needs. Anti-Black racism manifests in the lack of data available on our tenants for staff to validate our decision making and policy choices. TCHC becomes complicit by not making it our business to know, when we have the institutional ability to learn. What we choose to know and then respond to impacts how we use our skillset. When it seems like we don't know when it is our job is to know, tenants and the public looks at the organization like TCHC doesn't know what it is doing or is incompetent. Once this happens we become more concerned with our image than our impact, resulting in communications functioning as image control rather than holistic truth telling and strategic planning being unable to guide us through policy toward our vision.

> "One time I was called racist by an employee [because] I asked to speak to a call center employee with a cultural understanding. The white women then called me racist and hung up on me."
>
> -Tenant

Finally, while issues and concerns were raised about all areas of TCHC, there were two areas that tenants and staff emphasized: the Community Safety Unit and Human Resources. It would be remiss of us to speak about the current situation without focusing on these two areas of our company. Both of these divisions are concerned with people management, CSU mainly for tenants and HR mainly for staff. Through our consultations it is evident that both of these spaces manage liability through enforcement and an adherence to policies that have created a culture of fear internally for our staff and externally for our Black tenants.

## Community Safety Unit

The Community Safety Unit is made up of special constables, parking enforcement officers, dispatchers, community safety advisors and other management and administrative staff whose responsibilities include:

- conducting daily patrols on Toronto Community Housing properties
- delivering a variety of safety programs for tenants
- ensuring the security of tenants, buildings, and events
- working in close partnership with other law enforcement agencies including the Toronto Police Service
- participating in a variety of community policing liaison committees

After the amalgamation of various public housing organizations into the Toronto Community Housing Corporation in 2002, the Community Safety Unit began its work through what was characterized as a community engagement approach. Over time, coinciding with tough on crime initiatives and efforts to address gun violence in the city, the unit moved towards a more rigid enforcement approach, including giving CSU officers special constable status.

To inform this report, we held a series of group consultation sessions with CSU officers, and one-on-one sessions with past and current CSU special constables. We also heard directly from tenants, as CSU came up consistently in almost every tenant session we held.

The evolution of CSU, including the increased hiring of ex-police officers at all levels, privileging enforcement, valuing of policing skill sets and experience and special constable status, has resulted in tenants and staff noticing and feeling the impacts of an approach that is more aligned with the Toronto Police Service. TCHC special constables have peace officer authority on Toronto Community Housing property and the ability to enforce legislation, including the *Criminal Code of Canada*, the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act*, the *Mental Health Act*, the *Liquor License Act*, the *Trespass to Property Act*, and the *Provincial Offences Act*[1] through use of force and the power of arrest.

CSU has these powers so they are able to respond to critical incidences on TCHC properties from a community safety approach and not so they can replace or replicate TPS. CSU is supposed to be an alternative option;

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[1] https://www.torontohousing.ca/careers/communitysafetyunit

however, giving them police-like power, which overshadows the community development aspects, means replicating the same historical injustices that have existed between Toronto police and Black communities.

Based on what staff and tenants shared it is clear that there is confusion about the Community Safety Unit's mandate. CSU special constables stated not only did they not see a significant difference between them and the Toronto Police Service, but tenants did not as well, naming the uniform's likeness to those of TPS as contributing to the confusion. The sessions with officers also demonstrated a lack of adequate training around cultural sensitivity, anti-Black racism, and interpersonal skills and human rights.

> "We market ourselves, like we are the police for TCHC properties. We try to have it both ways, we want to be police and then be different than police. We do everything the police do, but we don't carry guns. In some instances, the guys are saying they would like to. I don't know if we're trying to be different, because in some instances it works for us."
>
> -Staff

Tenant consultations suggest that over time, CSU's emphasis has been more on policing approaches to manage safety. Practices of de-escalation and internal conflict resolution have become less apparent in the engagement between tenants and CSU. Tenants recalled stories of CSU in its earlier years where officers would connect with youths' parents if they noticed mischievous behaviour. In contrast, they stated that the CSU of today has the reputation of "treating youth as criminals." As Black youth continue to be criminalized through unfair carding practices and the school to prison pipeline, the additive policing that is facilitated through CSU that impacts young Black tenants in TCHC is alarming.

During the course of the consultations, tenants raised many points about the kinds of changes to CSU they would consider meaningful from TCHC. A theme that continuously came up was that of building stronger ties between CSU and local communities, including:

- CSU being made up of community members only, who have lived or are currently living in TCHC
- CSU receiving sensitivity training from community members
- Community members being empowered to help select CSU special constables and being part of the disciplinary oversight process.

Tenants suggested that CSU should connect with community peacemakers before calling TPS. Tenants want the community as part of the CSU decision-making processes and for CSU to be more community friendly, through close partnerships with social workers and community organizations instead of police.

Tenants also emphasized the need for CSU to use a community-centered approach, and should truly understand the effect calling the police can have on people's lives and should only do so when absolutely necessary. Tenants expressed the need for CSU to be more engaged in the community, and work as advocates for tenants not act as enforcement. Tenants mentioned that CSU officers should have a background in social work and youth work and that the job description for community safety needs to change.

> "Someone [I know] was on curfew after being on house arrest as a minor and was caught by CSU in the elevator going home late from a friend's house. The friend lived in the same building but, he was supposed to have been in his unit earlier. So they handcuffed him and called the police before even asking his name and details around his curfew. The boys say it's clear TCHC is working with the police because there is no way the CSUs could have known about the curfew - it was just a 17-year-old Black boy in the elevator of his own building."
>
> - Tenant

Lastly, tenants spoke about the CSU budget, stating CSU should be subject to an in-depth external review of its budget and financial allocations

and the CSU's budget should reflect a commitment to confronting anti-Black racism and community development, with allocations towards community partnerships that are attuned to the defunding conversations happening locally in Toronto.

CSU special constables recounted stories of talking to parents, parents counting on them to help steer youth in the right direction, but that they were only able to do this once they established meaningful relationships with community that went beyond yearly "public relations events." Carrying groceries, walking in community, having conversations created pathways for residents to connect with CSU officers when they needed them. Officers emphasized building relationships and trust during "good times" rather than only showing up during "the bad."

These ideas can and should act as stepping-stones in the re-imaging policing conversations. They are concrete suggestions that move the conversation from imagination to reality. Adopting innovative approaches to community safety empowers tenants to engage in fostering safe spaces alongside social housing staff. Approaches that are more punitive duplicate and embed policing bodies into neighbourhoods, and as a result further criminalize tenants who are vulnerable to policing forces.

It is important to recognize that enforcement does not guarantee safety. Successful community safety strategies consistently point to more investment in young people, poverty reduction, and overall community well-being. Community safety must be looked at holistically and not replicate policing models that have been historically and are currently are being critiqued for their anti-Blackness.

A summary of frequently repeated tenant-related concerns reflected in the sessions include:

- **Enforcement** – A significant number of tenants stated CSU operates from a policing approach instead of a community development approach and contributes to the school to prison pipeline by enforcing minor infractions.

- **Similarity to the Toronto Police Service**: A significant number of tenants spoke at lengths of the likeness between TCHC's special constables and police officers and that the increase of CSU presence does not make the community feel safer.
- **"Us vs. Them" dynamics**: A significant number of tenants see special constables as a threat. All young Black men in the sessions noted that they feel targeted, mocked and unsafe in their communities. The use of the Agent of the Landlord Agreements between TCHC and TPS also fosters the "us vs. them" dynamic.

A summary of frequently repeated CSU officer concerns reflected in the sessions include:

- **"Us vs. Them" dynamics**: CSU special constables stated they feel the community does not understand their role which contributes to an "us vs. them" dynamic.  They also noted that the community sees them as police which often makes it difficult for them to do their job.
- **Lack of training and support:** CSU staff highlighted a lack of cultural sensitivity training and support, impacting their ability to effectively connect with all residents in TCHC communities.
- **The similarity to the Toronto Police Service:** CSU staff noted the similarities between them and TPS, stating that they "essentially do the same things except that CSU officers don't have guns." They also noted the uniforms look the same as TPS resulting in tenants seeing them as TPS.
- **Lack of diversity at senior levels:** Senior levels of the CSU and front-line staff comprise many ex-police officers and do not reflect the diversity of the communities they serve.

## Human Resources

Human Resources is often understood to be the space that manages the people resources needed to ensure companies can deliver their mandate. The HR division provides human resources support to all employees, including the areas of recruitment, training, and labour relations. Staff, specifically Black staff, spoke at length about how HR's policies and

procedures are deployed only for those in positions of power and influence, but not for those further from positions of power, creating a culture of fear and inequity in the organization.

> "TCHC does have policies on discrimination. It is not transparent on how the complaint will be processed which needs to change. What are the steps for employees? Policies need to be out there in the open for TCHC staff to access."
>
> -Staff

During the consultations, both Black and non-Black staff highlighted concerns about:

> "[one of] the barrier[s] to allyship in TCHC is nepotism. There are entire families that work at TCHC - husband and wife, siblings, cousins, etc […] So when there's nepotism it makes people 'untouchable', accountability is ruined and workplace culture is ruined by things like bullying."
>
> -Staff

- **A culture of fear:** Mistreatment from management and constant restructuring have contributed to a toxic culture. Although several of the employees who created this culture no longer work at TCHC, there are ongoing negative impacts on the staff that remain at TCHC.

- **Inconsistency and non-transparency of policies and procedures**: There is inconsistency in how policies and procedures are enforced. The organization has failed to communicate the use of these policies to staff.

- **Lack of trust:** Over the years, the constant changes occurring at TCHC (i.e., staff changes, executive leadership changes, organizational changes, and what some staff identified as a history and culture of patronage and nepotism within TCHC) and how HR manages these changes have contributed to the ongoing distrust between HR and staff.

The culture of fear and inequity still exists both in the behaviours of HR and in the perceptions of staff because the conditions and behaviours resulting from HR's history have not been directly addressed or unlearned. This document acknowledges the current efforts of HR to address this current reality; however, the strategy will ensure that the work is effectively accomplished by focusing on the impacts on anti-Black racism. TCHC as an employer must respond to the internal conditions that prevent staff from being able to do their best work, and are actively working to address this and other historical challenges through its current commitment to transformation and change.

## Informing narratives of anti-Black racism at TCHC

This section is a reflection of what we heard from staff and tenants. These narratives have informed our work in diagnosing the problems and developing solutions. While reading this section, images will come to mind; while seeing these images, try and see what the opposite experience would be and how we can make that opposite experience possible. This is not the opinion of a few people, these are the experiences of all of those we spoke to during the consultations.

### What we heard from Black tenants:

Being a Black tenant living in Toronto Community Housing means you are reminded daily that as a Black person, people see you as a problem. Your experience is shaped by how TCHC sees you and how the City of Toronto sees you. As a Black person living in social housing, your experiences will be impacted by the many stereotypes and assumptions about Black people that exist. The stereotypes and assumptions that say that Black people are criminals, complacent, fatherless, single moms, dangerous, dishonest and therefore undeserving. TCHC's policies that are influenced by these stereotypes will make it so that the unique

> "TCHC often treats their tenants like criminals and don't want to seem accommodating to residents because it feels like you're accommodating criminals."
>
> -Tenant

intersectional experiences of Black people are not included in the assessment of your needs.

Being a Black tenant means the biases and lack of cultural competency of staff will shape how you receive service, and if those services are not adequate, your complaints will sometimes be met with threats or consequences, that's if those complaints are heard at all. In 2018, police in Canada reported 283 incidents motivated by hatred against the Black population. This represented 36 per cent of all hate crimes targeting race or ethnicity, and 16 percent of all hate crimes in 2018,[xviii] which means being a Black tenant in TCHC there's a high chance your neighbours will use racial slurs and racially charged language towards you. There is also a chance that you will be subjected to a culture of spying by your neighbours, who will watch your movements and report you as being "suspicious." In Toronto Black people are over-policed. For Black tenants that means CSU officers or police officers independently or together work to protect property and other people from you, without offering you those same protections.

Due to systematic racism, a disproportionate number of Black Torontonians are more likely to be unemployed or under-employed. Torontonians of African descent have an unemployment rate of 13 per cent, nearly two times the provincial rate.[xix] They are also more likely to live in poverty, which means Black people will likely rely on low-income housing for safe places to live. However, being a Black TCHC tenant also means the policies of the company penalize saving money and having any increase in income you receive be stripped in additional rent and loss of subsidies. When employers see a TCHC address, they may reject your application. Your ability to gain employment can be impacted based on a charge you received because a special constable enforced a policy and charged you rather than de-escalating and supporting you.

In 2016, close to 35 per cent of Black children in Toronto were living in a low-income household, compared with close to 20 per cent of children in the rest of the population.[xx] Because of limited opportunities, racism and a general sense of hopelessness as documented in the Roots of Violence report[xxi], Black youth are more at-risk of contact with the justice system,

> "A lot of tenants are losing faith in TCHC. The physical condition of the buildings has been so dilapidated that they have to be torn down, in the process displacing residents which is an added inconvenience in their lives. Why are there no consistent repairs done and it is left to the point where the only way to fix things is through redevelopment and displacement?"
>
> -Tenant

and that involvement impacts their and their family's tenancies at TCHC. Black youth, particularly young Black boys, don't feel safe: Not only from other potential threats, but unsafe from the people who are supposedly here to keep them safe.

The vague language of the policies in place will allow you to be evicted for "anti-social" behaviour through the discretion of staff, discretion that ends up getting applied in racially biased ways. Being young, Black and male in TCHC means that the way you are treated by your communities and by staff leaves you unsupported, completely misunderstood and stereotyped. For TCHC, this means the way we do our work disproportionately harms young Black people. Being Black at TCHC means that your experience of what it means to be Black and senior, Black and queer, Black and an immigrant, Black and Muslim, Black and of different ability, are not accounted for or acknowledged when interacting with TCHC.

Black people throughout the city experience the dehumanizing impacts of anti-Black racism on transit, in the workplace, in stores, in schools, and health care settings. However, for some Black people, their homes are sites of refuge, safety, and security– a sanctuary from the damaging experiences of anti-Black racism. This is not the case for Black tenants living in TCHC. Anti-Black racism is seemingly inescapable for them.

## What we heard from Black staff:

If you are a Black employee at TCHC, you will not consistently see yourself reflected in senior management and not at all in executive leadership. If

you are in a management role, you are often seen as a leader/representative for the Black staff voice but are ill equipped to support them because the systems do not support you. You will be asked to choose between upholding and implementing policies and procedures that are harmful to people who look like you or risk losing your job. You will have to make tough decisions because you are intimately aware of the outcomes for Black people and although you want to help the tenants you work with, the system is not set up in a way that supports you to center the experiences of tenants.

> "Tenants make comments like 'you don't fight for our people' or 'you don't represent the Black community.'" They feel like the system is against them, and you're not helping us. Tenants see Black staff as a means to help them against the failing of the system. I try my best to see how I can help. It takes energy and effort. You have to be able to give the help they need, but not do it for them, or else it becomes impossible."                                    -Staff

As a Black staff person, you will be seen as a source of support for Black tenants, as kin, but if you are doing your job as is, you will be known as a "sell-out." You will not just be a staff person, you will be a Black staff person, which means you play the dual role of the Black informant. When it works for your colleagues your lived experience of blackness will be leveraged, but you will not be acknowledged for it. When it doesn't work for your colleagues, that experience will be reduced, dismissed, and invalidated. You will be asked to prove yourself more while being promoted less. You will have your hair touched, your food will be described as "interesting," told you are not like "other Black people", "you are one of the good ones", "wow, you are so articulate" and if you bring this up to HR, you will be told you are creating a hostile work environment.

You will come to work and hear your teammates talk about "single Black mothers" and "ghetto Black people" and you will wonder if they say these things about you when you're not around. Some of your colleagues will even create and advocate for policies that would make you feel like a

criminal, if you were not a staff person. When you attend events and meetings, you will be spoken to with the cloyingly sweet tones reserved for tenants from staff that rarely meet with tenants and mistake you for a tenant based solely on the fact that you are Black.

## What we heard from non-Black staff:

Being a non-Black employee at TCHC means that you will be a witness to anti-Black racism and not know how to respond. Being a non-Black employee at TCHC means that you will witness or see your colleagues experience anti-Black racism and not have the support, knowledge or language necessary to help them. You will see your colleagues marching in the streets in response to violence against Black people, and see them take that activism into the workplace, and wonder how you can help, without jeopardizing your job. It means you'll see your organization put out a public statement saying they have a "commitment to eliminating anti-Black racism and all forms of discrimination" but not put out a statement acknowledging how the work we do is also harmful to Black people or what you can and should do to be a part of the solution and not the problem.

> "What has been done historically at TCHC, is making our policies colour blind. We don't see when the policies impact different communities differently. We don't ask how these policies impact the Black tenants in a different way, through an ABR lens.
> On paper these policies look neutral, but they are not."
>
> -Staff

You will see tenants struggle, suffer, and be unable to respond with feeling, but only with a cold and cruel sense of professionalism. It means you'll see things, but never speak or react to them in ways that are meaningful. It means that you are expected to follow policies and procedures that fail to capture the realities of what tenants and staff experience at TCHC and you may experience push back for even trying to solve the problems.

As a racialized employee you can feel left out, frustrated and apathetic because you experience racism too but no one is addressing it. It means you work for a company that is in the public eye, many times for negative stories. It means you'll work for an organization that serves vulnerable, marginalized populations but operates primarily from a corporate lens that is sometimes in conflict with what is most supportive to tenants. It means that your colleagues with business and professional backgrounds are tasked with creating policies and procedures, while never meeting or working with tenants, and not seeing how these policies and procedures impact tenants.

## What we heard and learned: Understanding the collective experience of anti-Black racism

Anti-Black racism manifests in our policies and programs, interactions between tenants and staff. It is found in our offices and our communities. It directly impacts the lives of countless Black people in Toronto. There is a contradiction that exists between what being a social housing provider means and the way we do our work. This contradiction is underpinned by anti-Black racism. Anti-Black racism threatens TCHC's success and its stakeholders. The conversations on anti-Black racism have raised fundamental questions about what it means to function more as a landlord *or* a social housing provider. Our ability to act as a social housing provider has implications for anti-Black racism.  This is where the contradiction, a disconnection, between our role as a social housing provider and the way we work is created. What has become apparent is TCHC is a product of the anti-Black racism that exists in our country, province and city. Our internal response to the external reality and the way in which we work contributes to an anti-Black environment at TCHC.

Being an employee at TCHC means that this contradiction prevents us from being able to provide care and invest in the wellbeing of tenants and their communities. This contradiction leaves employees feeling unsupported in being able to address problems innovatively and confront anti-Black racism when they see it or experience it. This contradiction

leaves staff with little or no institutional support when trying to make TCHC meaningfully better for tenants and staff.

Being a Black tenant at TCHC means that this contradiction creates an environment where your opinion will never be meaningfully heard, no matter how many community consultations you attend, no matter how many staff you speak to, or how many emails you write. A small group of non-Black tenants can challenge what is agreed upon and be catered to without reflecting the TCHC tenant population. It means you will only see superficial changes to your community over the years, but never receive investments that are transformational. It means you will always feel unsupported by our organization.

> "On some level [people] benefit from the structure currently in place. [There can't be a] removal of the individual in upholding, drafting and passing these damaging policies without taking the social lens in consideration. If there is not a structural benefit to non-Black staff, at minimum they benefit by not having the discomfort of having to learn, imagine, propose something and work differently. [We can't remove] all onus from people and puts it on things – policy, company, institution – as if people do not directly inform these things."
>
> -Community Stakeholder

Being Black at TCHC means that you might be able to do good for yourself by upholding systems that are inherently anti-Black, but you will not see that same good for the Black community collectively. This is the collective experience of anti-Black racism at Toronto Community Housing. By addressing the roots of this contradiction and confronting anti-Black racism directly, our aim is that systemic change can be experienced and how TCHC operates can be transformed. By directly going after the inherent contradiction that underpins our work, we can directly impact the lives of our tenants and staff and make our organization and our City better.

# Part II: Recommendations

# Recommendations

Guided by the learnings from consulting with staff, tenants and stakeholders, we have developed a strategy that offers a way forward. This strategy allows us to mitigate and manage the risk of anti-Black racism. Dealing with anti-Black racism at TCHC requires more than teaching people how to be anti-racist, as anti-Black racism is both predictable and unpredictable, and systemic anti-Black racism intends to find ways to sustain itself. This work requires an approach that allows for both short- and long-term tactics, but also flexibility. It needs experts and a day-to-day focus on the work. It needs leadership at all levels, especially at both the grassroots and at the top. Our approach allows us to locate the roots of anti-Black racism within TCHC and work to ameliorate it.

We recommend implementing this strategy alongside the implementation of a Centre to focus on cultural reform at Toronto Community Housing. The strategy and the Centre must be implemented together as the modalities required to effectively and sustainably support TCHC toward improving outcomes for Black staff and tenants. This strategy is not fixed in time, but rather *a living document*. Our goal is to achieve the outcomes set out in the strategy, but the actions we take to get to those outcomes must be flexible and responsive to the changing realities experienced by Black TCHC tenants and staff.

Together, the strategy and the Centre will lead to skill-building, leadership development, organization and alliance-building, issue-framing, messaging, advancing solutions and transforming organizational culture. We will do this by developing pathways into racial equity work for TCHC divisions, employing systems thinkers that utilize an ABR and equity lens, and enhancing the ability to respond to issues that **require both immediate action and long-term strategic direction**.

We are asking that the Board of Directors approve the following four items:

1. Approve the Confronting Anti-Black Racism Strategy and its 8-Point Plan for implementation

2. Authorize the establishment of a new TCHC Centre for Advancing the Interests of Black People and staff to develop and implement the Centre
3. Authorize the appropriate staff to take the necessary actions to give effect to the above recommendations
4. Require semi-annual reporting to the Board of Directors

> "This strategy, it captures most of the discussions I've had with folks, beyond the CABR discussions but also in my years of living in TCHC. It's like there's finally a part of the organization that can take everyone to account for years of systemic violence that happens in our communities. I hope that it brings effective change in our communities. When I think about TCHC, I think about trauma. It makes the experience of Black people treacherous, it makes the day-to-day living painful, and we suffer. I hope the Centre will function as a healing tool for Black people who have never known peace in their life."
>
> -Tenant

# TCHC strategies for change

The strategies for change are adopted from the Vancouver strategy to confront anti-Black racism and City of Toronto's Confronting Anti-Black Racism strategy. These strategies serve as the guiding principles to assess the recommendations in the eight-point plan. The TCHC Centre to Advance the Interests of Black people will lead the organization in applying the following strategies for change:

**TCHC anti-Black racism action plans:** Holistic action plans with resources, dedicated staff, connections to leadership, and work programs integrated across departments have been identified as critical to advancing meaningful action to address anti-Black racism in TCHC policies, practices, programs, and investments.

**Cultural redress:** Cultural redress initiatives will attempt to repair the harms of systemic anti-Black exclusion, displacement, and discrimination and consider how historic and contemporary forms of anti-Black racism shape the social housing landscape.

**Competency in anti-Black racism analysis:** Understanding and incorporating an anti-Black racism analysis into TCHC's strategic priorities allows us to see how the historical and current racist experiences is crucial to addressing anti-Black inequities in revitalization, tenant engagement and programming, community economic development, violence reduction strategy, community safety, tenancy management, and capital repairs.

**Public engagement:** Recommendations include work to consistently invest in culturally relevant, socially safe design, engagement, and participatory budgeting processes led by Black tenants, that reflect diverse experiences and the spectrum of complex intersectional identities, as well as mechanisms to catalogue and connect engagement across departments.

**Human rights data:** The ethical use and collection of race-based data should be implemented to inform budget, corporate initiatives, investment

processes, human resources practices and leadership diversity, and the development and delivery of services, including tenant engagement, tenancy management, revitalization, and community economic development initiatives.

**Human resources:** ABR analysis of the current HR policies and practices (hiring, retention, promotion, performance evaluation, and workplace culture initiatives) can support the implementation of processes to address unconscious bias and systemic anti-Black racism, as well as intentional hiring and advancement opportunities for Black tenants and staff.

**Advocacy:** The use of advocacy can influence decisions by external agencies and partners that impact TCHC staff and tenants and create partnerships to ensure TCHC can support needs of tenants and staff that are beyond our scope.[xxii]

# TCHC's 8-point plan to advance the interests of Black people

The TCHC 8-point plan captures the vision and are success indicators for TCHC. Addressing each point will come in phases as the work of the Centre and TCHC evolve. The 8-point plan captures some of the priority actions, but not all of the work that will be done since our actions must and will be responsive to the needs of Black tenants and staff.

The 8-point plan is influenced by the City of Toronto's Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism that explicitly names TCHC in playing a role in confronting anti-Black racism within the wider context of the City by "improving the quality of Toronto Community Housing through a revised tenant-focused service delivery model that better serves families, youth and vulnerable tenants, including seniors, with a stable funding formula."[xxiii]

> "In terms of neighbourhood trauma, there's a constant fear in your brain in how to navigate in your neighbourhood, that feel of being unsafe, afraid of being chased, on a deep mental level. Even when you're outside your neighbourhood, you still have that engrained level of fear, of always being watchful. You're always looking to find ways to cope constantly, that's what the trauma is doing to us."
>
> -Tenant

## 1. Decent and fair housing

TCHC recognizes that the stigmatization and oppression of Black people is further compounded by their presence in social housing. As a social housing provider, TCHC mitigates the material effects of this stigmatization and oppression by providing social housing that is clean, safe and modern, through reworking policies, procedures and interpersonal interactions that mirror a practice of valuing those who have been historically undervalued because of their race.

**Within TCHC this looks like, but is not limited to:**

- Updating the culture model, all corresponding policies, and performance management tools, to reflect a commitment to advancing the interests of Black people
- Embedding anti-Black racism analysis into Operations Service Quality Indicators and the service delivery model
- Implementing ongoing strategic training and coaching, developed by subject matter experts, on anti-Black racism and anti-oppression for all staff
- Mapping and analyzing repair backlogs through an anti-Black racism analysis
- Conducting an anti-Black racism analysis on CSU's policies and practices

## 2. Meaningful economic investment

TCHC recognizes that due to systemic anti-Black racism, Black people in Toronto are more likely to experience poverty and be underrepresented in positions of decision-making and power. TCHC shifts this reality by prioritizing the attainment of meaningful economic opportunities through investments, the creation of meaningful pathways to employment and promotion, and mobilizing local resources such as people, capital, institutions and organizations for staff and tenants.

**Within TCHC this looks like, but is not limited to:**

- Developing employment and advancement opportunities for Black tenants and staff
- Using disaggregated data to intentionally recruit Black staff into underrepresented positions
- Targeted recruitment of Black vendors for all TCHC service areas
- Actively supporting the education, training and hiring of Black youth into meaningful employment opportunities through career-based mentorship programs for Black youth to support skill development and the building of professional networks
- Developing a pilot program between TCHC and Black North Initiative with learnings informing and developing into increased procurement awards for contracting businesses owned by Black people
- Developing targeted programs that focus on poverty reduction for Black tenants, (i.e., arrears forgiveness or temporary rent support programs)
- Creating financial literacy programming and pathways for tenants to achieve their financial goals
- Reintroducing pilots and programs that create opportunities for Black tenants into skilled trades and other professional industries

## 3. Healthy children, youth and families

TCHC recognizes that due to anti-Black racism, educational institutions and poverty harm Black children and youth. Black children and youth are over-represented in the child welfare system and the youth justice system. Collectively, Black families are harmed when there is a lack of investment in children and youth, and the lack of ability to protect children and youth from the impacts of anti-Black racism making them more vulnerable to negative outcomes. TCHC invests in long-term, tenant-led, sustainable programming for Black children, youth and families that will provide access and support to programs needed to create healthy and vibrant communities.

**At TCHC this looks like, but is not limited to:**

- Targeting communication to Black tenants around new opportunities available at TCHC
- Consulting with a diverse group of members from the Black community to inform an engagement strategy for Black tenants living in TCHC
- Developing a corporate-wide Black families, youth and children strategy including long-term, sustainable funding
- Creating impactful year-round programming for Black youth and children that provides clear access to recreational, educational and employment opportunities
- Strengthening the Use of Space Policy to allow spaces in communities to be more accessible to tenants

## 4. Access to culturally responsive health and mental health services

In line with Toronto Public Health, TCHC recognizes anti-Black racism as a public health crisis, reinforcing the impacts of anti-Black racism on the social determinants of health and other social inequities for Black people in Canada. Systemic discrimination within the health care system and lack of culturally sensitive services are detrimental to Black tenants and staff. TCHC uses an anti-Black racism analysis to identify and address the intersectionality of race, housing and social determinants of health and the disproportionate impacts on Black tenants and staff.

**Within TCHC this looks like, but is not limited to:**

- Reviewing the Employee and Family Assistance Program to determine its effectiveness and explore the feasibility of alternative mental health and wellness supports (e.g., healing circles, culturally relevant mental health services) that will meet staff needs to address their physical and mental health
- Partnering with Toronto Public Health and other community agencies to develop a mental health strategy for tenants and staff
- Developing a crisis communications protocol for when ABR incidents occur affecting either staff or tenants
- Using an anti-Black racism analysis to review policies and procedures that focus on social determinants of health for Black tenants and staff
- Create culturally relevant and responsive, intersectional mental health service programs for tenants, including peer-to-peer supports and family counselling

## 5. Community centered safety and wellness

TCHC recognizes that the impacts of anti-Black racism create unsafe spaces for Black tenants and staff. Due to the school to prison pipeline, it's rare that Black youth are afforded second chances and are criminalized and written off at a young age. This cycle of criminalization creates a cycle of violence and a culture of fear. Black people and communities are barred from equal access to justice and community based support. TCHC disrupts the school to prison pipeline by employing tactics that afford Black youth second chances, anticipating dangerous situations, responding to crises in a holistic and restorative way and ensuring we are not putting our staff in harm's way by expecting them to enforce policies that have anti-Black implications.

**Within TCHC this looks like, but is not limited:**

- Creating a mechanism within the Centre that acts as a safe space for Black staff and tenants experiencing ABR issues
- Conducting a review of the Violence Reduction Program's funding model and explore opportunities to fund more community initiatives
- Establishing an external investigations process for complex ABR issues
- Developing a CABR risk management strategy for TCHC and its business units
- Focusing on tenant-led safety initiatives, including the development of gun-violence reduction initiatives
- Focusing on community safety from a wellness perspective
- Exploring the impacts of environmental racism on the wellness of Black tenants
- Conducting property audits through an anti-Black racism analysis

## 6. Divesting from police culture

TCHC recognizes that the blurred lines between TPS and CSU provide an entryway for the relationship between the police, Black tenants and CSU to overlap. The historical relationship between police and Black people in Toronto therefore reflects in the relationship between Black tenants and CSU. In line with the wider calls for transformation in how policing is done and how it impacts the Black community, TCHC invests in creating a culture of policing reform within our Community Safety Unit.

**Within TCHC this looks like, but is not limited to:**

- Creating a community driven task force to do a full-scale review of the CSU
- Reviewing all current enforcement-related programs and policies in an effort to address the tensions between TCHC communities and the CSU
- Eliminating the use of Agent of the Landlord Agreements
- Create and implement a standardized staff and managerial developmental and evaluation process, with a particular focus on ABR, equity and inclusion
- Reviewing the CSU budget to reflect a commitment to the CABR strategy, a community development approach, and to be in line with current local police reform conversations
- Establishing annual training modules in the areas of ABR, anti-oppression, cultural sensitivity and mental health for CSU recruits and staff including management staff
- Establishing a CSU advisory tenant board to build relationships that foster trust and legitimacy through consistent messaging, collaborative initiatives and measured outcomes
- Implementing non-policing alternatives in two key areas, mental health and youth, through the usage of specialized community based outreach workers

- Modifying staff qualifications to align with a community engagement and development approach

## 7. Uplifting social support networks

TCHC recognizes that dominant cultural norms do not reflect Black people in all of their diversity. Structures of anti-Black racism normalize forced assimilation into Eurocentric norms that prevent Black people from connecting with one another in culturally relevant and meaningful ways. TCHC recognizes the harms that anti-Black racism creates towards the Black community and recognizes that healing from the psychological and physiological consequences of anti-Black racism must also occur collectively. The impacts of anti-Black racism are combated by investing in mutual support networks that are organized by Black communities themselves.

**Within TCHC this looks like, but is not limited to:**

- Supporting Black Staff Caucus initiatives to participate and provide input in corporate projects, including CABR and HR's diversity and inclusion initiatives
- Improving tenant engagement and leadership streams for tenants to be actively involved in shaping the social and physical transformation of their community
- Using existing and new channels to help document and track tenant-led success stories and community histories
- Developing an engagement and access to information strategy to effectively communicate with marginalized and isolated seniors
- Creating a mentorship program that prepares Black staff for promotions and leadership opportunities
- Developing and implementing intergenerational and cultural connections through Black mentorship initiatives in TCHC communities

## 8. Addressing anti-Black racism and cultural redress

Black people make up 8.5 per cent of the population of Toronto, yet 85 per cent of racist hate crimes are against Black people.[1] From microaggressions to overt forms of racism to stereotyping, anti-Black racism impacts all areas of Black people's lives. While a human rights and equity lens can serve as a way to bring Black people justice, this approach often misses the mark when it is not grounded in an anti-Black racism analysis. Black communities have long noted the ways in which they are expected to accept racism and the lack of consequences for racist behaviours. TCHC engages in cultural redress initiatives to repair the harms of systemic anti-Black exclusion, displacement, and discrimination, and develops mechanisms to repair the harms of anti-Black racism.

**Within TCHC this looks like, but is not limited to:**

- Strategic training and coaching on anti-Black racism and anti-oppression for all staff developed by subject matter experts
- Anti-Black racism, anti-oppression, anti-bias training and engagement for the current and new Board of Directors and creating opportunities for the Board to meaningfully hear from tenants
- Developing and implementing a mechanism to hold the corporation and divisions accountable in upholding CABR principles, advancing the CABR strategy, and addressing and resolving ABR issues
- Developing and implementing an anti-racism policy that allows TCHC to hold accountable and reprimand all stakeholders, including tenants, for any form of racism
- Exploring a transformative justice approach to addressing community harm
- An explicit commitment to understanding Black experiences through an intersectional lens

- Developing a crisis communications protocol for when ABR incidents occur affecting either staff or tenants
- Developing protections for whistleblowers
- Empowering the Centre to hold staff accountable through CABR-specific accountability mechanisms
- Empowering the Executive Leadership Team through training and support that allows them to build confidence and competency to be able to model and guide organizational commitment to the CABR Strategy

# The TCHC Centre for Advancing the Interests of Black People

**The Centre aims to lead sectorial change in shaping the discussion around housing policy and race.**

TCHC needs the Centre in order to drive innovative responses towards confronting anti-Black racism and all forms of discrimination and prejudice. The goal of the Centre is to transform the operations and experiences at Toronto Community Housing and lead the sector in defining the experience of social housing for all tenants. Our work is primarily concerned with the experience of anti-Black racism; however, the Centre should evolve into a space that is able to respond to all forms of racism and discrimination, including anti-Indigenous and anti-Asian racism.

The Centre will drive institutional reform through the following job functions:

- **Centre Director:** Will oversee the Centre, provide direction, visioning and leadership, report to the CEO and Board and sit as a member of the Executive Leadership Team at TCHC.
- **Policy, Planning and Coaching Consultant:** Will utilize expertise on key issues on race, racism and in particular anti-Black racism to manage, influence, develop and provide recommendations on policies and manage systemic change efforts. Will be connected to the front-line as a way to ensure a ground-up approach to their work.

Will work to address silos throughout the execution of the strategy supporting capacity building of TCHC staff. This role will aim to shift corporate culture through coaching, ensure accountability and oversight measures are in place and guide TCHC transformation by providing professional advice to divisions and staff to implement work plans.

- **Education and Advocacy Consultant:** Will educate staff and tenants about the strategy and its recommendations, empower tenants and staff to use and engage the Centre effectively, and help staff and tenants to have the language to advocate their needs.
- **Resolutions Coordinator:** Will use a human rights lens, equity lens and ABR lens to resolve tenant and staff complaints and concerns. This role will liaise with relevant partners including unions, HR and Legal Services to manage issues to the point of resolution.
- **Tenant and Staff Oversight and Advisory Board**: Will function as an external accountability mechanism to hold the Centre and TCHC to account to fulfil the mandate of the CABR strategy.

These job functions will be responsible for working with business units and tenants at TCHC to design and oversee the implementation of the strategy.

The Centre team will support TCHC to design strategy and work plans, oversee implementation of work plans, foster accountability and oversight, conduct strategic training and coaching, and lead capacity building, public

> "[TCHC] can no longer participate in the criminalization and hyper surveillance of their tenants simply because they cannot afford to live somewhere else."
>
> -Tenant

education and investigations into human rights issues through an ABR and equity lens. The team will also advocate and communicate on behalf of the strategy, and implement an oversight network made up of both tenants and staff. They will also lead in the implementation of the TCHC 8-Point Plan to advance the interests of Black tenants.

## Next steps

The strategy provides the framework upon which action can begin. In order to execute the strategy we will:

- Develop clear, concise and measurable work plans with every division
- Develop a dedicated staffing structure to establish the Centre for Advancing the Interests of Black People
- Continue and maintain anti-Black racism training amongst all levels of staff
- Report on progress bi-annually to the Board of Directors, commencing in the third quarter of 2021
- Establish an accountability oversight group, composed of Black tenants, staff and service providers

## Conclusion

As we move forward, our inspiration as a social housing provider must be guided by the understanding that despite your social location, you are worth meaningful housing and safety. This work requires us to care about the people that society tells us not to care about, but we cannot do this if we have consciously or subconsciously bought into the idea that these people, Black people, Indigenous people, immigrants, poor people, queer people, people living with disabilities, people living with mental health issues, are a burden on our society.

This narrative exists within broader society and inevitably shows up at TCHC. When we put policies over people, procedure over well-being and liability over advocacy, we harm our staff and our tenants.  When we see our tenants as risks, or see fixing a toilet as a bigger risk or responsibility than providing safe places for children to play, rather than seeing the barriers and challenges they face as risks too, we move away from being a social housing provider. Being a social housing provider requires us to see

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that we are just as responsible for community wellbeing as we are for fixing buildings, and that requires us to truly see all of our tenants.

In organizational change, there is a saying, "culture trumps strategy." Policy implemented through phases and with iterations can change culture. The core of our work is to transform the operating culture of TCHC in order for the changes we set forth in this strategy not to lose momentum and to be wholeheartedly taken up and adopted by staff and departments.

This strategy is the first step in confronting anti-Black racism at Toronto Community Housing. It cannot and will not represent the totality of action required to dismantle anti-Black racism, but it commits us to action and moving forward. True success will require collaboration, learning, growing and evolving. Together we will build an organization that will honour the staff and tenants upon which it relies. Anti-Black racism will not be solved in a year or potentially in a generation, but inaction is equivalent to complicity. TCHC will no longer remain silent, we are choosing to be a part of the solution.

## Acknowledgements

To the Black Staff Caucus who have been longtime champions of supporting Black staff and tenants, including inviting Black staff leadership to the discussion of addressing anti-Black racism at TCHC, we acknowledge and thank you for your continuous work over the years. To the Black staff in management who escalated this very difficult conversation, who used your positions in leadership to make this conversation happen, we thank you and acknowledge your courage, leadership and creativity. Thank you for trusting us to take this important work on and make this vision come to life.

To the Black tenant leaders and the communities who have repeatedly engaged with TCHC to make us listen, know that through this strategy, we aim for your stories to not just be heard, but to be responded to in a way that reflects your realities and concerns.

We would also like to thank all the non-Black staff and tenants who supported us throughout the creation of this document. We recognize that it will require many voices around the table to address Anti-Black racism, and thank you for your support in moments that were not always easy.

Finally, to the countless other Black tenants and staff that have been fighting to be heard for years, it is your stories of courage and resiliency upon which we built this strategy. Without your ongoing participation and feedback, the strategy would not be reflective of the experiences of Black staff and tenants in Toronto Community Housing.

# Glossary

**Anti-Black racism:**

"Anti-Black racism is defined here as policies and practices rooted in Canadian institutions that mirror and reinforce beliefs, attitudes, prejudice, stereotyping and/or discrimination towards people of Black-African descent. The term "anti-Black racism" was first expressed by Dr. Akua Benjamin, a Ryerson Social Work Professor. It seeks to highlight the unique nature of systemic racism on Black-Canadians and the history as well as experiences of slavery and colonization of people of Black-African descent in Canada."[xxiv]

**Community development approach:**

"Community development is a process where community members are supported by agencies to identify and take collective action on issues which are important to them. Community development empowers community members and creates stronger and more connected communities. Community development is a holistic approach grounded in principles of empowerment, human rights, inclusion, social justice, self-determination and collective action (Kenny, 2007). Community development considers community members to be experts in their lives and communities, and values community knowledge and wisdom. Community development programs are led by community members at every stage – from deciding on issues to selecting and implementing actions, and evaluation. Community development has an explicit focus on the redistribution of power to address the causes of inequality and disadvantage."[xxv]

**Cultural redress:**

"Redress can be used as both a noun and a verb. In the noun form, it is the compensation for setting something right. As a verb it means to correct, right a wrong, or make restitution for something.[xxvi]

**Culturally responsive:**

"Cultural responsiveness requires individuals be cultural competent. This competency is having an awareness of one's own cultural identity and views about difference, and the ability to learn and build on the varying cultural and community norms. It is the ability to understand the within-group differences that make each [person] unique, while celebrating the between-group variations that make our [world] a tapestry."[xxvii]

**Experiencing poverty:**

"Poverty has many faces, changing from place to place and across time, and has been described in many ways.  Most often, poverty is a situation people want to escape. So poverty is a call to action – for the poor and the wealthy alike – a call to change the world so that many more may have enough to eat, adequate shelter, access to education and health, protection from violence, and a voice in what happens in their communities."[xxviii]

**Risk management approach:**

"Risk management is the process of identifying, assessing and controlling threats to an organization's capital and earnings. These threats, or risks, could stem from a wide variety of sources, including financial uncertainty, legal liabilities, strategic management errors, accidents and natural disasters […] Every business and organization faces the risk of unexpected, harmful events that can cost the company money or cause it to permanently close. Risk management allows organizations to attempt to prepare for the unexpected by minimizing risks and extra costs before they happen."[xxix]

**School to prison pipeline:**

"The school to prison pipeline has been used to refer to the disciplinary policies and patterns of socialization utilized within school settings to differentially target minority students (particularly young African-Canadian males) away from educational success, and towards incarceration. School disciplinary polices also discriminate against African-Canadian students and help to form the school to prison pipeline. […] Zero tolerance policies have emerged in this new policy environment both within Canadian school

systems and within the criminal justice system. These policies echo political rhetoric of being "tough on crime" by outlining that some behaviour is not acceptable (and even criminal). As a result of these policies, rather than giving students an opportunity to learn from their mistakes, the outcome is to punish and criminalize their actions, thereby limiting further educational opportunities."[xxx]

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