

**Rest is
Black Liberation**

ACT Now!

2ND NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
BLACK MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING



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Organized by:
 **TAIBU** COMMUNITY
HEALTH CENTRE

CONFERENCE REPORT

Sponsored by:



Public Health
Agency of Canada



Network for the Advancement
of Black Communities



Bell
Let's Talk

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Message from the CEO

On behalf of the Board of Directors, TAIBU's staff, the community we serve, and the ACT Now! conference planning committee, I am very excited to see this conference happen again. The ACT Now! conference was initiated in 2023 with the aim of creating a national dialogue around the mental health of Black Canadians thereby establishing a foundational network as well as building the capacity of organizations and individuals to respond to the evolving and complex needs of the Black communities across Canada.



TAIBU is so privileged to host the 2nd annual national conference on Black mental health to build on the conversations that was initiated last year. I have no doubt that the conversation has immensely contributed to our collaborative and sustainable efforts of promoting Black mental health and well-being and addressing systemic anti-Black racism. I would like to thank all who have been involved in putting the conference together and making it happen, including the planning committee, the collaborators, the advisory committee, our funders, and all stakeholders across the country.

Thank you. We did it again! We came together again, We had difficult but important conversation, we experienced rest together and we planned together. I look forward to next year's conference growing bigger, bolder, and more resonating. In the meantime, let us find REST!

REST is liberation!

Liben Gebremikael

Liben Gebremikael, CEO
TAIBU Community Health Centre

Background

TAIBU Community Health Centre hosted the second national conference on Black Mental Health and Wellbeing entitled “ACT Now! 2nd National Conference on Black Mental Health and Wellbeing” under the theme **Rest is Black Liberation**. The ACT Now! Black Mental Health and Wellness Annual National Conference is an annual event conceived in 2023.

As part of the Amandla Olwazi project the conference was intended to generate opportunities for Afrocentric knowledge gathering, sharing, knowledge mobilization, and networking centered on **Black mental health in Canada**.

ACT Now! was born out of a direct request from the stakeholders of the Amandla Olwazi project. When in 2023, the first ACT Now! was convened, the participants requested for the conference to become an annual event. Most conferences tend to be academic-oriented and focused on research findings. The planning and execution of the The ACT Now! Conference is based on experiential engagement and collecting knowing, gathering and mobilizing knowledge following the African-centered principles of ‘Nothing about us without us’ and ‘Kujichagulia – the principle of Self-Determination. Act Now! is unique in that it is embedded into the cultural, diversity, and unique needs of Black and racialized communities and brings together people from all walks of life across Canada.

The conference created an open, inclusive, and culturally safe space where participants were able to freely discuss issues affecting their mental health and well-being.

The conference created more opportunities for networking, pulling resources, and knowledge at the national level. Last year’s conference engaged predominantly Black-led and Black-focused organizations and individuals with lived experiences.

The 2024 conference envisaged a broader dialogue and knowledge exchange between community and mainstream organizations and institutions to identify a path towards systems change. The knowledge gathered from this event will continue to garner additional Afrocentric ‘knowledge’ to be translated into ‘power’ for change (hence Olwazi into Amandla = Amandla Olwazi – the Power of Knowledge) In addition, the experience of sharing and exchanging various perspectives and lived experiences within the diverse Black communities has an enriching and healing effect for the participants.

The three-day hybrid national conference was held in Toronto at Pan Pacific Toronto, from March 20-22, 2024. It targeted participants from diverse Black populations representing multidisciplinary backgrounds across 7 provinces.

Conference participants were from a variety of mainstream organizations and institutions, grassroots organizations serving racialized communities, diverse and multidisciplinary team members from health and social services sectors, Black leaders, Black elders, Black youth, Black 2SLGBTQ+, newcomers, academia, research institutions, interfaith communities, and decision-makers.

Over 300 participants (260 in-person and 100+ online) participated in the conference.

A nine-member conference planning committee representing various sectors and provinces were responsible for the successful planning and execution of the Conference.

The conference addressed a series of topics and themes *around Black mental health*. *The themes included, were selected based on the recommendations suggested by the 2023 ACT Now! conference participants.*

Themes include:

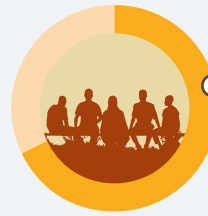
- **The Power of Community (Healing and Thriving in Community)**
- **Intergenerational Health / Wealth**
- **Policy, Research & Advocacy**
- **Rest as Liberation**

Participants

Pre-conference Registrants

Two sets of data were collected from the participants, one prior to the conference and a second as part of the post-conference evaluation. Participants registered for the event through an online portal, by invitations, through referrals, and promotion through work colleagues. The conference questionnaire was used to gather basic demographic information of participants. Accordingly, data was collected from **175 registrants**. Their responses were further used to inform the content and program flow.

Participants were from seven Canadian provinces and 35 cities across Canada. In terms of country of origin, they represented over 30 countries. 75% and 22% of the registered participants were female and male respectively. The remaining 2% identified as others and 1% preferred not to identify their gender.



300+ Participants
(260 in-person and 100+ online)



Sector Represented:

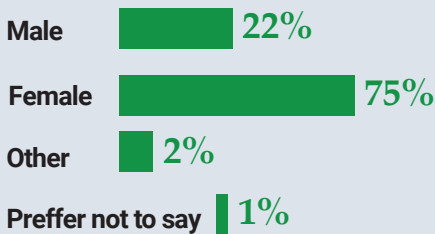
33% - Mental Health
18% - Community Health
15% - Social Services
7% - Primary Care



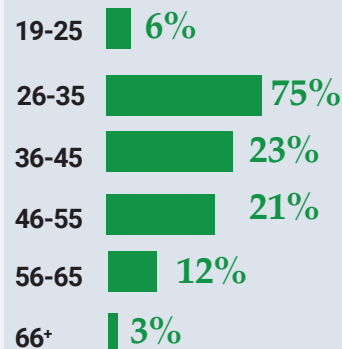
30+ Country of Origin

35 cities across Canada
7 provinces

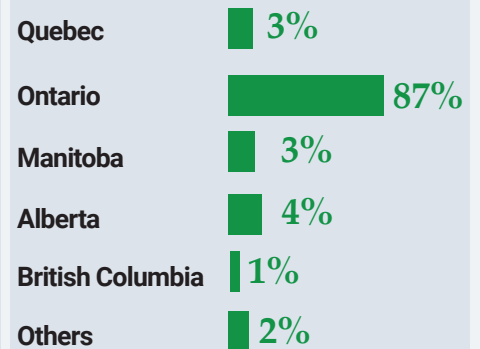
Registrants by Gender



Registrants by Age



Representation by Region



Theme preference

When asked about the three top themes they would like to participate in, the majority of registrants selected the Power of Community.



Opening Ceremony

Indigenous Ceremony and Ancestral Acknowledgement

Cindy White – Mohawk elder opened the conference with indigenous ceremony and teachings. She offered acknowledgment to:

The 4 Grandmothers who tend the water.

- The Fresh Water – lakes, rivers, ponds
- The Salt Water
- The rain
- The Birth water – that brings forth new li

The 4 winds that constantly refresh all creation

- She reminded the participants the importance of acknowledgment and gratitude on a daily basis as this contributes to the sustainability of life.
- The great warrior, ‘the sun’ that rises every day to pour the medicine on all creation and to burn away all the things from yesterday that do not serve us so we can get to write a new narrative each and every day.
- The Grandmother moon who watches over us during the night

She also reminded the audience that we were all sent to this earth with a mission and each were born in absolute perfection. Cindy then shared a spiritual message given to her by the ancestors for the gathering at the conference.

*“They have placed inside you, **ancestral powers**. That power is to build a **new society**. Your job is not to disrupt or to dismantle what is already in place because that requires too much energy and it is an emotional burden. **Your job is to build better and to make the old obsolete**. The time is now and what leads that process is your own personal healing.*

No more to focus on those things that bring us down; the places of weakness.

No more focusing on trauma It is your job to understand who you are, who the creator made you. To be proud of who the creator made you.

*To understand what your gifts are, your spiritual mandate here on the earth and how to make your gifts come alive. Young people are waiting for us to take our rightful places as leaders and mentors. In your work you must notice young people, troubled people. You must align with the supreme power to defeat the enemy. I beg you to turn your work around and put it towards oneself because **young people are waiting for us** looking for love”.*



Following the Indigenous ceremony and teaching, **Elder Siphon Kwaku** used the metaphor of Baobab tree to engage the participants in considering Rest as Liberation. The Baobab tree is the longest living tree in the world. The baobab tree, an African icon, symbolizes resilience and life, deeply rooted in African culture and ecosystems.

Revered in folklore and vital in maintaining ecological balance, it offers shelter and sustenance to diverse species and serves as a communal hub, with its uses ranging from medicine to crafts. It is a symbol of unity, community and connection as a metaphor for the resilience of us and our communities in the face of challenging circumstances, in the face of adversities, in the face of mental health challenges.

Elder Siphon stressed to the participants that, as we come to recognize our resilience and talk about rest from adversity such as mental health we have to understand that because of intergenerational trauma, we have forgotten who we are. We have to pose four very important questions:

**Who am I?
How did I become who I am ?
Am I really who I think I am?
and
Why am I here?**

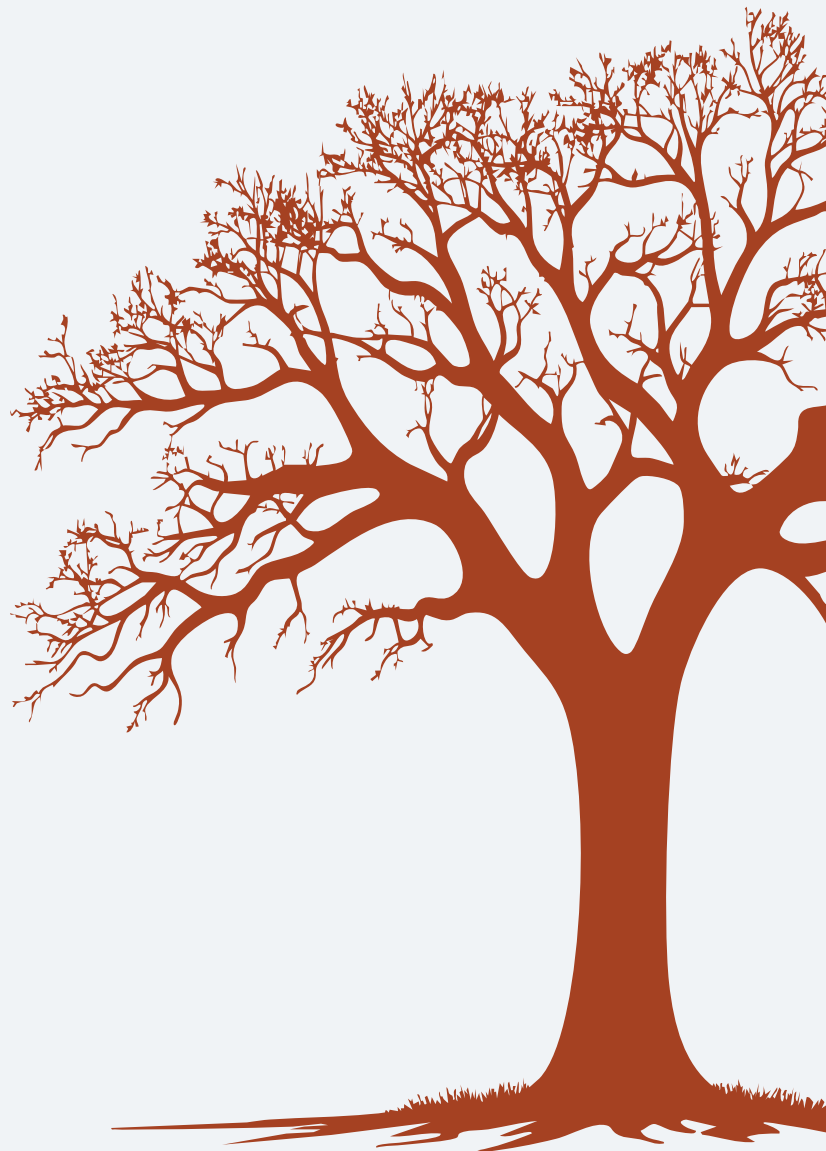
Our ancestors also rested under the Baobab tree. As we experience and practice rest in the next couple of days, May we always remember those who have gone before us May we always be inspired by their vision. May their lives constantly remind us that people are more important than possessions, services are more important than success, principles are more important than progress

May whatever we do be shaped and moulded by **respect, integrity, humility, competence, clarity of purpose, compassion and commitment.**

May our children and our children's children carry forward with pride of histories represented in this gathering today, and Let us dedicate to make this world better than we found it

Ashe, Ashe, Ashe.

The indigenous ceremony and ancestral acknowledgement was followed by invigorating African drumming, music and dance led by **Master Drummer Amadou Kienou** and his team.



Well Wishing Message From Hon. Sylvia Jones, Deputy Premier And Minister Of Health



Hon Minister Sylvia Jones shared a congratulating and well-wishing video message with the conference participants. She recognized the work of TAIBU Community Health Centre in addressing health inequities in the community and the efforts of the participants and stakeholders in connecting the community to culturally appropriate care.

She reminded the gathering the significant investment that the Ontario government has made and continues to make and in particular under the **Black Health Action Plan**. The government is committed to taking bold and ongoing action so that all Ontarians have better access to care.

In particular, she mentioned:

- The investment of **\$100 Million** to 78 Inter-professional care team services in Ontario connecting 300,000 Ontarians to care
- The investment of **\$1.5 Million** to TAIBU in developing a Black focus Inter-Professional care team to serve **6,300 community members** across the Greater Toronto Area
- The investment of **\$25 Million** to develop the Peel Black health & Social Services Hub to provide comprehensive primary care, mental health and social services

She concluded her message by wishing participants a successful conference.



Rest, Relaxation, and Immersion In Afrocentric Activities

The planning committee ensured that the conference participants had time for rest, relaxation and meditation thereby modeling and practicing the theme of the conference.

Kimetic Yoga – Natasha Eck

Natasha led the participants in breathing and body movement exercises facilitating their preparedness for the day so that energy can flow freely enabling them to receive, to hear, to listen and to feel. The exercise was concluded by declaring peace, joy, protection, and self-care.

Kimetic Yoga is focused on movement and energy through the body. Kimetic yoga (name comes from the word Kemet or KMT – ancient name of Egypt) incorporates physical poses from ancient illustrations of Egyptian gods and goddesses.

African drumming, dance and song – Negus Medhin

Nigus Medhin and his group performed African drumming, dance and songs during intervals to call participants back to the gathering and to raise their energy level helping their full participation.

Sound Bath meditation – Fimo Mitchell

Further grounding and mindfulness was facilitated by Fimo's Sound Bath meditation session. Sound Bath meditation is an ancient practice to experience deep state of relaxation and medication using bowls, gongs and chimes and listening to resonant sounds.

Mental Health for Black Canadians Project Update

Five projects funded under the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) - the Mental Health of Black Canadians (MHBC) projects provided updates on their respective projects. Prior the funded projects presentations, Public Health Agency of Canada presented a snapshot of the preliminary findings of all the BMHC funded project deliverables.

Public Health Agency of Canada: A snapshot or preliminary findings – Mental Health for Black Canadians (MHBC) funding for community support

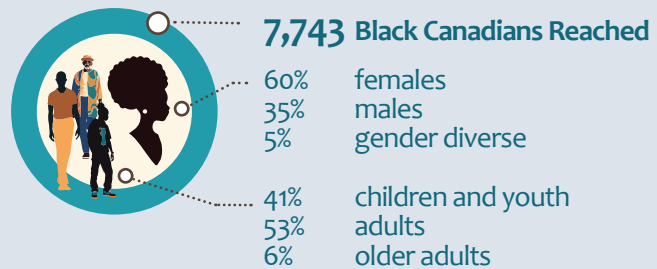
- The presentation provided a high-level report on all the projects funded by Public Health Project under the Mental Health for Black Communities funding stream.
- The objectives of the funding was to increase understanding of the unique barriers for mental for Black Canadians, increase knowledge of effective culturally focused approach and programs and to increase capacity within the Black communities in Canada
- The focus of the funding was to develop, mobilize and enhance mental health promotion for Black communities
- The report was compiled using a methodology of analyzing and synthesizing data from project reports received between 2019 and 2024 and other quantitative and qualitative data.

The Culturally focused interventions implemented across the projects included:

- Collaborative approach
- Trauma informed care
- Services offered by Black led and Black informed spaces
- Innovative programs responsive to cultural need
- Acknowledging the diversity of Black diversities

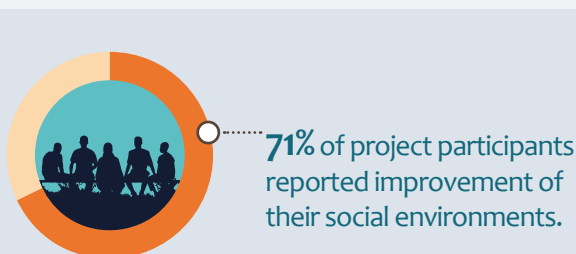
REACH:

- The Projects reached over 7,000 Black individuals. 60% were female, 30% male and 5% gender diverse. 41% children & youth, 53% adults and 6% older adults participated in a variety of innovative programs and activities.



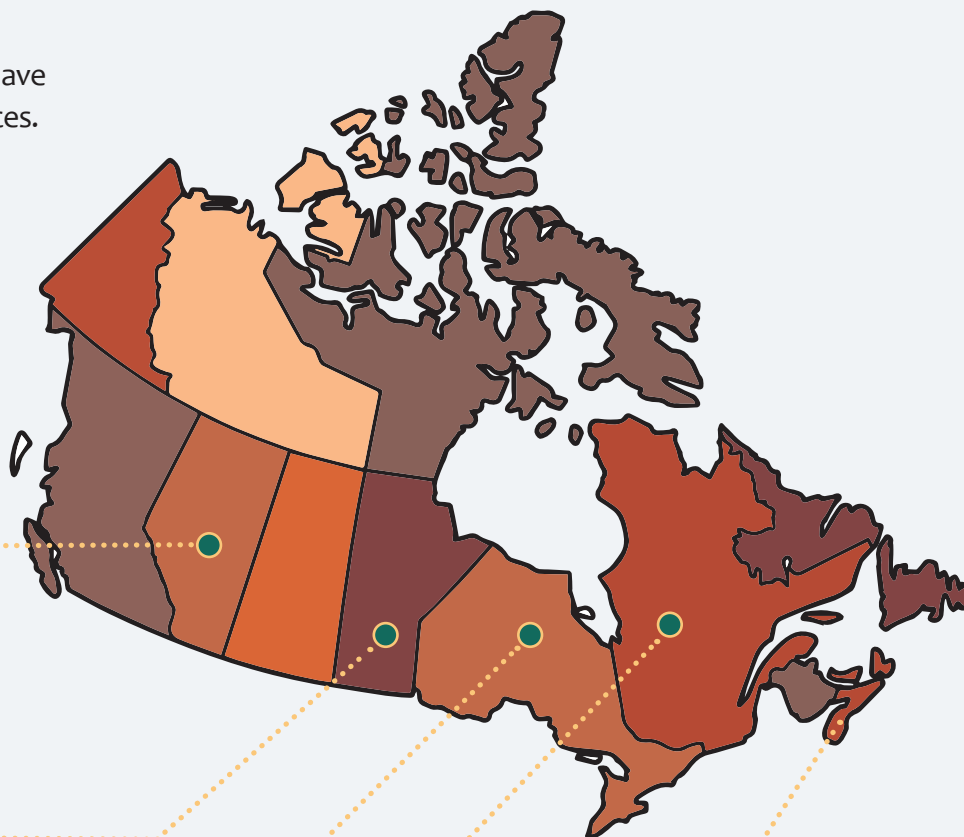
OUTCOMES:

71% of project participants stated that they experienced increase knowledge of mental health and impact of anti-Black racism on their mental health. 65% said that they had increased their skills and abilities to cope with their mental health including through arts, spoken word, music. Project participants also experienced improved social environments, strong social support, reduced stigma and strengthening of the fabric of communities. 61% experienced improved mental health and increase sense of wellbeing. The projects have also developed various knowledge mobilization products.



Funded Projects Map

The various streams of the MHBC Fund have supported 23 projects across five provinces.



Alberta

- University of Calgary
- Council for the Advancement of African Canadians (Africa Centre)
- Ribbon Rouge Foundation

Manitoba

- Barbados Association of Winnipeg Inc.

Ontario

- Kaleo Productions Inc.
- Aspire for Higher (2)
- Women's Health in Women's Hands Community Health Centre
- Black Creek Community Health Centre
- Black Health Alliance
- University of Ottawa
- TAIBU Community Health Centre (2)
- York University
- Across Boundaries - An Ethnoracial Mental Health Center (In partnership with Adornment Stories)

Nova Scotia

- Dalhousie University
- African Diaspora Association of the Maritimes (ADAM)
- The Lesbian Gay Bisexual Youth Project society (The Youth Project)

Quebec

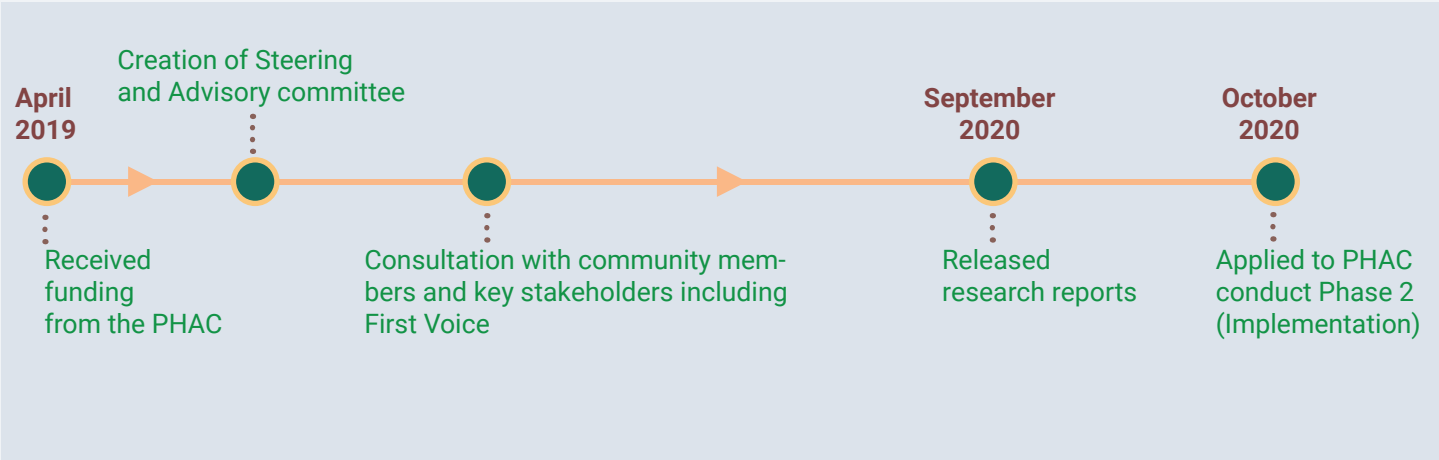
- Regroupement des intervenant(e)s d'origine haïtienne
- Événement Hoodstock (2)
- Université du Québec à Montréal
- Head and Hands / À deux Mains

Mobilizing Partnership

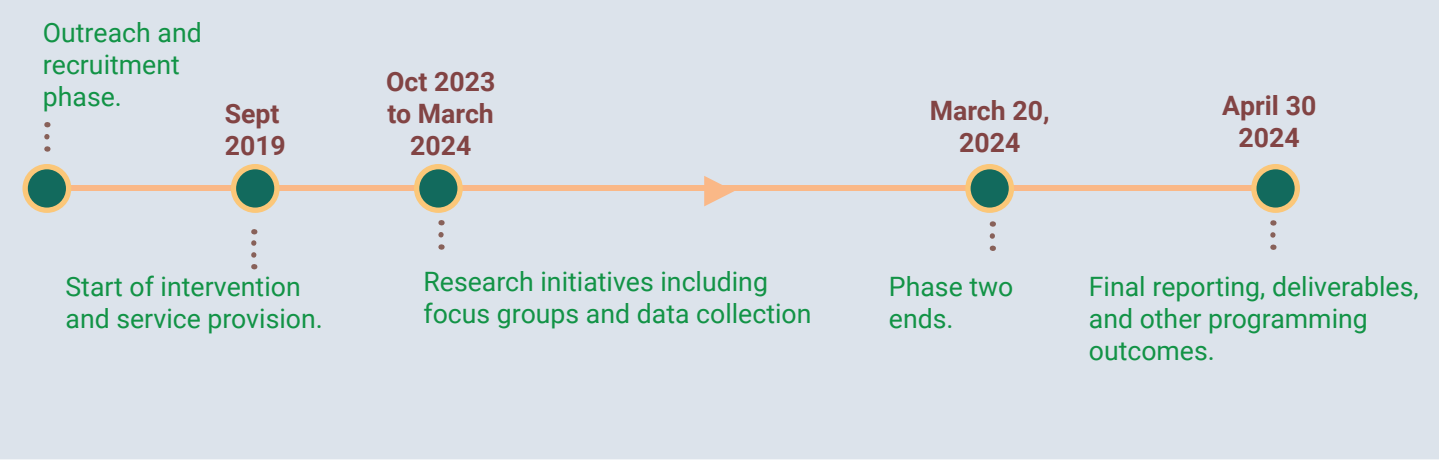
Dalhousie University

The project was focused on supporting Black individuals who have been in contact with the criminal justice system re-integrate into the society. The implementation of the project was in two phases.

Phase 1 - INCUBATOR: focused on stakeholder’s engagement and convening to assess and identify the needs of Black individuals who have been incarcerated and develop a pathway to support their re-integration into society.



Phase 2 - IMPLEMENTATION: was developing and implementing appropriate programs and services.



The Umoja Project

Abiona Centre for Infant & Early Mental Health

Focused on the infant & teen mental health, the project aimed to improve and promote positive parenting, educational attainment outcomes and positive mental health.

65 young mothers participated in the program. The project aimed at responding to their needs by connecting them with different partners that worked primarily with Black communities.

The program was able to develop and maintain over 15 partnerships within the city which has assisted program participants navigate the education system as well access housing services.



65 Young mothers participated in the program



Developed and maintained 15+ partnerships across the city.



Theatre for Positive Mental Health

Moyo Health and Community Services

The project was developed to address the impact of COVID-19 and anti-Black Racism on the mental health and wellbeing of Black communities by using arts, storytelling, and theatre by creating a positive self-identity and stronger protective factors. The project is based on the grounds that oral tradition is profound and a cornerstone of African centeredness and is powerful in connecting the past, the present and the future.

The project was able to develop meaningful interventions to address the mental health challenges faced by Black community members. It also developed and implemented provider training sessions, for instance, to discuss the mistrust that Black communities have with the health care system. The project also implemented a social medial campaign in collaboration with OCAD University.

Moyo Health & Community Services strongly believes in 'Resting by any means necessary!'.



Amandla Olwazi TAIBU Community Health Centre

Amandla Olwazi is from the Zulu language and it means ‘Knowledge is Power’. Supported by the Public Health Agency of Canada, TAIBU worked with over 20 MHBC funded projects across Canada to develop a Black mental health knowledge mobilization and network platform where resources and tools developed by the funded project are made available for knowledge exchange.

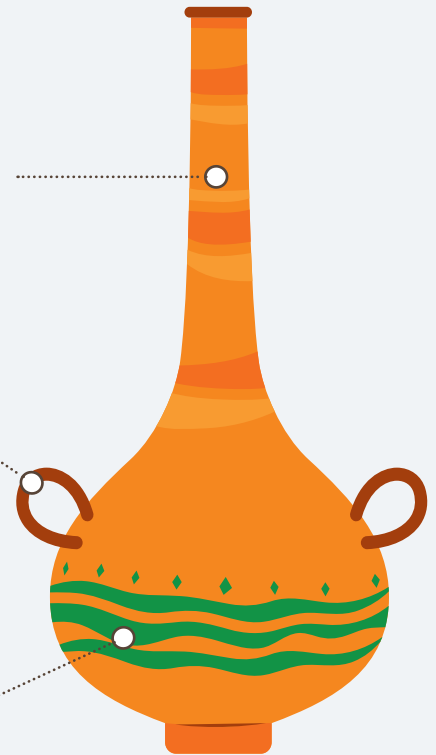
The platform (which was displayed during the conference – www.blackwellnessnetwork.ca/) include Afrocentric tools and resources including initiatives such as healing circles, storytelling, arts-based activities that promote positive mental health.

Project Outcome:

Reduced impact of anti-Black racism on the mental health and wellbeing of Black communities

Impact on policies and practices on issues related to the mental health and wellbeing of Black Canadians through continuous Afrocentric values and principles

Strong network of diverse Black communities at a national level for Self Determination



IMARA Generation Project TAIBU Community Health Centre

The IMARA Generation project engaged Black youth in co-designing an Afrocentric and peer led mental health mentorship curriculum to empower Black youth for better and positive mental health. ‘IMARA’ is Kiswahili word that means ‘resolute’ or ‘strong’. The curriculum and the peer led model of the program aims to build a stronger generation that builds capacity for Black youth to cope with and navigate mental health challenges.

The project has trained 24 Black youth and allied adults trainers who will be delivering this first of its kind Afrocentric peer led mental health mentorship program.

Acknowledging our diverse African heritage and culture is Rest!



Knowledge Gathering:

Keynote Addresses

ACT Now! conference 2024, focused on the concept of Rest, Healing and Thriving. Three key note addresses were organized to set the context of the conference and the breakout community conversations.

Dr. Onye Nnorom, a family physician, public health expert and founder of the Black Health Education Collaborative opened the conference with her keynote on the subject of *“Rest is Black Liberation”*.

Dr. Hamdi Mohamed, a researcher, organizational development consultant and Co-founder of Kaafi Integrative Health provided the second keynote address of the conference on the subject of *“Healing in the community – the Structures of Healing”*.

The third and last keynote address was given by **Dr. Sharon Davis-Murdoch**, a social justice champion from Nova Scotia on the subject of *“Policy Research & Advocacy – Rest as Liberation is Political”*.

Summary of Dr. Onye Nnorom' s Keynote address

“Rest is Black Liberation”

- Rest seems counterintuitive to liberation because it may give the impression that it is ‘doing nothing’. But rest for Black communities is liberation.
- Black communities, compared to their white counterparts faced several disproportionate challenges whether it is in education, employment, home ownership etc.. It is said that as long as there is equal opportunity the field is level. **“What is the matter, it is the same distance!”** we are often told.
- It is within this context that Black communities should understand the importance of rest and that rest is in fact, resistance and an act of liberation!
- Anti-Black Racism must include in its definition, the Canadian history of slavery. This is key because many people do not believe that slavery was part of our lineage. The legacy of slavery has caused people to believe that Blacks are less intelligent, subhuman, have different pain threshold, are not to be trusted etc. Systemic racism drives everything else and health outcomes at a population level.
- Racism is a form of trauma – Research has shown how racial trauma affects people as a form of stress. For instance, when everyone around you get promoted and you are not getting promoted – that is a form of stress and anticipatory racism (it has not happened yet but you are worried about it). The stress manifests into serious psychological distress (e.g. PTSD, eating disorder, overconsumption of carbohydrates, chronic fight or flight mode). One way of accounting for the impact of racism on the health and wellbeing of individuals is measuring ‘allostatic load’. Black women, for instance, tend to have higher allostatic load compared to all other groups.
- Collective work is needed to address the disproportionate ¹‘allostatic load’ / removing the ‘ball and chain’
- Rest drives repair. Finding a homeostatic dynamic balance is key to rest. (Homeostasis is a state of balance among all the body systems needed for the body to survive and function correctly. In homeostasis, body levels of acid, blood pressure, blood sugar, electrolytes, energy, hormones, oxygen, proteins, and temperature are constantly adjusted to respond to changes inside and outside the body, to keep them at a normal level.). For instance, sleep helps bring balance to our mood, creativity, ability to function and good brain health.
- The churches had collective spaces for rest during the civil rights movement. They were engaging in resistance and good work, but they were also intentional about the need for the community to rest. **Rest and prevention** are better than cure.

In recognizing our humanity (Ubuntu) we can rest!

¹ Allostatic load refers to the cumulative effects that chronic stress has on the mental and physical health. It refers to the wear tear on the body that live events and emotional stress create.

Summary of Dr. Hamdi Mohamed Keynote

“Healing in Community - Structures of Healing”

Dr. Mohamed’s keynote focused on the ongoing process of healing – maintaining and sustaining healing. She started her address by acknowledging that being present at the ACT Now! Conference, she felt ‘connection, nurture, sharing of values and destiny and peace’.

- The structure of healing happens when there is intentionality and space for differences. “We were born noble, created noble. We don’t need names, titles, etc.”
- Each one of us was created with a purpose in mind. Each one of us has a specific unique purpose that no one else has. We have to connect to this uniqueness and to this purpose.
- Our sense of the world is shaped by culture. Culture impacts how people understand and make sense of shattering experiences. Culture also shapes how shared experiences and social concerns are expressed. Concepts such ‘I am because we are’, ‘it takes a village to raise a child’, if you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together’, if you think you are too small to make a difference, you have not spent a night with a mosquito’ and/or ‘if people come together, they can even mend a crack in the sky’. These and other traditional philosophies, concepts and ways of being help facilitate a restful environment. We need to use cultural teachings for community healing.
- The exposure to racial violence and the exhaustion of being in it takes a toll on our bodies, peace of mind, and our ability to rest. Sometimes it is difficult to rest when you have to hold three jobs because you get paid less. There is increased social and political consciousness that is making institutions aware. The good news is that more research is coming out demonstrating how racial oppression is damaging our wellbeing.
- The art and science of healing in the community are founded community healing practices which include, creating spaces that affirm and nurture multiple identities, helping us pause, breathe individually and collectively and mend our hearts.
- We need knowledge systems that are real and are based on Indigenous African knowledge, communal practices such as Ubuntu, Sawubona and Salaam to counter the everyday threat to our peace and help us heal from historical and ongoing systemic and cultural oppressions. Salaam Aleikum essentially means that I commit to give you peace, to not be part of a system that harms you.



Summary of Dr. Sharon Davis-Murdoch

“Policy, Research & Advocacy: Rest as Liberation is Political”

- In order for us to understand the importance of resisting and what it takes to make it happen, we need to realize the importance of policy. In simple terms, policy is simply the work that the government chooses to do or chooses not to do.
- Black people have power. We influence policy, even without trying. But how much more could we accomplish if we were intentional and not exhausted?
- No doubt structures of white supremacy exist. But we are influencers. We are policy makers. We have untapped potential for policy direction. We are needed but we must get out of our own way.
- We can influence and make policy but we can also do it our own way. Innovating, organizing and building our way is key. I hope that we can work smarter not harder to reach our policy goals. We can make it happen and now is the best time. Canada has never needed us more!
- Policies have been developed to work for the system and not for us. Health systems past and present, reflect mistrust and hyper-vigilance, leaving us with post traumatic stress symptoms. We can note examples such as the COVID-19 pandemic, low birth weight babies, mental health and substance use struggles.
- Canada is on the brink of an election. Canada cannot change what it will not acknowledge. Black people must be deliberate in making that case. Working smarter and not harder because we know that together we are enough.
- Health equity is about fairness, not about taking away from others. Reparations in the context of health is part of health equity. Black Canada can lead and take time to build leaders. We have to visualize solutions and sometimes we will fail. But we need to try again with intention, not exhaustion.
- What we need is to:
 - Work on policies based on ‘our’ data and research
 - Gather anti-Black racist data – evidence that supports our movement forward
 - Ensure that there is appropriate interpretation and governance of the data
 - One size will never fit all
 - Collective action is smart work. What is not measured does not count in this system.
 - All our people must share a vision and a single destination no matter how we get there.
- Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policies are good. But EDI policies with consequences and with monitoring are BETTER
- As Black communities/peoples we are brilliant. We have ideas and solutions. We need to respect what emerges from us. We are worth our time. We must lift as we climb.
- Our story informs. We require change because we are citizens of this country and we pay taxes. We have stories to tell. Let us write policies that the government needs to pay attention to and we cannot be relentless in this.
- Canada needs a 10 year plan for improved Black health outcomes that is monitored and measured every two years until the government is accountable for the improvement of our health.
- Let us connect the dots. Let us join the policy work out there. The National Institute in Black Health, the National Health Strategy, The Canadian Black Justice Strategy ... let us join these things up and have the government answer to us about what we need as the people that we and the power that we have. **Rest is resilience and resistance.**
- Policy is iterative and we must rush not walk, with intention towards Black liberation. Let us have our struggles redefined as opportunities. Many us are people of faith. BE still. Let us prioritize love as rest.

May we be rejuvenated towards Black liberation!

Breakout Room

Conversations

ACT Now! conference 2024, focused on the concept of Rest, Healing and Thriving. Three key note addresses were organized to set the context of the conference and the breakout community conversations.

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The Power of Community

Healing and Thriving in Community

The legacy of slavery and colonialism continues to impact the lives of the diverse Black communities. Hence, the importance of gathering to reinforce the importance of healing and thriving for Black people. The painful murder of George Floyd moved everyone but has impacted Black communities disproportionately and in my other ways. It is the starting point for Black communities to initiate the healing and thriving process.

One of the ways that slavery and colonialism has disempowered our communities is by creating distrust of the system but most significantly distrust among ourselves. We are not always trusting. We are guarded against information and guarded against people. As we learn to trust, we open up possibilities for healing and thriving. We begin to lean onto one another and at the same time offer space for one another. We give permission for ourselves to seek, receive and give help.

The power of the community for healing and thriving is founded on **Trust**.





The power of the community for healing and thriving is founded on Acknowledging our Elders

We have to remember that part of the community healing is honoring those who have made a little bit easier for us to have rest. There is strength, there is wisdom, there is empowerment when we acknowledge and reflect upon the struggle, the fight and the resistance that our ancestors have displayed for us.

The power of the community for healing and thriving is Our Faith

We display this power by reminding each other that all things will work together for our good. It helps us thinking and creating of new possibilities. We seek healing and rest by offering a prayer. Healing and rest for our minds is made possible.

The power of the community for healing and thriving is about Self-care

Healing, rest and thriving is essentially about self-care. It requires boldness to have honest conversations and asking for help. Many times, we are in situations or positions that we are only thinking about others. It is also important to realize that self-care is not being selfish or self-centered. We need to move away from the Eurocentric way of understanding self-care and incorporate the Africentric way of understanding self. For Black communities self-care must be embedded in the principle of Ubuntu – I am because we are. One’s wellbeing is part of the community’s wellbeing. One’s self-care is the care of the communit



“In Manitoba, we create space for organizations and Black people to be their authentic self. By creating space for ourselves, we create opportunities to thrive. This allows more liberation. We should never underestimate the power of what we can do to use and change the world”

“When we think about rest it means being vulnerable enough to say I don’t really rest enough. Coming to the conference has helped me validate my healing. It is okay to not be okay. We have to be well to truly help others. The greatest thing you can do in life is to serve others. While we think we are healing others, they are healing us”

“We are burdened by so many responsibilities. How can we rest and take a break? Just the acknowledgement of how we feel is powerful. Rest is key. Strength is sharing and being vulnerable in the community”

“Rest is about balance. Rest is about leisure. Rest is about playtime.”

“Rest is good. We are carrying 500lbs and we are tired. You take the 500lbs and put it down. You have to know yourself and be strong. Know your roots. Going back to Africa, they might not have what we have but they are happy. How can they be poor and happy? There are many things we can learn. When you know yourself you will be more strong. People are not strong because they are told they are nothing. This is why we need ACT Now! See ourselves differently”

“You are no help to others by neglecting yourself. We have to go forward with resting. Giving ourselves grace is the most important thing.”



Policy, Research and Advocacy

Rest is essential for marginalized communities, particularly for Black individuals who face ongoing systemic barriers in various areas such as education, economics, and politics. Despite the urgent need to advocate for rights and justice, it is important to incorporate rest to sustain the fight for equality.

Rest is not just necessary for personal well-being but also critical for effective policy work, research, and advocacy. Using the African tradition of the ‘talking stick’ the participants in the breakout rooms contributing to the knowledge synthesizing process.

Rest as pre-requisite for policy, research and advocacy

Being Black is tiring. In order to create the revolution, we need to rest. The rest is a pre-requisite for policy, research and advocacy work. Black communities need rest to think about what we are doing, what we want to do, how we want to do it with, how we want do it, why we want to do it and where we want to do it.

Recognize the default setting of policy, research and advocacy work

When it comes to policy, research and advocacy work, we need to pay attention of not falling into the default setting of Eurocentric approach. It is also important to recognize that many organizations and agencies in this area of work are part of the systems structure who are complicit in preventing rest due to their internal policies and ways of doing. There needs to be genuine acknowledgement of the impact of anti-Black racism and transparent process of engaging communities in research or policy development work that requires the meaningful and equal participation of communities with lived experience. Related to this, views were also shared that Black issues are often limited to Black History Month.

Policy, research and advocacy must focus on youth and the next generation

The Nguzo Saba principle of Kuumba relates to “do[ing] always as much as we can, in the way we can, in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it.”

It was stressed on several occasions, that our collective work on policy, research and advocacy must focus on youth and the next generation. We must find out ways of how our youth find rest in their desperate situations.

Another key theme that emerged out of the discussion related to youth is significant intergenerational work required to build capacity and transfer knowledge from the adult to the younger generation. Capacity can be built through mentorship.

The Paradox of Rest and Action in the same sentence

Several participants of the breakout sessions have expressed the challenging position of talking about rest and advocacy and policy in the same sentence. Advocacy, policy and research are action words. The concept of rest also seems unrealistic when considering that there is so much more work to do. Given that Black people often have to work twice as hard to get half as far, the concept of rest is exhausting by itself.

Ujima - Collective Responsibility

Collective action was another prominent theme that came out of the breakout discussion. Participants made it very clear that a collective approach to engaging in policy, research and advocacy was imperative. Rest can only be achieved collectively. Black communities have to advocate together. We need to conduct research together. If we need to cross the river together, we need to work on policy, research and advocacy as a collective. Creating space, such as the ACT Now! conference is great to come together where we can talk and plan together is helpful. Collaboration among Black led organizations and a stronger network helps to distribute the burden and amplify the impact at the same time.

Representation

In addition to coming together uniting diverse backgrounds and experiences towards engaging in policy and advocacy work for change, representation in different spaces and in particular decision making and political spaces was highlighted as an important strategy. Participants shared personal experiences in political spaces and pointed out that even being a volunteer creates an opportunity to influence policies. Our biggest mistake is staying away from such spaces of power and influence.

The paradox of solving a problem that we did not create

Part of the fatigue that Black communities experience on an ongoing basis is the fact that we are trying to solve a systemic problem that we did not create. It is therefore imperative that systems and those in power have to be made accountable instead of overburdening Black individuals/communities with the responsibility of providing and actioning on solutions.

Many times, the paradox is rendered more complex when organizations are put in a difficult situation where they receive funding from the government and are limited to engage in advocacy initiatives and activities. We need to find a way of working through this challenge to be able to amplify the voices of our communities, so they can rest in liberation.



Intersectionality

The policy, research and advocacy work for Black communities has to ensure that it has an intersectionality approach. We recognize that there are many groups within the diverse Black communities are further marginalized and therefore policies should address these unique disparities.

Among the various intersectionalities that were mentioned during the conversation include:

- Newcomers and refugees
- People living with disability
- Black women
- 2SLGBTQ+ communities
- Homeless/transient population

The Breakout session was brought to a close by taking a moment of rest to restore one's soul and then sharing one word that describes their experience.

Canada has an official policy embodied in our Charters of Rights and Freedoms. We are all entitled to freedom and justice. This 2nd national conference would have not been necessary if this was not just an espoused policy, but a policy in practice. This is the challenge that we face and what makes Black people exhausted – trying to get the policy to be not only what it says but what it does.

“Black issues are kind of related to Black History Month and then nothing else is set up. I am really glad that this conference is not during Black History Month [in February]. It gives us a chance to explore that”.

“I have been thinking about discernment. Yes, the problems are many, but we cannot solve them all. And racism is not the problem we created. So is it our role, is it our people to solve the problem that isn't ours, that we didn't create?”

“I think about REST as an opportunity to regroup and re-stabilize on how we focus our research on the Black community and how that directly translates into policy in a way that benefits the community”

“Policy can actually be the facilitator of that rest. How is housing policy supporting the Black liberation in rest? So, I have been thinking about how do you rest when you don't have a place to rest? I haven't come up with the answer yet. But I need to rest. We need to rest.



Intergenerational Health & Wealth

Slowing Down to Get Ahead

Black people through the devastating experience of slavery and colonialism contributed generations of unpaid labour and stolen labour for the tremendous wealth generation for white families and communities. During the era of reconstruction and after the abolishing of slavery, Black people had nothing. For instance, during the Jim Crow period in the US, Black people were deliberately excluded from participating in economic, financial and social benefits.

Health means life and wellbeing – Wealth is also wellbeing

Rest is health and Rest is wealth!
The direct correlation between disparities in wealth, in addition to and distinct from income disparity, on the health and wellbeing of communities is well established. We cannot have health without wealth and we cannot have wealth without our health. To be alive, to be living, is our wealth. There is a Ugandan saying that says, “to be able to be well is your wealth”.

Intergenerational inheritance

- We are all very exhausted healing others, working a lot, calling out racism, racial battle fatigue, battling anti-Black racism constantly. How do we rest while overcoming the ongoing fight?
 - What were we given? What were we shown? Who told us to work so hard? Who told us that working hard is what gets us ahead?
 - Many of us work more than one job. If we are to sleep for 8 hours, how are we to fit our life into the remaining 16 hours
 - We have inherited a story about work and what work should look like that gets us exhausted
 - Myths and Stories that we have learnt from such as ‘work twice hard and twice as smart’ or ‘money does not sleep so why should you sleep’. ‘You can rest when you die so you have to work hard now’ is another saying that we have heard repeatedly. These are our parents and grandparents’ stories of being an immigrant in Canada and how they have been able to survive and establish themselves.
- What we inherited, what we saw, what they told us, what they modelled for us is what we get to model for others. We have to be intentional on how we approach REST.
 - We have to Embody Rest, so it becomes a part of us. It is not something that we do, but it is something we are or we become. If you are ‘rested’ you move as rested. You will choose what will phase you, what conversations you chose to have – elevating and healing conversations. You will choose the words that you will use – building up words as opposed to tearing down words.
 - We need to embrace our experience of money. A change of mindsets from ‘money that I need vs things that I need’.
 - We need to invite Rest in all our lives.
 - We can learn a lot from the Indigenous teaching of ‘enoughness’. Enoughness is a state of being content and having enough. It is not taking or having more than what you need. The colonial and capitalist system is about extracting as much as possible and it is always about profit. It is never enough or there is not enough to have. However, in actuality, there is enough – more than enough if it fairly distributed and if we have a sense of gratitude.

Deepening our Hearts

Rest as True Liberation for Black Bodies

This breakout circle started with a mindfulness stretching and breathing activities.

Black people are always on the move. There is expectation to produce. The Breakout circle was intended to provide space and to give permission to rest. The Breakout Circle was a 'Rest Circle'.

A basket was placed at the centre of the circle. The basket was from Kenya. It symbolized the coming together, the connectedness, and the weaving together of the different peoples, feelings and perspectives in the circle. It represented the fabric of all people sitting around the circle. Many would have experienced oppression and pain differently but liberation and healing is achieved together. No one stands alone. What affects One affects All!

The facilitator reminded the participants to take care of themselves in the space. Participants were encouraged to share what felt comfortable and to take what was useful and what they needed. The circle was a space to collectively generate and contribute wisdom. When asked what they were intending to bring into the circle, participants mentioned the following:

- Honesty
- Focus
- Grace
- Truth
- Respect
- Hope
- Love
- Passion
- Vulnerability
- Commitment
- Action
- Healing
- Understanding
- Acceptance
- Joy
- Authenticity
- Nia – Purpose
- Transparency
- Faith
- Peace
- Liberation
- Clarity
- Openness
- Respite
- Research
- Empathy
- Compassion
- Impartiality
- Nothing

The discussion then emphasised that we have to understand 'Rest' from the context of how the system has and continues to take from us just as it has taken from our ancestors. It keeps on taking from us and distracting us from ourselves. When Black people come together in a circle and talk and share, there is power. **Liberation is about breaking the chain!**

The session used the song 'Energy Budget' by Tony Jones as a metaphor to engage the participants in reflecting what their energy budget looked like. What were the things that add, enhance, support, resource, maintain, sustain and ground oneself? What were the things that take away, deplete emotionally and drain spiritually? Are we in balance or deficit?

Participants shared that anxiety, loss of friends and families, sickness were situations that would deplete them. Living a life of double consciousness, always trying to address two things at the same time is draining. One participant strongly highlighted that looking at what is happening in South Sudan and the genocide in Palestine was traumatizing. He felt that he was being forced to observe these atrocities in real time and at the same time not been able to speak about it due to political constraints in his environment was emotionally challenging. We are expected to suck it up. Our humanity is being compromised. It is also daunting to imagine that this can turn on to Black people as quickly as it is happening elsewhere.

It was acknowledged that Black people are holding a lot. Black people are carrying a lot. That is why Rest is Liberation. It is about breaking the chain. It is a choice we have to make. It is a process.

One of the questions that was discussed during the session was, ‘What does the unchained self, the liberated self look and feel like?’

Answers included:

- Being one with the ancestors – communicating with them and aligning with their desires and vision. Ensuring that we are moving in the right direction and based on their messages making necessary adjustment.
- Being in a safe space to have conversation (such as the current circle). The space will enable one to be vulnerable without guilt or shame. To be in a space of trust. Finding a circle where one will feel the permission to break the silence.
- Being in the circle now. Not feeling guilty or feel bad.
- Many Black people are engaged in activism and advocacy. This is very tiring. Just as the Indigenous Elder stated during the opening ceremony, building new possibilities instead of fighting all time is liberation. Exploring what are new possibilities? What are our dreams?
- **Give oneself grace to fail, grace to say I don't want to fight anymore.**
- Unchained does not need to be a big thing. It could look like deciding to take time to rest for 2 minutes before jumping on another call.
- What stops one from rest is sometimes the guilt. It is reflecting about the narrative that we have learnt along the way. What does it mean to be present? What does it mean to be a hard worker? How do we measure success?
- Be recognizant of one's internal dialogue and give permission to just be!
- Remind ourselves our worth. A participant shared that she has the following message on her desk as a reminder – “Dear Black Women, you don't have to define your worth by how quickly you respond to others. You are more than what you do for others. You are infinite”.
- A participant shared an excerpt from Tricia Hersey's Rest is resistance – “... staring out of the window and gazing at the sky or a tree is rest. Looking at the water just doing nothing is rest. In a culture focused on hyper-productivity, it can feel uncomfortable to sit and do nothing, let silence wash your brain ... Doing nothing is a radical part of your life long rest practice. To be intentional about embodying rest disrupts systems of oppression. We must practice rest. We must count on it as a protest. We must go slow. Go stare at your heart ...”
- It may be hard to focus on oneself when we have to produce all time. We need to make an intentional decision to focus on oneself. Our soul has to heal so we are able to serve the community. We have to challenge our thoughts and our assumptions. We have to work on our inside. We have to make it a habit. We often associate our worth with our work and we need to separate ourselves.
- There is significant amount of loss experienced by Black people. We have to take time to grieve. We all grieve in different ways. There is expectation that we have to get over our grief quickly and return to ‘normality’. A space that validates our experiences and our loss is important to contribute to our rest. We have to allow ourselves space to breathe. COVID-19 has disrupted our grieving process. We have to do what we have to do to heal.
- The group also discussed the experience of women in Africa who go to the well to fetch water. When they go to the well, it is not just to fetch water but also use that opportunity as a gathering to share, to connect, and to talk. We can create our own well. Today, this gathering is our well.
- It is important that we are also intentional to ask who is not at the well. We need to think of our brothers and sisters who struggle with substance us. When we think about our queer and trans and their family members, do they feel they belong in our circle? When we are thinking about people who are struggling with mental illnesses or those who feel stigmatized and judged do we see them at the well? So as we are calling the circle, we have to be intentional about who is not here, so they can come and sit and be seen. This is our responsibility as a community.

The experience of Black communities is painful. The experience has left scars. The Liberation may not do away with the scar. The unchained self may not forget about the scars or the experience. But rest will help to look at the scar and experience a different emotion and feeling. The remembering will set us free. It will not happen overnight. The pain is here but healing is possible! It will take work. It will take the community to come together and weave healing together.

Rest begins with us! Peace begins with us!

Rest in the intersectionality for Black Youth and Individuals Living with Disability

The facilitator started the session by considering two questions:

1. How do we identify with being Black?
2. What does it mean to be a Black youth in Canada?

Black communities are of diverse background, rich and mixed cultures and intersectionalities including race, class and sexuality. Black communities are resilient, contributors, innovators, first inhabitants of the earth, and hardworking. We are people who pave our path towards the future. We are also stolen people on stolen lands.

When it comes to the Black youth in Canada, the discussion outlined that Black youth are marginalized,

criminalized and adultified and often forced to be resilient. Youth have lost their childhood. In many cases, youth have no vision, misled, have low self-esteem and low esteem of self and disconnected from culture, ethics and values. Black youth experience a sense of not belonging, always seen as suspects, as troublemakers, fatherless which tends to lead to the over-representation in the criminal justice system. Youth feel that it is hard to find role models from people that look like them.



But at the same time, Black youth are also rebellious to go against adversities. They are creative and innovative.

It is, therefore, significantly important to remember our roots. We have a lot of work to do but we are capable of making changes because we understand and recognize the different intersectionalities within the Black culture.

The facilitator shared their lived experience to portray how Black youth with diverse intersectionalities are able to navigate different systems and achieve Rest as Liberation. The two most important factors in this regard are Strong Parental Support and Self-Advocacy.

- There is a ‘deafening’ silence and stigma in the Black communities around disability.
- It was only because of the advocacy from their parents that the facilitator was able to navigate the world ‘audio centric’ society and today is able to lip read and develop speaking ability. Without the advocacy the facilitator would have ended in a deaf school only able to communicate with sign language.
- Parental support was also instrumental in coping with bullying environment in schools against statements such as, ‘what do you have in your ear?’, ‘why do you speak like that’, ‘are you retarded’.
- Not every fight is worth fighting. Rest comes from taking on what is possible and not take on what affect their health and wellbeing. “I knew how to reclaim my humanity”.
- In addition to strong parental support, advocacy for self is as critical. The facilitator had challenges travelling and would miss their flights on several occasions because they would not be able to listen the information communicated through the PA system at airports. Through self-advocacy, they developed a ‘I am Deaf’ identity card and now is able to receive accommodations.

People with disabilities are often mistreated and do not always know how to advocate for themselves. In addition to parental support and advocacy, we should also have a community led advocacy.



Panel Circle Discussion

The panel circle discussion was facilitated by Amanuel Melles, founding Executive Director of the Network for the Advancement of Black Communities (NABC).

The format of the discussion, unlike customary panel discussion, did not feature the panelists on stage where they would speak to participants. Rather, following the African way of holding conversation, panelists were asked to remain within the group and share their thoughts and perspectives for reflection and further discussion.



Nancy Hamzawi

Executive Vice President for Public Health Agency of Canada (who joined the conversation virtually from Ottawa)



Peter Flegel

Executive Director, Federal Anti-Racism Secretariat



Dr. Sharon Davis-Murdoch

Black Health Policy Leader & a Founding Member of the Health Association of African Canadians (HAAC)



Thomas Bankole

Black Senior, Retired Engineer



Panel Moderator:

Amanuel Melles

Founding Executive Director of the Network for the Advancement of Black Communities (NABC)

Highlights of conversation and points raised

Public Health Agency perspective: Trends in Black Mental Health and Addictions

- There is acknowledgement from Public Health Agency of Canada that there is high prevalence of mental health and addiction challenges but fewer mental health programs and services that are available.
- Due to the various systemic barriers and the impact of the Social Determinants of Health and provider bias Black Canadians experience challenges in the health care system including misdiagnosis and inadequate care.
- Stigma, self-stigma, cultural and religious biases impact mental health of Black Canadians and more work is needed, specially from the Public Health Agency of Canada around research and evidence based support.

Perspective from the Federal Anti-Racism Secretariat: The Impact of COVID-19 and Learnings

- The fact that Black communities had the highest infection and mortality rate related to COVID-19 is not talked enough
- We have also witnessed disproportionate access to vaccine and support for Black communities compared to white communities.
- It has been suggested by some scholars that targeted campaign and misinformation about the virus and the vaccine was seen as an attempt to see to increase the infection and mortality rate among Black and racialized communities.
- There has been strategies implemented during the pandemic that have resulted in success but there is even much more to be done to continue to enhance and accelerate the work of anti-Black racism in Canada



A Community Leader's Perspective: The Impact of COVID-19 and Trends in Black Mental Health

- It is imperative that Black scholars and Black researchers work on Black issues. Data that we have available today are fashioned by non-Blacks for non-Blacks.
- Public Health Agency of Canada has the responsibility to engage Black scholars and Black researchers so that we have the right information, evidence and perspective.
- Problems impacting Black communities start in elementary schools. By the time Black students get to high school they would have experienced significant trauma but they are not on the radar of the government.
- Communities in Nova Scotia, for instance, had identified COVID-19 as an emergency and were having community engagement and dialogue much before the government's actions
- When the government finally did, it was with 'One Size Fits All' approach whereas the community needed a culturally specific approach. We continue to inform the government about the ways to address many pandemics. We have to acknowledge that also we have the pandemic of anti-Black racism that creates mistrust and makes it difficult to be as healthy as we need to and deserve to be.
- Communities also ensured the recognition of the importance of bodily autonomy and the fact that not everyone will choose to be vaccinated. This is also related to the history of mistrust that Black communities had endured from the beginning.

Public Health Agency of Canada's Perspective Current policies & Practices and Ways Forward

- Under the principle of 'Nothing About Us without Us', having Black scholars engaged is the best way to move forward. The COVID-19 pandemic has provided us with a lot of experience and lessons learned. Community leaders played a critical role in engaging Black Communities and other communities that were most vulnerable. PHAC will continue to work together and provide support through community leadership
- PHAC will continue to listen to the community for advice, for developing collaborative partnership and sustainable engagement

From Community's Perspective Current policies & Practices and Ways forward

- Mental health is a sensitive issue in Black communities. Representation is key. If your doctor (health professional) looks like you, you are better able to open up to them.
- There should be a concerted effort and a commitment to produce, for example, 50 Black doctors in the next 10 years.
- A Pan-Canadian Black Strategy is a must. That is the only way forward.

Perspective from the Anti-Racism Secretariat: Now That the Prime Minister Has Extended the Decade for People of African Descent, what Aspirations Should We Have?

- The Permanent Forum on People of African descent is a United Nations forum developed to seek to advance the rights and needs of people of African descent. Canada has taken a leadership role in developing partnerships with other states. The Federal Anti Racism Secretariat has negotiated the North American partnership for equity and racial justice signed by the Prime Minister, the American President and the President of Mexico in 2023. This partnership provides unprecedented framework not only for governments to work together on racial justice and equity but even more so for organizations like everyone at the ACT Now! Conference to connect with their counterparts in the US and Mexico to enhance collaboration, whether it is information sharing, research or joint initiatives in addressing anti-Black racism.
- Canada has also started conversation with the Brazilian government. Brazil is a country with the second largest Black population in the world outside of Africa. This is an opportunity to connect with the incredible work Black organizations are doing in Brazil to counter the pandemic of racism and its relations to physical and mental health. Participants of the conference are encouraged to sign up on the Federal Anti-Racism Secretariat website.



A community's Perspective:

Things We Need to Pay Attention to When It Comes to Seniors, Young People and Other Members of the Community

- It is imperative that a Black mental health policy. In fact we need to consider a comprehensive health policy from cradle to the grave. We need to think about needs of pregnant women. Low-birth babies is an epidemic in the US and if we had the data it is certain that it is the same situation in Canada.
- From the focus on pre-natal mental health, we need to move to the importance of Black children's mental health and then moving to Black youth. For instance, what do we know and what are we doing about the suicide rates among Black youth. We also have to consider the mental of a diverse adult population including men, women, queer and trans adults who are experience years of mental health trauma.
- There is also a huge problem still not being addressed in Canada and that is the disproportionate rates of dementia within the Black community.
- The need to address mental health challenges in the prisons is very critical. It is usually estimated that 3% of inmates would be impacted by mental health but in actual fact the rate is 90%. There is also not enough services being made available to support inmates. Children and youth experience similar challenges in the child welfare system.
- Absent from conversation is the increasing trend of Black youth suicide rates. Because of the lack of data it is challenging to plan for support services.
- There is also a significant gap when it comes to Black youth with disabilities in general. Most disabilities are not visible to the public.
- It is also important to acknowledge that psychosocial challenges and trauma by the Black communities are trans-generational in nature.
- There is a dire need for disaggregated data. There is also a systemic approach to address issues such as disabilities or addictions.
- Intimate partner violence is another area that requires attention. The challenge comes with a lot with intersectional trauma. It is seen as a social issue when it should be considered as a public health issue. Support programs should go beyond the focus on women and incorporate the support for the whole family.
- How programs are funded is another systemic issue that is not helping the mental health challenges faced by Black communities. Long term sustainable funding are critical to address the issue in a meaningful way.
- Addictions within the Black community is another area where much attention has not been given. There are not enough space to learn what addictions look like, the various barriers that Black youth face and how they can be supported. There is a myth that addictions in the Black community is the use of marijuana. Substance use and the opioid crisis is also considered a 'downtown problem'. It is difficult to have support programs and services in rural areas.
- There is a growing trend of newcomers and asylum claimants in homeless shelters engaging in drugs. With the lack of culturally appropriate mental health support services many Black men with mental health challenges are interacting with the police which in turn is leading to fatalities. Examples were shared about a Sudanese refugee and an international student ended up being killed by the police following mental health crisis situations.
- The impact of COVID-19 and lack of housing has complicated issues for many newcomers and refugee claimants and there is no specific advocacy for them.
- Environmental racism and gentrification are added issues exacerbate the challenges faced by Black communities. Black communities are displaced and forced out of their communities and neighborhoods.

Conclusion

- Amanuel Melles concluded the panel circle discussion by reiterating that we need to move from making noise to the development of a comprehensive Black health and mental health strategy that pays particular attention and focus on the diverse and intersectional members of the Black community.
- The strategy will also be instrumental in connecting the different areas of concerns and ministry portfolios. It will be instrumental in connecting what is happening in Halifax to initiatives in Edmonton and Toronto etc. It will also connect other initiatives such as the Canadian Black Justice Strategy.
- Without a strategy we cannot have a dedicated resource to advance the health and wellbeing of Canadians.

Without a strategy we are lost and scattered!

Parting Comments

Our focus should include the next generation. Like the Indigenous communities, we need to start thinking and planning for 7 generations.

PHAC is looking forward to the call to action out of this conference. It has been a necessary forum for knowledge sharing and knowledge transfer.

The unemployment rate for Black people in good economic times is high. Imagine what it will be in difficult economic times! The government should develop a plan for appropriately supporting Black communities.

*“I look forward to the day when the first interaction of a young Black person with mental health system is in the back of a police car”
[Instead of being dead].*



Closing Sessions

What makes ACT Now! Conference unique is the incorporation of experiential session where participants can practice the theme of the gathering – Rest is Liberation.

Using African centered traditions, rituals and discussion Elder Aina-Nia graced the conference with her presence and energizing engagement ending it with a call to Action - Commit to not die for anti-Black racism! But Live to build our people!

Rest is Black Liberation – Closing Session

Elder Aina-Nia Ayo'Dele

Elder Aina-Nia engaged the participants in an energising but poignant closing session by bringing participants in a large circle, a circle that was much bigger than the 2023 ACT Now! Conference; a demonstration of growth, prosperity, and fertility. She also started the session by using music for movement and dance to help open up oneself to conversation around rest and liberation. This was followed by the African tradition and ceremony of libation; inviting ancestors into the space.

Ancestors are already present but in calling their names, we call them to ground and anchor the gathering and the participants for commitment.

- Black communities find ourselves in mental unwellness because we have been uprooted from our traditions, cultures and being not just geographically but spiritually as well.
- When one's way of being, one's core values and purpose, one's honor is taken away, it results in mental unwellness and dis-ease.
- This is how colonialism and slavery have brought upon Black communities.



In view of the above, how do we Rest and make it our Liberation? Which is the ask of the conference.

- It has been mentioned during the course of the two days that we need to force the government to develop a policy for Black Mental Health – A Black Mental Health Strategy and hold them accountable. We need to remember who we are. We need to do the ‘Sankof’. In the Ethiopian tradition ‘Sankof’ is the process of removing the jiggers flea completely from the feet – specifically from the skin part of the nail in the foot. If it is not removed fully and completely, it continues to infect the area resulting in complication and in some cases requiring amputation. In the same way, we need to dig out and remove the dis-ease before it infects the entire body – the community.
- The easiest way to remove the dis-ease is ‘Sankofa’ – to go back and fetch. Return to our original ways of who we are, of how we are, how we do and what our purpose is. When we remember who we are then Rest becomes easy. Sleep is part of it but Rest is stillness, the listening to self, the spiritual self.
- We usually tend to say that ‘nobody cares so I have to do it myself. I must sacrifice myself’. This is a statement that emanates from a place of unwellness. Black leaders are in pain. We want to address anti-Black racism. We want to fix anti-Black racism so much that it is killing us. However, we need to realize that our ancestors have already paid the price.

- **What is our calling? What should we do? Commit to not die for anti-Black racism! Live! Live to build our people. “I have stopped trying to confront or dismantle institutions. I am choosing to build my people, to make them strong and healthy. I am choosing to build structures that will support us. To bring my people to love themselves. We have a choice. The systems do not care. They are not broken. They have been built that way. And when we are dead, they come to our funerals and read their letters”.**

Elder Aina-Nia asked the participants to engage in an exercise where they would write on a piece of paper what they would need to release in order to make the Black Mental Health Strategy a reality. Participants were asked to write down what is stopping to live out their vision. If it stops one individual, it stops everyone – the community. Examples are, distrust, jealousy, resentment of the past etc.

Once the participants had written on the piece of paper, they were asked to place the note in a pot which later was burnt as a demonstration of releasing those hurdles towards rest and building the strategy. The note was to be signed and dated. This was an agreement that everyone ought to make with oneself because REST IS LIBERATION!

I give myself permission to REST by

_____ (e.g. taking 30 seconds every hour to do a breathing exercise, to sleep at 6 hrs a day, to stop work at 5pm, to make Saturday a day of joy) because I deserve to experience LIBERATION so that I may _____ (e.g. fulfill my destiny on planet earth to be the best African descendant).

I LOVE MYSELF!

Rest is Black Liberation

Emcee, Moderating And Facilitation

The ACT Now! 2024 Conference's success would have not been achieved without the Emceeing, moderation, facilitation and thoughtful engagement and care provided by two amazing community members who made the two and half days enjoyable, fun and captivating.

Marlon Cole – Public Speaker, Brand Strategist and Mental Health Ambassador, and **Adama Bundu** - Family & Child Interventionist / Family & Parenting Coach.

On behalf of all of the Conference participants, WE THANK YOU!!



EMCEE Marlon Cole and Adama Bundu ended the conference with the words of Marianne Williamson:

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, ‘Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?’ Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of a serve the world.

There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do.

We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

Evaluation

The evaluation of the conference covered a few questions:

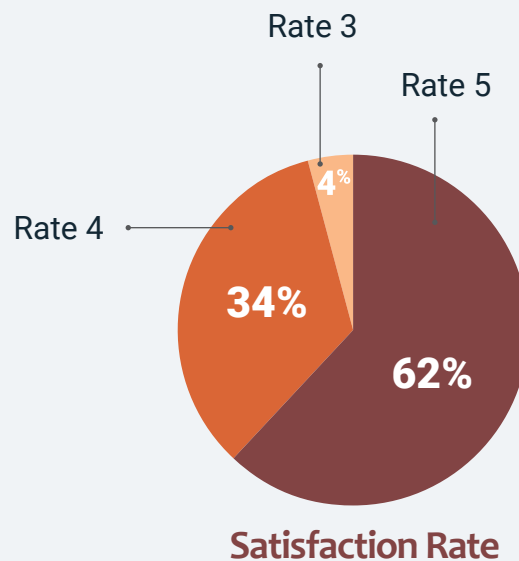
- How satisfied are you about the conference?
- How will you realize Rest as Liberation?
- How will you use the information and knowledge gained?
- What are your calls to action for service providers and for policy makers / governments?
- How can we improve the conference?

Overall experience of the Conference

The average satisfaction rate given by participants was 4.5 out of 5.

Some quotes from the participants include:

- “The conference was absolutely phenomenal, keep up the great work!”
- “The conference was well organized. Volunteers were accessible”
- “It seems to get better every year”
- “I like the way it was organized. Venue was great. Rooms, food and snack were great. It was an enjoyable conference”
- “I will make time for deliberate rest and I have learned to say NO without feeling under pressure...”



How will you realize Rest as Liberation?

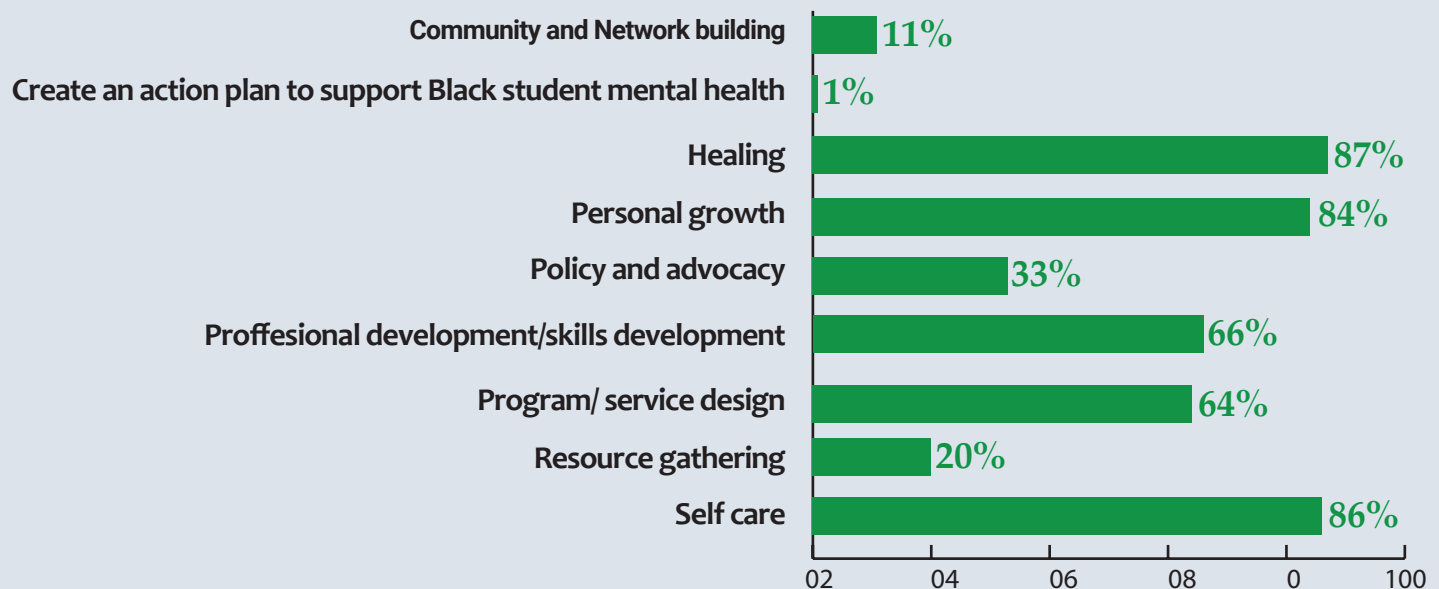
The repeated theme that emerged in the response to this question was **intentionality**.

Some quotes from the participants include:

- “I will be more intentional about taking rest”
- “I will choose the battles to tackle”
- “Being a stronger ally for my colleagues and clients
- “Take my self-care as a priority”
- “... not to try harder to prove myself”
- “Apply everyday routine and be consistent”
- “Be intentional for self-care, self-aware, self-advocate and self-healing”
- “Giving myself permission to rest”
- “Stop Feeling guilty for resting”

How will you use the information gained?

Participants were asked to select from a menu of options to answer this question.



ACT Now! – Call to action to service providers

Several call to action were recommended by the participants.

- **Understand** the employees and the emotional weight they carry
- **Be Intentional** how to promote, actualize and advocate for rest within the organization and in the community
- **Be aware** of the challenge facing front line staff and promote rest as liberation
- **Actively** make changes within the organization from the top down at all levels so that Rest becomes a shared language across the organization
- **Acknowledge** the barriers in the community and work together with the community to find and implement solutions. Advocate for change
- **Incorporate** rest not only programs and services but also in the organizational culture
- **Recognize** the importance of rest a revolution to liberate and start our healing
- **Create** space to continue the dialogue – moving from being a spectator to participating in solutions
- **Allow** intentional time for employees to rest, recognizing that this allows for the employees to bring their best self to work
- **Provide** allyship to Black communities in order to realize their goals for equity
- **Advocate** for change within the system
- **Make** noise about the issues concerning the Black communities
- **Be authentic** in the advocacy you do
- **Encourage and Respect** rest for staff and service users
- **Create** safe spaces for employees and clients to be able to ask for help, show their vulnerabilities so that they can feel being heard
- **Acknowledge** the impact of racism and racial disparities

ACT Now! – Call to action to Policy Makers & Government

The calls to action for policy makers and government include:

- Government must **engage** with the challenges faced by Black communities and **not just throw money at the problem.**
- **Start fixing** the problem within the system
- **Meaningfully engage** the voices of the people
- **Create and enact** policies that can quantitatively measure the improvement of Black communities' health and wellbeing. **Start with respecting the Charter of Rights!**
- **Create** a 10-year plan to improve the Black Health Outcomes that gets monitored every 2 years
- **Allocate** sufficient fund to support preventative mental health and addictions treatment and recovery services
- **Increase** financial support to Black organizations serving Black communities
- **Remove** policies and laws that perpetuate anti-Black racism and disparities in society
- **Implement** rest as a public holiday and introduce recognition for those who practice it
- **Bring forward** bill and proposals that focus on Afrocentric/Indigenous lens and weave them into existing systems
- **Fund Research** by Black researchers for Black communities
- **Collect** race-based data and bring forward policies that brings more accountability

How can we improve the conference and what themes would you suggest for 2025?

The following improvement ideas were provided:

- **Make it bigger** – more breakout sessions, more activities, more presentations and more practical exercises
- **Invite / Engage** artists, poets, singers
- **Add another day** to the conference. The Conference seemed fully packed and there was not enough time to network. Also having a formal network time and space would be good
- **Include** activities so that we have something tangible to take away (e.g. painting, crafts)
- **Online participation** was not the greatest due to audio limitations.
- **Better** conference bags (canvas) with cultural imaging (e.g. baobab tree)
- **Bring back** the massage
- **Organize** the breakout rooms in such a way that participants remain in the same room and presenters rotate
- **Allow more time** in breakout rooms and limit the number of people for better discussion and conversation
- **Advertise and promote** the conference early for better preparation and attendance
- All subjects presented and discussed were great but not enough time to spend with each topic. Fewer subjects and more time next time.
- **Get more youth to attend**
- **Showcase** LGBTQIA+ and their unique mental health needs and experiences
- **Community Resources** available to attendees
- **Include** diverse voices for panel conversation – individuals with lived experiences, mental health advocates
- **The sound bath** session happened at the wrong time of the day and should have its own separate workshops
- **The conference was wrapped up in haste** because of weather/storm.
- **Provide** culturally appropriate food





Theme for Next Conference

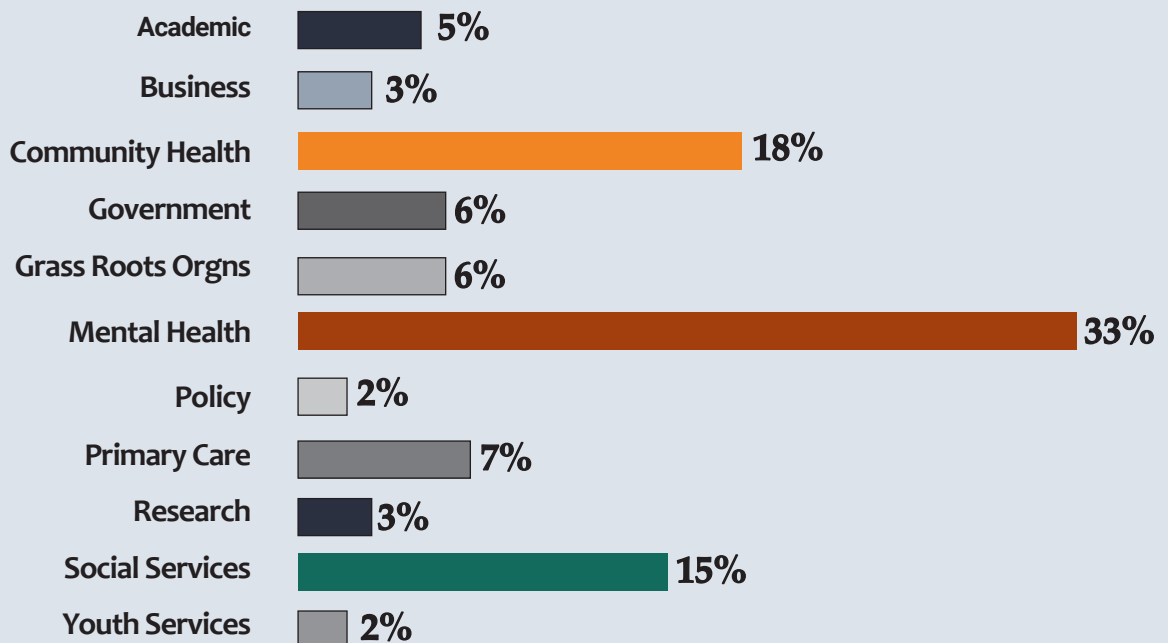
- Black Intersectionality
- Nia – Purpose
- Community Cohesion
- Process to Progress
- The power of Hope
- The power of mental health in Ubuntu
- Black community Development
- Let's Learn together hand in hand
- Research as Resistance
- Reconnecting to Africa
- Empowerment, Emotional Regulation & Mindfulness
- Something on Youth or Generation
- Black Families – the new era

Feedback from Community Stakeholders & Partners

A meeting with community stakeholders and partners was held post-conference to gather reflections and feedback on three main areas: what went well, what didn't work well, and improvements for future opportunities. The summary of their reflection include:

- The team reflected on the evolution of their project over the past few years, noting the difference between the initial motivation and the emotional release seen in subsequent conferences. They emphasized the importance of creating a space at the conference for emotional expression and suggested adding an educational component to help frontline workers articulate their needs to policymakers.
- The team highlighted the benefits of having committee members from different provinces, acknowledging the varied landscapes and challenges.
- They emphasized the importance of addressing intersections such as housing and mental health, particularly acknowledging cultural nuances within Black communities, such as intergenerational households.
- The participants also reflected on the need to shift from merely surviving to thriving, inspired by a previous conference speaker. They pointed out the importance of addressing intersectionality, including gender and sexual identity, noting the high suicide rates among Black transgender individuals and the need for resources and support.
- It was acknowledged that appropriate funding for the conference is crucial to be able to offer the conference cost free. The conference fee has limited the participation of many grassroots organizations such as those dealing with housing, food banks, and faith-based groups. While MHBC-funded agency staff could participate due to specific funding allocations, many grassroots organizations were not able to do so.
- Another suggestion was to be more intentional about including youth and children in future conferences to foster intergenerational dialogue and understanding. The involvement of children through art competitions to express their mental health experiences was an idea that was proposed. The stakeholders also suggested opportunities for collective action among organizations to advocate for funding and support from policymakers.
- Despite the snowstorm cutting the conference short and limiting data collection, the need for actionable feedback was acknowledged for the need for actionable feedback.

Sectors represented at the conference



Speakers



Dr. Hamdi Mohamed

Dr. Hamdi Mohamed is a researcher, an organizational development consultant, and the Co-Founder of Kaafi Integrative Health. She has over 20 years of professional experience in leading organizations, consulting, teaching, and designing and implementing organizational change and research projects.

Dr Mohamed is recognized for her innovative approach, designing, and facilitating highly participatory processes to co-create solutions with impact and capacity to break down old ways of thinking by providing fresh insights. She has served in

non-profit sector leadership for over 20+ years, including being the former Executive Director of the Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO) and the Ottawa Rape Crisis Centre (ORCC).

Dr. Mohamed designed and taught graduate and undergraduate at Carleton University and American University Abroad and lectured widely on refugee resettlement, social work, human rights, social justice, public policy, and gender and politics in North America, Europe, and Africa. She published several research papers and contributed

to numerous scholarly works.

Dr. Mohamed has received several leadership awards recognizing her community service and professional achievements including being named a Community Builder by the Black History Ottawa and being recognized as one of the Top 10 Inspiring Citizens to Watch in Ottawa in 2010. She holds a PhD and MA in History from the University of Ottawa and a BA in African History and English Literature from the Somali National University.

Dr. Onye Nnorom



Dr. Onye Nnorom is a distinguished physician, advocate, public speaker and leader in the field of public health and equity. She is a family doctor and public health and preventive medicine specialist and Assistant Professor at the University of Toronto. Born in Montreal to parents of Nigerian and Trinidadian backgrounds, she learned at an early age the impact of social injustice and the power of community action. With a deep commitment to social justice and health equity, Dr. Nnorom has dedicated her career to addressing health disparities and improving health outcomes for marginalized communities, with a particular focus on Black populations.

Dr. Nnorom completed her medical training at McGill University, where she developed a passion for community medicine and the importance of addressing social

determinants of health. She went on to pursue a Master of Public Health degree at the University of Toronto..

She has led numerous initiatives aimed at reducing health disparities, promoting cultural competency in healthcare, and empowering underserved populations. From 2013 to 18 was the chronic disease prevention lead at TAIBU Community Health Centre, where she led several successful cancer screening initiatives which have been published in peer-reviewed journals;. From 2019-2022, she was the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Lead, within the Department of Family and Community Medicine at the University of Toronto as well as the President of the Black Physicians' Association of Ontario where she forged a partnership between the BPAO and the DFCM

to lead and coordinate vaccine and wellness clinics across Ontario during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr. Nnorom is the host of a podcast called Race, Health, and Happiness where she interviews successful Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color, providing wisdom on how to stay well in a “racialized world”. Dr. Nnorom is the co-founder of the Black Health Education Collaborative, which was established to provide online educational resources on anti-Black racism and Black health for health professional students, clinicians, and public health practitioners. She is a mother, a dancer, host of the podcast Race, Health and Happiness, and past president of the Black Physicians' Association of Ontario.

Speakers



Sharon Davis-Murdoch C.M

Sharon Davis-Murdoch C.M., is a social justice champion. Retired from the Nova Scotia Public Service, Sharon's political science background and public policy experience inform her work in the community. Among her public policy accomplishments was the development of the first Provincial Guidelines for Culturally Competent Primary Health Care in Canada. Sharon was made a Paul Harris Fellow by the Halifax and Dartmouth Rotary Foundations of Rotary International in April and December 2022, recognizing her commitment to service over self. In December 2021 Sharon was named to the Order of Canada for her dedication to culturally competent care and improving the health equity and inclusion of racialized communities in Nova Scotia.

Sharon received Premier's Awards of Excellence in 2007 and 2015. Sharon works at the community level and is a founding member and the Co-President of the Health Association of African Canadians. In addition to that role, Sharon was appointed and served as Commissioner on the Independent Commission on Effective Electoral Representation of Acadian and African Nova Scotians in 2017.

In 2018, Sharon received the Inspiration Award from the Dalhousie School of Public Administration awarded to public servants who have demonstrated a superior dedication and commitment to mentoring, coaching, and inspiring students and public servants over the course of their careers.

She served as Co-Manager to the Association of Black Social Workers and Health Association of African Canadians, COVID-19 Response and Impact Team, now evolved to the Advisory Committee for Black Public Health. She is also currently a co-lead Faculty of the East Coast Public Policy Training Institute.

President of Shamardavon Consulting, Sharon is a proud member of the Dartmouth Community and an even prouder Nana of two growing boys.

Aina-Nia Ayo'dele



Aina-Nia is “A transformative leader and change maker.” She is CEO & Principal of Aina-Nia Learning Journey Inc. and is unapologetically on a mission to influence institutions and individuals to create bold and meaningful change through a decolonized approach to leadership, as a means to equity, inclusion, reparation, and reconciliation and most importantly, SELF-love. Aina-Nia is a leadership coach, author, and ancient wisdom teacher who considers herself a Spiritual Liberation Activist.

In 2018, Aina-Nia established North America’s first government-sanctioned strategy and permanent office to address anti-Black racism and was the lead consultant on the creation of the Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism.

She led the development of the COVID Equity Plan on Community Engagement & Mobilization for Vaccine Equity, including the establishment of the Black Scientists’ Taskforce for Vaccine Equity, Toronto Youth Vaccination Advisory, and the Accessibility Taskforce.

Over a decade ago she founded Sacred Women International and the life transformational process, Sacred Leaders Training™ which has been transforming individuals, families, and communities.

Aina-Nia is known for masterfully integrating her spiritual and corporate expertise throughout all her offerings to create generational impacts.

She is multifaceted - a Yoruba priest initiated in various other ancient wisdom traditions as well as an Ontario licensed clergy in Metaphysical & New Thought Ancient Wisdom.

Aina-Nia was honored with a Lifetime Advocacy Award in February 2022. In 2018, she was named one of the 100 Most Accomplished Black Canadian Women. Aina-Nia’s work is featured in the film Remembering Her Power, which premiered at the 2018 Parliament of World Religions in Toronto.

Organizing Committee

Solomon Lome

Solomon is a Public Health professional with over 15 years of international experience. As the project coordinator for the Amandla Olwazi -The Power of Knowledge national knowledge mobilization and networking project He has led the coordination of the conference.

Solomon holds a Master of Science in International Health from University College London, England. He has extensively worked on promoting the health and well-being of marginalized communities including HIV and STBBI programming, stigma reduction, mental health, and community-based research.

Dana Williams

Growing up in an under-privileged high priority Scarborough neighborhood, Dana learned about Anti- Black racism at an early age. Although it was a diverse community, she learned quickly that she as a Black kid was not expected to succeed.

She was the first valedictorian to the Scarborough Black Education Organization student leadership series; she was not only the first Black nurse but the first nurse in Ontario to be certified as a child protection agent by the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS); she is the first Black nurse to be hired at the biggest closed custody youth facility Roy McMurty Youth Centre in Canada.

Ann-Marie Moulton

Ann-Marie Moulton is a Social Worker, and Community Leader, who is passionate about social justice work and has dedicated 15+ years serving marginalized population groups as a case manager, poverty advocate, and youth counsellor through community engagement and development efforts.

Ann-Marie has served on the City of Toronto's Poverty Reduction Advisory Board for four years, helping to create pathways to prosperity by focusing on improving quality jobs, adequate income, stable housing, affordable transportation, nutritious food, supportive services, and by informing the effective development, implementation, and monitoring of the City's Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Ann-Marie's passion for people extends through her heart for community. She has a deep desire to see communities thrive, and is committed to work that provides opportunity and inclusion, as well as enhanced resilience and security allowing people to live in dignity.

Ebenezer Ayim

Ebenezer Ayim holds MA in Disability Studies at the University of Manitoba, Canada, and BSc. Psychology from the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. He was born in Ghana and received his Bachelor of science degree in Psychology from the University of Cape Coast (UCC), Ghana in 2013. His background and experience include years of research in mental health, intersectionality, disability, race, health inequalities using community participatory and systematic review as research methodologies.

Ebenezer hopes to see a society where systemic barriers that prevent Black persons with disabilities from achieving their mental wellness are addressed. Ebenezer is the founder of HOPE ALIFE CENTER, Ghana, a non-profit organization and charitable organization that provides mental health support services for disabled youth, children, and seniors in Ghana.

Watetu Gichuki

Watetu Gichuki is currently dedicated to her doctoral studies in the Global Health Program at McMaster University in Canada. As a scholar affiliated with the Stronger Futures Centre of Research Excellence (CRE) at Murdoch Children's Institute Australia, she brings a unique perspective to her research. Her PhD focuses on the health of African, Caribbean, and Black women (ACB), specifically emphasizing Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). In her research, Watetu explores the application of an Afrocentric perspective to address the experiences of IPV among ACB women in Canada.

Watetu also takes on the role of a Program Manager in the Violence Against Women (VAW) sector. Her professional journey spans both VAW and public health, collaborating with diverse groups. Watetu approaches her work with a commitment to decolonizing practices and a trauma-aware, integrated feminist lens. This approach reflects her profound understanding of the intersecting challenges women face.

In 2020, Watetu was honored with the Gown African Scholars Award for Emerging Academic Achievement. Beyond her academic and professional commitments, Watetu continues to inform the broader dialogue on issues affecting women's well-being.

Fimo Mitchell

Fimo Mitchell is a meditation teacher, a writer, and a podcast host. In 2021 he founded When The Village Meditates, a non-profit dedicated to creating meditation, yoga, and discussion spaces as well as wellness retreats that centers on racialized and marginalized people.

Fimo has published three books, his most recent work is a collection of short stories titled Pastel Remembrances.

Bankole Thomas

Mr. Thomas Bankole is a retired Engineer with extensive work experience in the manufacturing industry in Canada and the US. He has a great passion for Black "Rest and Liberation", and he believes TAIBU is a formidable vehicle - along with others - to get us there. Mr. Bankole is an ardent advocate for equity in the area of mental health and well-being and social justice in the Greater Edmonton Area.

He is a serving member of several non-profit organizations in Alberta and spends time advocating and supporting our community members who are victims of systemic inequity in our health and justice system.

Hathor-Ra Phoenix Adwoa

Previously known as Sabrina Morrison, now named Hathor-Ra Phoenix Adwoa, is a subject matter expert, with over 20 years in Leadership, Human Services, and Mental Health.

Passionate throughout Alberta and Ontario for black health equity, mental wellness, and healing. Hathor-Ra has dedicated her life to Spiritual Healing and wellness as a Spiritual Doula and a Mental Health Instructor across Canada at Sacred Health and Wellness Network.

Hathor-Ra was the lead for the African Caribbean Black (ACB) Caucus of Alberta, past Elder for the USHARI Eldership Advisory Board for the Canadian Institute for People of African Descent and now Co-Chair for the Amandla Olwazi - The Power of Knowledge of Project advisory committee.

Shanique Edwards

Shanique Victoria is an Ontario-based psychotherapist, registered with the College of Registered Psychotherapists of Ontario (CRPO). She completed her undergraduate degree at the University of Toronto in Neuroscience and Psychology and holds a graduate degree from Tyndale University in Clinical Counselling. Shanique is a Knowledge Translation Specialist for the Cundill Centre for Child and Youth Depression at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH).

In addition, she currently serves as the Knowledge Translation Specialist for Black Mental Health Canada (BMHC) and is a member of BMHC's Circle of Leaders. Shanique has conducted mental health workshops for non-profit and professional organizations, college and university student organizations, and corporate businesses.

She has developed and facilitated workshops, as well as written broadly on the topic of racial trauma and mental health resilience.

Noah Boakye-Yiadom

Noah Boakye-Yiadom is a dedicated health promotion facilitator with Alberta Health Services, committed to fostering mental health, preventing addiction, and addressing suicide in the communities of Lacombe County, Ponoka County, and Clearwater County.

His journey in the field of public health began with a solid foundation, earning a Bachelor of Health Sciences (BHSc) degree from the University of Western Ontario in 2005. Driven by a passion for community well-being, Noah furthered his education by obtaining a Master of Public Health (MPH) from Lakehead University in 2010.

Noah is currently a PhD Student at the University of Calgary's Cumming School of Medicine. Noah Boakye-Yiadom's story is one of passion, collaboration, and a relentless pursuit of positive change in the realm of public health. Through his work, he continues to make a lasting impact on the mental health and well-being of the communities he serves.

Acknowledgment

TAIBU would like to acknowledge the following organizations, individuals, and partners without whom this conference would have not been possible.

- Amandla Olwazi Project Advisory Committee
- Amandla Olwazi Project Collaborators
- ACT Now! 2024 Conference Sponsors
- ACT Now! 2024 Organizing Committee
- Amandla Olwazi Project team
- All partners and stakeholders
- TAIBU Ambassadors and volunteers



Sponsors

Organizing such a national event is costly and as such TAIBU proudly thanks those who share the TAIBU's vision to support the initiative and make the conference a success.

We sincerely thank the **Public Health Agency of Canada, Royal Bank of Canada, Bell Canada, and The Network for the Advancement of Black Communities (NABC)** for their generous support in executing this year's conference.

Service Providers

Decor:	Miders concept
AV and live streaming:	Red Sound and Lighting Inc,
French interpretation:	Cassie Pierre-Louis & Diana Saint-Jean
Interpretation equipment:	Libra Show System Inc
Coffee ceremony:	Jebena Coffee (Jalene and Marta)
Drumming:	Amadou Kienou, Negus Medhin, and their team
DJ:	Kwaku Owusu
Conference Branding Design:	Fiveline Creatives



ACT Now!

We look forward to see you at our next gathering in 2025



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