

Health Equity Charter – Ottawa Health Team - Équipe Santé Ottawa

Background

The Ottawa Health Team - Équipe Santé Ottawa recognizes that people in our society face oppressive experiences because of individual and systemic unequal power related to Indigenous identity, race, colour, culture, ethnicity, language preference and linguistic identity¹, ability, socio-economic class, age (children, youth, seniors), ancestry, nationality, place of birth, religion or faith or other forms of consciously held beliefs, sex, gender (including gender identity and expression), sexuality (including sexual orientation), family status (including marital status), and residency/migratory status. Unequal power dynamics create structures, policies and programs that result in health inequalities and health disparities.

We acknowledge that anti-Indigenous discrimination and racism, both explicit and implicit as well as other systems of oppression, including colonialism, sexism, heterosexism, cissexism, ableism, classism, ageism, and religious persecution, are evident in the health care system and our communities. Individuals may have multiple identities and experience numerous forms of oppression. Colonialization in all forms resulting in oppression and racism needs to be dismantled across institutions, and within the communities, we work with.

Purpose

The Ottawa Health Team - Équipe Santé envisions a redesigned health system in which people are healthy, well and supported to live in the community. The Ottawa Health Team - Équipe Santé Health Equity Charter will facilitate shared responsibility for promoting health equity as the foundation for this health system transformation. In order to fight inequities and oppression, it is necessary to examine structures, policies, and programs, and work to ensure that systems are fair and equitable for everyone.

The Health Equity Charter is one of the foundational documents for the Ottawa Health Team - Équipe Santé Ottawa and the endorsement of the Charter is required of all partners.

Intent

The Ottawa Health Team - Équipe Santé Ottawa and partners will embed equity in organizational cultures, governance, human resources, service delivery and community engagement.

¹ Réseau Collecte des données linguistiques, Réseau des services de santé en français de l'Est de l'Ontario Guiding

Guiding Principles ²

1. **Systemic focus:** We are focusing on proactively removing systemic barriers and root causes of racial and other inequities.
2. **Intersectional approach:** We recognize that working across sectors — not in silos — is required to address systemic inequities, oppression, and racism.
3. **Holistic:** We recognize everyone benefits from removal of systemic barriers faced by the most vulnerable communities. Reducing barriers and disparities leads to a better Ottawa for everyone.
4. **Distinctness and intersectionality of racism:** We acknowledge racism is experienced differently by various groups, and within groups along intersectional lines, including gender identity, creed, class, income, sexual orientation, history of colonization. Oppression does not stand still – it is dynamic and everchanging.
5. **Inclusive:** Those facing inequities must be meaningfully engaged. Their perspectives and guidance inform the strategy and the Ottawa Health Team - Équipe Santé Ottawa decision-making. We recognize that Francophones frequently do not have access to linguistically appropriate services. We respect the unique identities of First Nation, Inuit and Métis peoples and the need for a distinct approach to achieve health equity for Indigenous peoples. We also recognize the disproportionate impact of racism on racialized communities.
6. **Transparent, evidence-based approach:** Our approach will be evidence-based and driven by measurable goals and outcomes and disaggregated data collection, use and disclosure.
7. **Sustainability:** We are setting the foundation for long-term health equity and anti-racism, anti-oppression efforts.
8. **Alignment:** Our work will be strongly aligned with Ontario Health’s Equity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism Framework.

Objectives ³

The following long-term objectives are the basis for the development of strategies and actions.

1. Build health equity capacity within our organizations and communities including knowledge sharing and leadership to acknowledge and address institutional racism and bias.
2. Develop and use knowledge and evidence related to health, health equity, and the social determinants of health, including linguistic identity and race-based data disaggregated data to improve decision making and allocate adequate resources to address systemic racism, structural inequities and improve health outcomes
3. Address public awareness, attitudes to increase understanding of inequities, including racism, and grow connections among residents.
4. Utilize the leadership, assets, and knowledge of racialized and other oppressed communities to increase engagement with these communities.

Accountability

Accountability mechanisms comprise three basic interacting components: shared goals and commitments; ways of measuring and understanding progress; and means of supporting action for change. These mechanisms will be developed in the first year after the Health Equity Charter is adopted and progress reported annually.

² Adapted Ontario Anti-Racism Strategy <https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontarios-anti-racism-strategic-plan#section->

³ Adapted from the Equity Ottawa Collection Action Plan – Ottawa Local Immigration Partnership (OLIP) <https://www.ontariohealth.ca/sites/ontariohealth/files/2020-12/Equity%20Framework.pdf>

Glossary ⁴

Systematic Racism

A system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequity. Systemic racism is not something that a few people or institutions choose to practice. Instead, it has been a feature of the social, economic, and political systems in which we all exist. City of Ottawa Anti-Racism Secretariat

Anti- Racism

Anti-racism is the active process of identifying and eliminating racism by changing systems, organizational structures, policies and practices and attitudes, so that power is redistributed and shared equitably (NAC International Perspectives: Women and Global Solidarity).

Health Equity

Health equity is created when individuals have the fair opportunity to reach their fullest health potential. Achieving health equity requires reducing unnecessary and avoidable differences that are unfair and unjust. Many causes of health inequities relate to social and environmental factors including income, social status, race, gender, education, and physical environment. (Public Health Ontario)

Health inequalities and health disparities

Health inequalities and health disparities refer to differences in health status experienced by different groups in society, regardless of their cause. The term ‘health inequalities’ is often used when referring to measured differences in health status.

Health Inequities refer to those health inequalities which are avoidable or remediable differences in health among populations or groups defined socially, economically, demographically, or geographically.

Anti-Black racism

Prejudice, attitudes, beliefs, stereotyping and discrimination that is directed at people of African descent and is rooted in their unique history and experience of enslavement. Anti-Black racism is deeply entrenched in Canadian institutions, policies, and practices, such that anti-Black racism is either functionally normalized or rendered invisible to the larger white society. Anti-Black racism is manifested in the legacy of the current social, economic, and political marginalization of African Canadians in society such as the lack of opportunities, lower socio-economic status, higher unemployment, significant poverty rates and overrepresentation in the criminal justice system.

Antisemitism

Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.

Colonialism

A practice of domination, which involves the subjugation of one people to another. Settler colonialism — such as in the case of Canada — is the unique process where the colonizing population does not leave the territory, asserts ongoing sovereignty to the land, actively seeks to assimilate the Indigenous populations and extinguish their cultures, traditions, and ties to the land.

⁴ Building a Foundation for Change: Canada’s Anti-Racism Strategy 2019–2022. Unless otherwise stated.

Disaggregated data

In the context of race-based data, this means breaking down composite ("aggregate") categories such as "visible minority" into component parts, such as Black, Chinese, Arab etc.

Discrimination

Treating someone unfairly by either imposing a burden on them, or denying them a privilege, benefit or opportunity enjoyed by others, because of their race, citizenship, family status, disability, sex, or other personal characteristics.

Equity

Fairness, impartiality, even-handedness. A distinct process of recognizing differences within groups of individuals and using this understanding to achieve substantive equality in all aspects of a person's life.

Evidence-Based

Evidence-based means making decisions based on the best available research and is informed by the experience and expertise of practitioners, communities, and those with lived experience. It may also include the knowledge of subject matter experts.

Francophones

The Inclusive Definition of Francophone (IDF) defines Francophones as "persons whose mother tongue is French, plus those whose mother tongue is neither French nor English but have a particular knowledge of French as an Official Language and use French at home." (Government of Ontario)

Homophobia

Homophobia is fear, hatred, discomfort with, or mistrust of people who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Homophobia perpetuates violence, discrimination and stigma against people based on their sexual orientation.

Intersectionality

Acknowledges the ways in which people's lives are shaped by their multiple and overlapping identities and social locations, which, together, can produce a unique and distinct experience for that individual or group, for example, creating additional barriers or opportunities

Islamophobia

Includes racism, stereotypes, prejudice, fear or acts of hostility directed towards individual Muslims or followers of Islam in general. In addition to individual acts of intolerance and racial profiling, Islamophobia can lead to viewing and treating Muslims as a greater security threat on an institutional, systemic, and societal level.

Oppression

Oppression refers to the use of power by one group to disempower, marginalize, or exert dominance over another group. Dominant groups can maintain their status, privilege, and power over others both intentionally and unintentionally as well as in obvious and subtle ways. Acts of oppression can become institutionalized or systemic, thus becoming hidden and seemingly 'normal'. They can also play out on the personal and interpersonal levels, influencing individual values, beliefs, and actions as well as interactions between people.

Race

Race is a "social construct." This means that society forms ideas of race based on geographic, historical, political, economic, social, and cultural factors, as well as physical traits, even though none of these can legitimately be used to classify groups of people.

Racism

Racism is any individual action, or institutional practice which treats people differently because of their colour or ethnicity. This distinction is often used to justify discrimination.

Transparency

Transparency is the process of being open, honest, and straightforward about the operation of an organization. Clear communications are one of the most important hallmarks of transparency and we will strive to provide the public with information in a reliable, and understandable manner.

Sustainability

Sustainable health and health care is the appropriate balance between the cultural, social, and economic environments designed to meet the health and health care needs of individuals and the population (from health promotion and disease prevention, to restoring health and supporting end of life) and that leads to optimal health and health care outcomes without compromising the outcomes and ability of future generations to meet their own health and health care needs. (Conference Board of Canada)

Systemic or institutional racism

Consists of patterns of behaviour, policies or practices that are part of the social or administrative structures of an organization, and which create or perpetuate a position of relative disadvantage for racialized persons. These appear neutral on the surface but, nevertheless, have an exclusionary impact on racialized persons

Transphobia

Transphobia is discrimination against trans and gender-diverse people, on the basis of gender identity and gender expression. Transphobia is a systemic issue, meaning that it is embedded in social, political, and economic institutions, as well as throughout communities and cultures.