

Edmonton, Alberta
March 19-21, 2025

ACT Now!

3rd NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
BLACK MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS



Rooted in Traditions: Healing Through Ubuntu CONFERENCE PROGRAM



ORGANIZED BY:
COMMUNITY
HEALTH CENTRE

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Foreword from TAIBU

The 3rd Annual ACT Now! Conference on Black Mental Health is here! Encouraged by the success of the two other conferences in 2023 and 2024, we are excited to be gathering together again this year to continue this important and meaningful conversation and knowledge exchange.

This year, we are hoping to root our conversations in traditions and exchange knowledge, experience and wisdom to promote healing for the communities that we serve and for ourselves through the principle of Ubuntu – “I am because we are”.

The conference planning committee has worked very hard to ensure that your experience at this unique conference will be meaningful, engaging and inspiring. I have great confidence that it will meet your expectations.

Thank you for making time to be present and to participate. On behalf of the planning committee, TAIBU Board of Directors, staff, volunteers and the communities that we serve, I extend to you a great welcome!

TAIBU - “Be In Good Health” !

Liben Gebremikael

Liben Gebremikael
CEO, TAIBU Community Health Centre

About the Conference

The ACT Now! Conference on Black Mental Health emerged out of the Amandla Olwazi - The Power of Knowledge project. The plan to have a dialogue with about 20 projects funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada under the Promoting the Mental Health of Black Canadians initiative turned into a national conference charged by the community to be held on an annual basis. Building on existing research around anti-Black racism and its impact in Canada with an Afrocentric lens, Amandla Olwazi aims to create a learning environment rooted in traditions and holistic practices with the purpose of exchanging knowledge that promotes the health & wellbeing of Black Canadians.

The ACT Now! conference is part of our purpose of centering cultural heritage and Africentric knowledge systems and highlights strategies for fostering our strength to thrive against adversity, building strong support networks, and overcoming systemic barriers to mental health care.

This year’s theme explores transformative ways to integrate Ancestral Traditions & Ubuntu—a philosophy of interconnectedness and collective well-being—into mental health practices. It focuses on communal healing approaches, emphasizing cultural identity, collective responsibility, and empowerment to address mental health challenges in Black communities.

About Amandla Olwazi

The Amandla Olwazi-The Power of Knowledge project is guided by Afrocentric traditional values and principles and is committed to reducing the impact of anti-Black racism on the mental health and well-being of Black communities in Canada.

The project aims to gather, and synthesize knowledge through research, and community engagement, and develop Afrocentric principled knowledge mobilization products. It also engages diverse Black community members and establishes a strong collaborative partnership with groups to mobilize knowledge. By reducing barriers to mental health in Black communities, the project aims to positively impact policies and practices related to the mental health and well-being of Black Canadians.

To learn more about this initiative and the resources available, please visit www.blackwellnessnetwork.ca

Nea Onnim
The Adinkra Symbol of Knowledge



Themes

Empowerment and Advocacy:

Equip attendees with knowledge and tools to advocate for mental health wellness within Black communities.

Focus on Mental Health:

Examine the unique mental health challenges faced by Black individuals and communities due to systemic racism.

Community Engagement:

Foster dialogue, networking and collaboration among community members, researchers, healthcare professionals, leaders, and activists.

Conference Objectives

- 1 Integrating Ancestral Traditions and Ubuntu:**
Explore how ancestral practices and the philosophy of Ubuntu—interconnectedness and collective well-being—can enhance mental health approaches.
- 2 Emphasizing Communal Healing:**
Highlight the power of collective healing methods that reinforce cultural identity, shared responsibility, and community empowerment.
- 3 Centering Cultural Heritage:**
Utilize Africentric knowledge systems to address mental health challenges while celebrating and preserving cultural traditions.
- 4 Fostering Resilience and Strength:**
Discover strategies for overcoming adversity, building support networks, and empowering individuals and communities to thrive.
- 5 Addressing Systemic Barriers:**
Identify and tackle structural inequities to create equitable access to mental health care for Black communities.



Hon Nancy Hamzawi

Executive Vice President of the Public Health Agency of Canada

Guest Address

Nancy Hamzawi joined the Public Health Agency of Canada in February 2023 as the Executive Vice-President. Prior to this position, Ms. Hamzawi served as the Assistant Deputy Minister (ADM) of Health Canada's Health Products and Food Branch. Ms. Hamzawi also assumed the role of acting Federal Lead and ADM of Policy and Strategic Integration of the COVID-19 Testing, Contact Tracing and Data Strategy Secretariat at Health Canada.

Before joining the Health Portfolio, from 2018 to 2020, Ms. Hamzawi served as ADM of Environment and Climate Change Canada's Science and Technology Branch. Ms. Hamzawi has also held several executive leadership positions in international affairs, regulatory programs and policy, and audit and evaluation.

Ms. Hamzawi holds a Master's Degree in Chemical Engineering and Bachelor's Degrees in Chemical Engineering and Biochemistry from the University of Ottawa.

Keynote Speakers



Shayla Dube

Shayla S. Dube (She/Her/We/Us) is a clinical social worker, part-time social work professor, anti-oppressive mental health therapist, and intersectionality-grounded facilitator committed to decolonizing mental health as an act of colonial resistance and epistemic justice.

Rooted in Ubuntu, her work challenges Eurocentric frameworks by centering culturally affirming, trauma-responsive, and community-driven healing practices.

By disrupting cognitive imperialism and amplifying marginalized epistemologies, she creates spaces where decolonization moves beyond theory into praxis, fostering psychological safety, collective healing, and liberation.

Dr Akwatu Khenti

Akwatu Khenti is Director of Social Policy Analysis and Research (SPAR) and former head of Community Resources at the City of Toronto's Social Development, Finance and Administration Division.

Akwatu is also an affiliate scientist with the Institute for Mental Health Policy Research (IMHPR) at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) and an Associate Professor with the Dalla Lana School of Public Health (DLSPH, U of T).



Akwatu led the development of the Substance Abuse Program for African Canadian and Caribbean Youth (SAPACCY), now known as AMANI and was also a co-lead of the development of culturally adapted cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) interventions for counsellors/clinicians working with Black individuals of African Caribbean origin (both English and French speaking).

He also adapted this tool for Christian and Vodou priests in Haiti. He has co-led substance abuse capacity building across the Caribbean, Central America, Mexico, Brazil and Chile, Tanzania and Nigeria. Akwatu developed an anti-stigma intervention to reduce mental health stigma in primary health care in Ontario and has co-led regional drug research capacity building with the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD, OAS) involving 30 universities across Latin America and the Caribbean.

Akwatu also teaches a wide variety of graduate courses, from International Health, Human Rights and Peacebuilding to the Fundamentals of Black Mental Health.

Akwatu is formerly the Assistant Deputy Minister for Ontario's Anti-Racism Directorate (2017-2020) as well as CAMH's Director of Transformative Global Health (1997-2017). He was also Special Advisor to the City of Toronto's COVID-19 equity initiative and Chair of the Black Scientists' Task Force on Vaccine Equity (2020-2023).

He has a PhD in health policy and equity from York University and was appointed as a member of the Council of Canadian Academies' (CCA) Expert Panel on Socio-Economic Impacts of Science and Health Misinformation (2021-22).



Shirley Hodder

Shirley Hodder is the Provincial African Nova Scotian Health Services Consultant at Nova Scotia Health, dedicated to improving health outcomes and addressing systemic barriers and inequities faced by ANS/African descent and Black communities.

Shirley Hodder works collaboratively across NSH programs and with government, academic, and community partners to enhance access, representation, and diversity in health services across the province.

In addition to her role at NSH, Shirley is the Research Coordinator for Moving Forward Together, a research initiative based in Dalhousie University's School of Social Work that seeks to challenge and unsettle racism, silence, and violence within health care and social services affecting African Nova Scotians.

A proud member of the Black Loyalist community of Gibson Woods, Shirley holds a BSc in Health Promotion and a Master's in Health Administration, along with a Certificate in Healthcare Law for Non-Lawyers from Dalhousie University.

With a strong background in academic research and advocacy, she is deeply committed to accessibility, inclusivity, and accountability, particularly for the ANS and disability communities—an advocacy shaped by her lived experience as a Child of Deaf Adults (CoDA).

Odion Welch

Born and raised in Edmonton, Alberta, Odion Welch is an Amazon internationally recognized best-selling author for her novel Breakthrough. She is currently pursuing a doctoral of leadership with a focus in social justice.

She holds a certificate in Business Management from Macewan University, a degree in Human Resources & Labour Relations from Athabasca University, a recruitment designation from the Association of Professional Recruiters, and a Master of Arts in Leadership at Royal Roads University.

Suffering from depression and anxiety all her life, she aspired to share her story to help minorities, particularly women and children. Odion's vulnerability to show how she broke through personal struggles demonstrates that we are not alone.

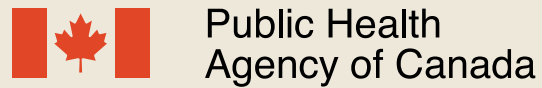


She uses vulnerability and conversations to empower women to overcome their struggles, whether family, finance or connections. Through her work and her book, she has created, supported and implemented panels, workshops, and organization rebranding.

Not only that, she has engaged in a Western Canada book tour, hosted a panel at Edmonton Comics Expo and spoke at Kingsway's International Woman's Day Panel.

Sponsors

We are grateful for the support and collaboration with our funders and sponsors of the 3rd Annual ACT Now! Conference on Black Mental Health.



Indigenous Elder

Tansi, My name is Apitah Kisikinew Piyesiw (Southern Thunderbird), known as Chantelle Gray in the Western World. I am Metis/Cree from Northern Alberta (Treaty 8). I am a Mother to 4, and an Auntie to many. I am also the founder and steward of Maskwa Medicine.

I love to spend my time outside with my dog's, reading a good book, laughing so hard people can't help but join in or being on the Land visiting with our plant relatives. In my professional work I am a certified Life Coach, Counselor, and Circle Facilitator.

Through my own healing journey I've shifted from western ways of addressing substance use, trauma, sexual health, gender based violence and learned behaviours to reclaim my own Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

I have been taught and continue to grow through Ceremony, connecting to the land, Our Matriarch's and connecting to the language that the barriers we face as Indigenous people are not insurmountable.

My goal is to share and support your own healing journey through grassroots community building efforts, safe, and inclusive Circles, storytelling, and Land Based teachings. Together we become strong and together is really the only way we can move forward in a good way!

Ayhay Ekosi!

Apitah Kisikinew Piyesiw (Southern Thunderbird)

Known as Chantelle Gray in the Western World



Emcees

Bert and Karen Richards are a second-generation African and Caribbean-Canadian couple in Edmonton, Alberta (Treaty 6 territory). Through activism and engagement, they create safe spaces for families and communities to connect and celebrate heritage.

Team Richards has explored the globe on The Amazing Race Canada and impacted their local community. Since founding Joyful Noise Inc. in 2023, they have hosted cultural workshops for festivals, schools, senior facilities, and business events.

Bert specializes in Event Management, Arts, and Entertainment. Karen is a Social Worker (MSW, RSW) with a Bachelors in Science of Psychology and a certified Mental Health First Aid Facilitator. Together, they bring 50 years of community volunteering, speaking, and program facilitation experience.

Bert and Karen Richards

The 3rd Annual ACT Now! conference Emcees



African Centered Ceremony & Wellness Session

Aina-Nia Ayo'dele, "A transformative leader and change maker," is CEO & Principal of Aina-Nia Learning Journey Inc., unapologetically on a mission to influence institutions and individuals to create bold and meaningful change through a non-colonial and indigenized approach to leadership as a means to equity, inclusion, reparation, and reconciliation and most importantly, SELF love.

Aina-Nia is a leadership coach, author, ancient wisdom teacher and a Spiritual Liberation Activist. She is a well sought-after public speaker who presents to academic, corporate, government, Faith and civil society audiences across North America, United Kingdom, West Africa and the Caribbean.

She is known for inspiring action through her masterful delivery, transforming you almost immediately. This multifaceted leader is known for integrating corporate expertise and indigenous African practices to create notable impacts.

Aina-Nia Oye'Dele

CEO & Principal of
Aina-Nia Learning Journey Inc

Program Agenda

Wednesday, March 19, 2025

Time	Event	Presenter(s)
3:45 PM	Conference Opening	Karen & Bert Richards
4:00 PM	Indigenous & African Opening Ceremony	Chantelle Gray, Elder Aina-Nia Oye'dle
4:30 PM	Official Welcome	Liben Gebremikael
4:45 PM	Official Remarks	Hon. Nancy Hamzawi
5:00 PM	Report from PHAC	
5:20 PM	Premiere Screening of the FREEDOM Documentary & Conversation	Wayne Salmon, Neil Price, May Mohamed
6:30 PM	Opening Keynote	Shayla Dube
7:15 PM	Housekeeping	
7:30 PM	Dinner, Social Networking, DJ	

Thursday, March 20, 2025

Time	Event	Presenter(s)
8:00 AM	Breakfast	
9:00 AM	Call to Order/Drumming	
9:15 AM	Welcome & Housekeeping	
9:30 AM	Wellness Exercise	
9:45 AM	Keynote Remark	Dr. Akwatu Khenti
10:30 AM	Concurrent Breakout Circle Conversations (Workshops)	Various Presenters
11:45 AM	Lunch Break	
1:00 PM	Call to Order/Drumming	
1:15 PM	Keynote Remark	Shirley Hodder
2:30 PM	Concurrent Breakout Circle Conversations (Workshops)	Various Presenters
3:15 PM	Health Break	
3:30 PM	Youth Presentation - Arts/Spoken Word/Song	
4:45 PM	Health Break	
5:00 PM	Panel Circle Conversation	Hon. David Shepherd, Simone Donaldson, Dr. Kirk Stewart
6:15 PM	Closing / Housekeeping	
7:30 PM	Dinner, Social Networking, Cultural Performance	

Friday, March 21, 2025

Time	Event	Presenter(s)
8:00 AM	Breakfast	
9:00 AM	Call to Order	
9:15 AM	Keynote Remark	Odion Welch
10:00 AM	Recap, Next Steps, Call to Action	Amanuel Melles
11:15 AM	Health Break / Check Out	
11:45 AM	African-Centered Wellness & Closing	Elder Aina-Nia Oye'Dele
1:00 PM	Evaluation	
1:15 PM	Final Closing Remarks / See You Again / Thank You	
1:30 PM	Lunch	



Evaluation

It is important that we hear from you about your experience at the 3rd ACT Now! Conference 2025. The good, the not so good and the areas where we can improve including ideas for the next conference.



Morning Breakout Circles

Thursday, March 20

Breakout Room 1: Chairman

Time: 10:30 AM - 11:45 AM

An Africentric Approach to Culturally Responsive Counselling for Racialized Populations

Presenter: *Dr. S Dixon, N Sibanda & Dr. M Sekandi*

Informed by an Africentric worldview that emphasizes holistic care, this session provides key strategies for counsellors supporting racialized communities. Community-based healing approaches, ancestral wisdom, and decolonizing counselling practices will be explored. By attending, participants will gain confidence, comfort, and competence in addressing racial trauma, developing practical tools, increasing cultural competence, and enhancing their ability to address complex client needs.

This session aims to equip counsellors to address racial trauma, exploring culturally responsive strategies and Africentric community-based healing approaches.

Participants will gain confidence, practical tools, and enhanced cultural competence to support racialized clients, addressing the multifaceted impacts of racism on mental health and wellbeing.

Breakout Room 2: Chancellor

Time: 10:30 AM - 11:45 AM

L'Appartenance comme déterminant de santé (Belongingness as a Determinant of Health)

Presenter: *A H Tchanaye*

Ce panel vise à illustrer comment l'équipe d'engagement communautaire francophone du Centre de santé communautaire TAIBU travaille à sensibiliser, mobiliser, soutenir et retenir les membres de la communauté francophone pour favoriser leur intégration et leur bien-être. En mettant l'accent sur la langue, la culture et le sentiment d'appartenance, le panel présente comment ces éléments sont essentiels pour renforcer la résilience des jeunes, des familles, des aînés et des autres membres de la communauté francophone dans le Grand Toronto. Grâce à la philosophie Ubuntu, les programmes développés visent à créer des espaces sûrs, renforcer les liens communautaires et promouvoir la santé de manière holistique tout en assurant une rétention durable des clients dans les services proposés.

Les participants pourront découvrir les stratégies employées pour répondre aux défis uniques des francophones à Toronto, notamment dans un environnement majoritairement anglophone. Le panel mettra en avant les initiatives adaptées à la diversité des parcours de vie, en abordant des sujets comme l'emploi, la prévention de la violence, le développement du leadership et l'inclusion des aînés, avec une attention particulière aux besoins des femmes et des jeunes. À travers ce panel, la présentation soulignera l'importance de l'appartenance comme levier pour améliorer les résultats en santé, l'équité, et la rétention des clients, tout en créant un environnement d'échange et d'apprentissage.

Breakout Room 3: Turner Valley

Time: 10:30 AM - 11:45 AM

African Spirituality as Protest - Ubuntu & Resilience Among African Diasporas

Presenter: B Shambare, C R Ikeorji & C Nwachukwu

Through the lenses of decolonial and empowerment theories, it becomes clear that African spiritual and religious ‘notoriousism’ is protest and resistance. Spirituality is a protest to systems of suppression and exclusion, it is a protest to ideologies that are designed in whiteness. African spirituality is defiance against barriers that are set for Black Africans to fail in the diaspora. Ubuntu fundamentally challenges/protests Western philosophies of individualism, which often emphasize autonomy, self-interest, and personal rights.

Ubuntu’s central tenet is that the well-being of the individual is inseparable from the well-being of the community. In this research, using secondary data collection from reputable databases, we are arguing that African Spirituality is protest and life-enhancing.

The purpose of this research is to further examine spirituality as a protest using these questions:

1. How does African Spirituality influence the resilience and coping mechanisms of diasporans in overcoming challenges? 2
2. In what ways does African Spirituality contribute to the overall peace and well-being of individuals in the diaspora?

Breakout Room 4: Strathcona

Time: 10:30 AM - 11:45 AM

Voices of Resilience - Using Orature & Contemporary Art for Enhanced Data Collection & Collective Healing

Presenter: M Mohamed

Oral culture, or orature, has long been a central means of communication, knowledge transmission, and cultural preservation within African and African diasporic communities. Through practices such as storytelling, proverbs, songs, and rituals, orature has not only sustained cultural identity across generations but has also served as a tool for resistance and resilience in the face of systemic oppression.

Contemporary art forms, including rap and visual art, provide rich sources of data, offering deep insight into the complex realities of Black life. These creative expressions serve as powerful mechanisms for documenting both personal and communal struggles while fostering healing and empowerment.



Breakout Room 5: British Columbia

Time: 10:30 AM - 11:45 AM

Afrocentric Praxis & Feminist Thought on IPV, Mental Health & Services Access for ACB Black Women in Ontario

Presenter: W Gichuki, C Leonard, D Johnson

The intersection of Afrocentric praxis and Black feminist is thought to illuminate transformative approaches to addressing intimate partner violence (IPV) and mental health challenges among African, Caribbean, and Black (ACB) women in Ontario, Canada. This research emphasizes the importance of culturally informed strategies to enhance healthcare and social service responses.

By centering the lived experiences of ACB women, the study advocates for interventions that are not only effective but also deeply rooted in the cultural, spiritual, and communal contexts of the target population. Central to the study is the integration of culturally resonant practices like healing circles and the inclusion of faith and spirituality in therapeutic interventions.

The methodology employed reflects a commitment to intersectionality and inclusivity, incorporating both qualitative and community-based research methods. Key findings highlight the critical role of Afrocentric praxis in bridging gaps within existing service models. It emphasizes the necessity of integrating Afrocentric and feminist principles into service delivery to create inclusive and effective interventions.

Breakout Room 6: Alberta

Time: 10:30 AM - 11:45 AM

Youth Healing/Drumming Circle

Facilitator: Aina-Nia Oye'Dele

This is a youth specific session who will participate in an African centered ritual and ceremony that will promote and reinforce for the youth, Black identify, purpose (NIA), Self Determination (Kujichagulia), and Collectiveness (Ubuntu).

The impact of slavery, colonialism and anti-Black racism is significant among Black youth and is manifested in various spaces including education, unemployment, criminal justice and health care.

During the session Black youth will be exposed to Ancestral knowledge, wisdom and traditions and reinforce their skills for improved mental health. This will be an opportunity to celebrate their youth, Blackness and greatness.

Breakout Room 7: Yukon

Time: 10:30 AM - 11:45 AM

Addressing Systemic Barriers to Mental Health Access - The Black Lives Living Well

Presenter: Dr. M L C Dennis

Black people are dying slow, quiet, and painful deaths at alarming rates from preventable diseases. Systemic anti-Black racism is a major reason for the social and health challenges that affect Black people who often live in poverty, have limited education opportunities, and are overly represented in prisons. The reason why there is a higher risk for health problems is because physiological and biological changes happen to the body as it develops.

There are structural changes to the brain such as the limbic system. Hormones responsible for the fight, flight, freeze response goes into overdrive and causes limited interaction with the prefrontal cortex where executive functions reside. The “Black Lives Living Well” booklet and video were created as a resource to educate Black people on how trauma affects their bodies and minds as well as empowering them by giving them tips on how to take better care of their health.

This workshop includes a partial viewing of the 13 min video and samples of the booklet will be shown with the section on Mental Health being highlighted.

Breakout Room 8: Consulate

Time: 10:30 AM - 11:45 AM

Creative Rhythms

Presenter: M Lyn

Creative Rhythms was a vibrant project celebrating the talents of youth aged 14-20 from Toronto’s Jane and Finch community. A culminating showcase highlighted a range of performances, including music, dance, and spoken word poetry, emphasizing the power of creative expression and strength of community. This program consisted of mental health and artistic workshops and mentorship aimed at nurturing the artistic skills and personal growth of young performers.

The program empowered youth to express themselves through music, dance, spoken word poetry, and visual arts, while also fostering collaboration, confidence, and entrepreneurial thinking. They learned to communicate effectively, resolve creative differences, and support one another’s growth. Youth were also employed in the Creative Rhythm project.

They were able to gain practical experience and develop essential skills to prepare them for future professional roles. They were trained in handling logistical aspects of the program, such as scheduling sessions, coordinating with volunteers and participants, and managing event details for the grand showcase.

Afternoon Breakout Circles

Thursday, March 20

Breakout Room 1: Chairman

Time: 2:30 PM - 3:15 PM

AYA Circle of Care - Afrocentric Approach Supporting Communities Impacted by HIV

Presenter: M Innocent, D Williams, S Adolphe, B Charles

The AYA Circle of Care team embraces an Afro-centric approach to health, centering the experiences, values, and traditions of the African, Caribbean, and Black (ACB) community. Operating at TAIBU Community Health Centre, this interdisciplinary team—comprising a Nurse Practitioner, Social Worker, Clinical Nurse Specialist, and Community Systems Navigator—provides holistic, culturally affirming care that empowers individuals affected by HIV.

Spearheaded by Dr. Notisha Massaquoi, this research initiative is a pilot project funded by the Ontario HIV Treatment Network in collaboration with the Black Health Equity Lab at the University of Toronto. Recognizing the intersectional challenges faced by ACB individuals—including systemic racism, health inequities, and stigma—the team integrates ancestral wisdom and community-centered practices with clinical interventions.

This fusion respects clients’ cultural identities while affirming their resilience. The AYA model emphasizes the empowerment of marginalized groups, including 2SLGBTQ+ individuals, youth, immigrants, refugees and francophones.

Breakout Room 2: Chancellor

Time: 2:30 PM - 3:15 PM

Enhancing Mental Health of Black Youths in High School in Canada

Presenter: Dr. L N Nwigwe

Black youths in high schools in Canada face significant systemic barriers that negatively impact their mental health and academic outcomes. At Lindsay Thurber High School in Red Deer, Alberta, Black students have expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of diversity among school counselors, citing cultural mistrust and insufficient understanding of their unique experiences.

This paper proposes a comprehensive initiative to address these challenges through an advocacy and social policy approach. The initiative aims to highlight the need for Black mental health practitioners to provide culturally appropriate counseling services, enhance mental health outcomes, and reduce stigma and racism within the school environment. It aligns with the Health Belief Model by addressing students’ perceptions of their mental health needs and the benefits of accessing culturally competent services.

It also incorporates peer support groups and awareness campaigns to create a supportive school environment for the black youths. The broader impact of this initiative extends to influencing public policies to prioritize culturally competent mental health services in schools.

Breakout Room 3: Turner Valley

Time: 2:30 PM - 3:15 PM

**Healing Through
Spiritual Practice**

Presenter: *F Mitchell*

Spirituality has long been a cornerstone of Black communities, serving as both a sanctuary and a source of resilience. Yet, in modern dialogues around mental health, its vital role is often overlooked or misunderstood. This workshop aims to bridge that gap by exploring spirituality as a transformative tool for healing and mental wellness.

This workshop will begin by attempting to define spirituality in a way that resonates across diverse Black communities, demystifying it while honoring its depth and multifaceted nature.

Participants will then explore spiritual practices that have proven effective in fostering healing and mental health. These include meditation, mindfulness, affirmations, community rituals, and ancestral reverence.



Breakout Room 4: Strathcona

Time: 2:30 PM - 3:15 PM

**Suffering in Silence - Addressing
Mental Health Inequities &
Breaking Cycles of Violence
in Black Communities**

Presenter: *D Hurley-Laing*

Structural inequalities in mental healthcare, compounded by historical views and cultural views and cultural beliefs within the Black community, create barriers to accessing support and exacerbate issues such as domestic violence and Intimate Partner Violence. This presentation will begin by unpacking the historical and cultural factors that discourage individuals from seeking mental health and domestic violence support.

This includes beliefs such as viewing mental illness as a personal weakness. I will examine cultural stigmas around mental health, the normalization of trauma and the harmful notion of suffering in silence narrative, especially as it relates to hypermasculinity, noting its impact on DV.

The discussion will highlight how these beliefs intersect with economic disparities, underrepresentation in the mental health field and systemic biases in health care and the legal system to limit access to care.

Finally, the session will pivot to solutions, offering a road map to address these barriers. Our goal is that attendees will leave the session with a deeper understanding of the systemic and cultural factors impacting mental health and domestic violence in the black community, along with practical strategies to support healing and transformation within these spaces.

Breakout Room 5: British Columbia

Time: 2:30 PM - 3:15 PM

**Toronto Community
Crisis Response - A Step
in the Right Direction**

Presenter: *R Hamlet, I Moursalien,
M-E Barasubiye*

Developed in 2021 and launched in 2022 in partnership with the City of Toronto, it emerged from calls for police reform after the tragic death of Regis Korchinsky-Paquet and other racialized people across North America.

It is a community-led, community-driven mental health mobile crisis team. Originally piloted from 2022-2025, it is now approved for expansion until 2028.

The target population includes Black, Indigenous, and other marginalized groups across the GTA experiencing mental health crises.

Through its holistic model, the service connects clients to professionals, peer support, and essential resources like housing and employment services. Successes include preventing homelessness, de-escalating emergencies, and stabilizing lives.

TCCS diverted 78% of eligible non-emergency mental health and crisis-related calls from police involvement, fostering safer, community-driven responses. 95% of surveyed users were satisfied or very satisfied, appreciating the non-judgmental, person-centered approach. In addition to immediate crisis care, TCCS provides follow-up support and referrals to mental health, housing, and other social services.

Breakout Room 6: Alberta

Time: 2:30 PM - 3:15 PM

**Addressing Mental Health
Challenges of Black Queer
Youth in the Workplace**

Presenter: *R Ojo*

This session explores the intrinsically complex experience of coming out at work, highlighting the challenges of black queer youth in navigating this transformation.

As queer individuals, this path towards liberation is associated with a cognitive dissonance which emerges while breaking away from what's learned and familiar into unknown territories.

Navigating the emotional and relational landscape of this challenge necessitates effective self-regulation strategies to maintain one's mental well-being. During this session, we will explore mindfulness practices, journaling, community immersion, and the healing power of nature—each uniquely distinct tools for grounding and self-reflection.

This journey of discovery, rebellion, and grace will be collectively witnessed during this 30-minute presentation. This focus on the workplace experiences of black queer youth is crucial because despite the inherent systems of bias present in this setting, it remains a majorly important source of financial wellbeing for us.

By addressing the practical and psychological challenges of owning one's narrative, together, we will transform our fear into authenticity, weakness into strength, and multiply this process to create a future where global queer communities after us thrive too.

Breakout Room 7: Yukon

Time: 2:30 PM - 3:15 PM

Actions That Can Be Taken to Provide Access to Mental Health for Black Canadians - Black Refugees' Mental Health

Presenter: *Dr. R King, Dr. S Yohani & Dr. M Rwigema*

A group concept mapping systems study explored actions that could be taken to improve Black refugees' mental health. A total of 174 participants including community leaders of Black communities, volunteers and service providers in Calgary and Edmonton contributed to the study.

The reported results produced a 10-cluster map comprising the following clusters: (1) promoting cultural identity, (2) promoting ways of knowing, (3) addressing discrimination and racism, (4) addressing the criminalization of Black Canadians, (5) investing in employment for equity, (6) promoting equity in housing, (7) facilitating self-determination, (8) improving (public) services, (9) promoting appropriate and culturally relevant mental health services, and (10) working with and addressing faith and belief related issues.

In this presentation, we deconstruct the importance of addressing the criminalization of Black Canadians and promoting appropriate and culturally relevant mental health in promoting health equity and mental health of Canada's Black refugees. Specifically, we unpack how the cultural identities and ways of knowing of Black communities are dismissed in the public institutions they encounter and forced into private community spaces. Implications and significance of these findings are discussed.

Breakout Room 8: Devonian

Time: 2:30 PM - 3:15 PM

Food Security, Systemic Racism & Mental Health - Ubuntu as a Path to Collective Healing from Black Communities

Presenter: *M Furtado*

Type Diabeat It, a Black-led charitable organization in London, Ontario, addresses health inequities through culturally informed food security initiatives. Although our primary focus is not mental health, our work with Black youth, families, and adults in low-income housing has revealed alarming trends: food insecurity, systemic racism, and poverty are contributing to a mental health crisis in Black communities.

Through programs like culturally tailored food boxes, Afrocentric cooking classes, and a community-driven breakfast initiative, we have seen how addressing food insecurity and cultural disconnection can positively impact mental health. Ubuntu, emphasizing shared responsibility and collective well-being, offers a powerful framework for tackling mental health challenges rooted in systemic inequities.

Diabeat It integrates Ubuntu by centering the Black community's strengths, traditions, and resilience. We will present a model that combines food security, cultural heritage, and collective action to address mental health challenges in Black communities, showing how grassroots organizations can build pathways to mental wellness, rooted in tradition and guided by Ubuntu.



Jasmine Duncan

Owner and Lead planner at SNK Event

Event Planner and Coordinator

Hi, I'm Jasmine Duncan, owner and lead planner at SNK Events, based in Edmonton, Alberta. I specialize in full-service event planning, day-of coordination, and project management for corporate, non-profit, and social events.

With a passion for creating meaningful experiences, I've worked on everything from intimate gatherings to large-scale productions. My approach blends creativity, precision, and care — ensuring every event reflects the unique vision of my clients while running seamlessly behind the scenes. At SNK Events, I believe events should feel as good as they look. I'm dedicated to taking the stress out of the process so my clients can truly enjoy their moments.

Whether you're planning your next celebration or seeking tools to plan your own, let's create something unforgettable together.



Sizwe Marimba Band

Sizwe Marimba Band brings the vibrant sounds of African marimba music to life. Originating from Sihle-Sizwe Vineyard Foundation, the band consists of young musicians from various African countries, united by their passion for the marimba, rooted in Zimbabwe.

The band provides a nurturing environment where they can grow, share ideas, and learn. Their polished performances celebrate African musical traditions and showcase their commitment to sharing their cultural heritage with Canada and the world.



Sangea Academy

With a splendid repertoire that draws heavily from the rich traditions of West African performance art, Sangea continues to brilliantly redefine what it means to revitalize tradition and in turn captivate a modern audience.

Sangea is a diverse West-African performance group made up of 8 members from several countries in Africa, and from Mexico and Canada. The name of the group means female leader and is a common name given to young girls in Liberia.

Established in 2012, the group has grown from being a household name amongst several communities within the Edmonton area to becoming a leader in the forward progression of traditional West-African music, dance, poetry, and theatre in its home province and across the country at large.



Steel Pan

Keandra Maynard and Jhinelle Andrews are captivating performers who bring the vibrant rhythms of the Caribbean to life. Representing Saint Kitts & Nevis and Jamaica, these artists share their passion, energy, and versatility with audiences.

Keandra, known for her chill yet energetic style, has used the steelpan to share the rich sounds of the islands across Alberta. Jhinelle, a multifaceted performer, has left a lasting impact with her artistry in singing, dancing, and steelpan across Jamaica and Alberta. Their music celebrates culture, rhythm, and the essence of the Caribbean.



DJ Jeree – From Dance to Decks

Meet DJ Jeree, a high-energy DJ whose journey from dancer to decks is as electrifying as her sets. With over 25 years in the entertainment industry, she brings an unmatched passion for music, movement, and connection to every performance.

Specializing in Soca music, DJ Jeree infuses every crowd with the infectious energy of the Caribbean. Her sets are a nonstop celebration of rhythm, culture, and joy.

Currently making waves at local events, DJ Jeree aims for the global stage. Her mission is to make you feel the music and move to the rhythm.



Rooted in ancestral wisdom and Ubuntu, we embrace collective healing, resilience, and empowerment to transform Black mental health and well-being.

Conference Planning Committee

Solomon Lome



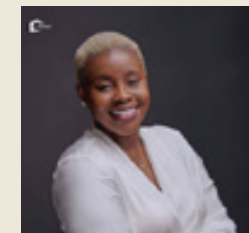
Solomon is a Public Health professional with over 15 years of international experience developing and managing various community health and social service projects and programs. He has worked with local and international not-for-profit relief and development organizations and academic institutions both in Canada and internationally. Solomon holds a Master of Science in International Health from University College London, England.

Watetu (Mercy) Gichuki



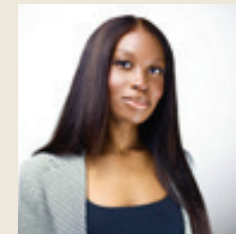
Watetu is a Global Health doctoral candidate at McMaster University, exploring IPV among African, Caribbean, and Black women in Canada. She applies Afrocentric theory, Black feminist thought, Ubuntu, and intersectionality to reimagine trauma-informed support systems. Watetu is a Stronger Futures Centre scholar and community consultant, advocating for systemic change and equitable policies.

Noreen Sibanda



Noreen, a Registered Provisional Psychologist and CCC-S, specializes in Black mental health, Africentric healing, and systemic advocacy. Originally from Zimbabwe, she has over a decade of experience supporting refugee, immigrant, and ACB communities in Canada. As Executive Director of ABTN, she leads initiatives to reduce stigma, increase access to culturally responsive care, and build a supportive network of Black mental health professionals.

Yawa Idi



Yawa coordinates Mental Health and Enhancing Gender Equity programs at the Africa Centre. She oversees daily operations of the counselling clinic and works to reduce intimate partner violence in African, Black, and Caribbean communities. Her expertise began at the University of Alberta, and she is completing her Master's in Counselling Psychology, aiming to become a registered psychologist in Alberta while continuing community-based research.

Salem Sisay



Salem is an organizer passionate about storytelling and community building to amplify underrepresented voices and engage younger demographics in the Canadian democratic process. A Political Science graduate from York University, she leads communications and fundraising initiatives at TAIBU Community Health Centre, supporting Black communities in accessing holistic health and wellness services.

Liben Gebremikael



Liben is the CEO of TAIBU Community Health Centre, leading the organization for 16 years. Under his leadership, TAIBU has built strong community roots and focuses on addressing the impact of anti-Black racism on Black communities' health and wellbeing. TAIBU has received numerous awards, including the Inaugural Scarborough Hero Award, the Black Health Alliance Award, and the Transformational Change Award from the Alliance for Healthier Communities.



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