



A Resource Tool for Systemic Discrimination

**Compiled by The Regional Diversity Roundtable
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Purpose of this document

Purpose of this document is to provide important information and relevant updates backed by research and data about systemic discrimination at regional, provincial and global levels. This document is intended for everyone from service providers, residents, newcomers, immigrants, and refugees to DEI advocates, experts and professionals in Peel, Ontario, and Canada.

Systemic discrimination – What is it?

Systemic discrimination refers to the ways in which society's institutions, policies, and practices disproportionately impact certain groups of people based on their membership in a marginalized group, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, or religion. This form of discrimination is not always intentional, but it is built into the systems and structures that make up our society, leading to outcomes that are unjust and unequal.

One example of systemic discrimination is use of personal networks (e.g., the recruiter's hockey team), social relationships (e.g., friendships) and word-of-mouth referrals to recruit for vacancies. These types of informal processes tend to exclude those who do not share the same ethnic/racial characteristics as the recruiter.¹

Another example of systemic discrimination is Inflated job requirements (e.g., a master's degree when a bachelor's is all that is really required for the job), "Canadian experience" and specifying desirable personality traits, e.g., "aggressiveness" can screen out or discourage racialized persons.¹

In an organization that does not provide training in anti-racism and human rights, managers may be unaware of what constitutes discrimination or harassment and how barriers operate to exclude people.¹

Relevance of the discussion on systemic discrimination

Despite laws to address racial discrimination having existed for over 60 years, racial discrimination and racism persist in Ontario and affect the lives of not only racialized persons, but also all persons in Canada.¹ Systemic discrimination and exclusion can lead to disparities in access to services, supports and opportunities and in health, social and economic outcomes.

The Peel Community safety and wellbeing plan² (2020-2024) highlights why systemic discrimination is still relevant:

- Peel residents in the lowest income levels are less likely to have access to a regular physician, have dental insurance, visit a dentist and visit an eye specialist compared to those with higher income.
- Low-income populations in Ontario are twice as likely to report having multiple chronic conditions compared to the highest income group (23.5% vs 12.4%).
- Black and Indigenous populations are overrepresented in the criminal justice system in Canada.
- LGBTQ2S+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning and Two-Spirit) communities experience large gaps in access to housing and income with 20-45% of Canada's homeless youth identifying as LGBTQ2S+.
- A 2016 report on youth unemployment in Mississauga described systemic barriers to employment including discrimination faced by young people with disabilities and/or mental health issues and those from racialized populations or low-income neighbourhoods.

All organizations in Peel have significant work to do to address and effectively respond to systemic discrimination including systemic racism. This was echoed in consultations with the community where a clear need for accountability and transparency were reinforced.

To provide formal support to eliminating discrimination, the federal and provincial governments have issued directives and introduced laws. The following pages cover key provisions and recommendations.

Federal Level

Canadian Human rights act- R.S.C., 1985, c. H-6

This law¹ states that all individuals should have an opportunity equal with other individuals to make for themselves the lives that they are able and wish to have and to have their needs accommodated, consistent with their duties and obligations as members of society, without being hindered in or prevented from doing so by discriminatory practices based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, etc.

The act applies throughout Canada, but only to federally regulated activities.

Some Canada-wide organizations working on promoting inclusion

- The Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC) provides information and resources on discrimination, including systemic discrimination, in Canada.
- The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) addresses the ongoing systemic discrimination faced by Indigenous women in Canada.
- The Canadian Race Relations Foundation (CRRF) is a national organization that addresses and fights against racism and discrimination in Canada.
- The Canadian Association of Black Lawyers (CABL) works to promote and advance the interests of Black lawyers and their clients.
- The African Canadian Legal Clinic (ACLC) provides legal services to the African Canadian community and works to address and combat discrimination in the legal system.
- The Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW) addresses the issues faced by Muslim women in Canada and works to promote their equality and empowerment.
- The Chinese Canadian National Council (CCNC) works to promote and protect the rights of Chinese Canadians and to address discrimination against them.
- The Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity (CCGSD) works to promote inclusion, diversity and equity for people of all gender identities and sexual orientations.

Provincial Level

Ontario Human Rights Code

Ontario's Human Rights Code¹, the first in Canada, was enacted in 1962. The Code prohibits actions that discriminate against people based on a protected ground in a protected social area.

Discrimination based on 17 different personal attributes is against the law under the Code. The grounds are citizenship, race, place of origin, ethnic origin, colour, ancestry, disability, age, creed, sex/pregnancy, family status, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, receipt of public assistance (in housing) and record of offences (in employment).²

The Code protects people from discrimination in specific situations. Under the Code, you have the right to be free from discrimination in five parts of society based on one or more grounds. Accommodation (housing), Contracts, Employment, Goods, services and facilities, Membership in unions, trade or professional associations are protected social areas as per OHRC.

Organizations have a responsibility to take proactive steps to ensure that they are not engaging in, condoning or allowing racial discrimination or harassment to occur. Obligations in this regard range from collecting numerical data in appropriate circumstances, accounting for historical disadvantage, reviewing policies, practices and decision-making processes for adverse impact and having in place and enforcing anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies and education programs, to name just a few.

[OHRC multi-year strategic plan 2023-25](#)

In January 2023, OHRC launched a new three-year strategic plan¹ to support Ontario Human Rights First². This plan maintains three priorities established in its previous strategic plan: Indigenous reconciliation, the criminal justice system, and the education system. The revitalized plan also includes building human rights culture through meaningful engagement with rights-holders and duty-holders, applying a human rights lens to determinants of health such as housing, income and employment.

The OHRC had released its 2017–22 strategic plan, putting people and their rights at the centre, in December 2016.

[The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 \(AODA\)](#)

Its purpose is to improve accessibility standards for Ontarians with physical and mental disabilities to all public establishments by 2025.¹

[Anti-Racism Act, 2017, S.O. 2017, c. 15](#)

The Government of Ontario is committed to eliminating systemic racism and advancing racial equity. This law¹ states that everyone deserves to be treated with fairness, respect and dignity. Systemic racism is experienced in different ways by different racialized groups. For example, anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Black racism, antisemitism and Islamophobia reflect histories of systemic exclusion, displacement and marginalization. This law aims to eliminate systemic racism and to support the social, economic and cultural development of society.

[The Employment Equity Act](#)

This act encourages barrier-free working conditions for the designated groups such as women, Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities and members of visible minorities. The Act¹ applies to the federally regulated industries and other federal organizations with 100 employees or more.

[In the Peel region](#)

[Some Local organisations promoting inclusion are -](#)

- The Regional Diversity Roundtable (RDR)
- Anti-Black Racism and Systemic Discrimination (ABR-SD) Collective of Peel
- Peel Regional Police (PRP)
- Peel District School Board (PDSB)
- Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board (DPCDSB)

- Trillium Health Partners (THP)
- Region of Peel (ROP)
- Cities of Mississauga, Brampton, Caledon
- United Way of Greater Toronto (UWGT)

These organisations have started their systems journey, are celebrating differences, and coming together to foster a diverse and harmonious community. Do you know any other local organization, which can be included in the above list? Connect with us on: rdr@regionaldiversityroundtable.org. We always welcome your feedback!

Peel Regional Police

On 16th December 2021, Peel police posted results of systemic racism survey ¹ on their website. Over a thousand (1,102) individuals who live or work in the Region of Peel completed a Peel Regional Police survey, which was developed with the Ontario Human Rights Commission and the Peel Police Services Board as part of a broader effort to help the Peel Regional Police identify and address systemic racism in its organization.

The survey found 48% of respondents who completed the survey agreed with the statement “systemic racism in policing is a problem”. Just over half (55%) agreed with the statement that policing in Peel Region needs reform.

Based on the above survey the Peel Regional Police Services Board announced in October 2022 its diversity and inclusion committee ² to tackle systemic racism and to “apply a human rights lens to policing.”

Peel District School Board

Peel District School Board is the second largest school board in Canada with over 250 schools. In 2020, the Ford government appointed a supervisor for the Peel District School Board (PDSB) after a review raised serious concerns about systemic discrimination and governance dysfunction.¹ The new director of Education at PDSB introduced anti-racism policy in June 2022, which was Endorsed by the Ontario Human Rights Commission as the “most comprehensive” policy in the province ²

In February 2023, the PDSB launched a five-year plan after taking inputs from the community. This plan – the Black Student Success Strategy³ is a complimentary document to PDSB’s anti racism policy. This strategy provides guidelines and actions to eliminate anti-Black racism from its operations, resources, staffing and leadership. The progress of this strategy will be tracked through measuring data of student and staff experience.

In January 2023, PDSB has adopted a landmark strategy, saying it is the first in Canada to create a detailed plan to affirm Muslim identities and dismantle Islamophobia. The board's plan also notes Islamophobia often intersects with other forms of oppression including racism, such as anti-Black and anti-Palestinian racism, sexism, anti-LGBTQ hate and systemic oppression.

Anti-Black Racism and Systemic Discrimination Collective of Peel

The Anti-Black Racism and Systemic Discrimination Collective of Peel 2022-25 looks to benefit historically marginalized and neglected groups by going beyond the brainstorming and discussion stage to effective implementation and assessment of public education, community driven engagement and an ecosystem of support groups within the organisation. This plan suggests data collection through surveys of its stakeholder’s experiences with systemic discrimination, SWOT

analysis, cultural humility, hiring and accessibility along with a community of practice groups, where organisations can meet, strategize and learn from each other are effective tools to dismantle racism, systemic discrimination, hate crime from our system.

Systemic racism in healthcare during the Pandemic in Peel

COVID-19 showcased the vulnerability and deep-rooted inequalities among marginalized communities. Racial and ethnic populations had less access to supplies, information and social resources to overcome the effects of COVID situation. The pandemic has also revealed how older workers with limited education and professional experience had very low levels of job control, job security, and were at the frontlines providing essential resources to our communities. Long standing oppression, systemic racism, stereotyping and resource hoarding came to light once again during challenging months in 2020-2021 as per research on systemic discrimination in the context of the pandemic.¹

A project which worked with women and girls in the Peel region during the pandemic was the Daughters of the Pandemic project². The purpose of this project was twofold. Firstly, they assessed the long-term implications of COVID-19 on South Asian girls and women in the Region of Peel through community conversations. Secondly, an effective and culturally responsive support post-pandemic was established by specifically addressing the main concerns of South Asian girls and women.

The Globe and Mail reported³ on 2 February 2021 that systemic racism had put racialized people – and particularly new immigrants – at greater risk during this pandemic. The article showed how the virus was hardest to control in regions such as Brampton where households are larger and there's a higher proportion of essential service workers.

An article⁴ published in Canadian journal of Diabetes on 25 May 2022 explores determinants impacting type 2 diabetes management for South Asian adults in Peel. Service providers attribute the high prevalence of Type 2 Diabetes in South Asian adults to the interconnected relationship between social, cultural, economic and systemic factors. Several study participants explained that clients often need to choose between the expenses associated with implementing dietary and exercise recommendations and providing the basic needs for their families. Service providers reported that these decision-making processes were stressful and further exacerbated throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key milestones across the globe in DEI space 2022

There have been a few key milestones around the globe:

- The US passed a bill that bans race-based hair discrimination at work¹
- All federal employees in Belgium were granted “the right to disconnect,” meaning they have the right to ignore calls or emails from their bosses outside of working hours.²
- Pope Francis visited Edmonton, Canada, delivering a formal apology for the abuse that occurred at the hands of Catholic clergymen in the Indian Residential School System.³
- Scotland became the first country to provide menstrual products, including tampons and sanitary pads, free of charge.⁴
- Same-sex marriage was legalized in the last of Mexico's 32 states. While Mexico declared state laws that prohibit same-sex marriage unconstitutional in 2015, states have been slow to adopt laws conforming with the ruling.⁵
- 100 UK companies adopted a four-day workweek —permanently— with no loss of pay.⁶

As Maya Angelou says, “We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter what their colour. It is time for parents to teach young people early on that in diversity there is beauty and there is strength.”

Feel free to contact us to share your valuable inputs on DEI initiatives from across the globe. Let us work together towards equal, inclusive world, together we can do it!

Additional recommendations to manage discrimination within the system/s.

To address systemic discrimination, it is important to recognize that it is not just the actions of individual people or organizations that contribute to these outcomes, but rather the systems and structures in which they operate. This means that solutions must focus on changing those systems and structures, rather than just punishing individual actors. This can include things like reforming laws and policies, changing the way that institutions operate, and investing in programs and initiatives that provide support and resources to marginalized communities.

Additionally, it's important to note that it's not just individuals or minorities who are affected by these issues, it is a problem that affects the entire society by perpetuating patterns of inequality, hindering social mobility, and perpetuating poverty. To build a fair and just society, it is important that individuals and organizations work to actively dismantle systems of discrimination, and strive to create a society that truly provides equal opportunity for all.

Anti-bias training, anti-discrimination template, fair assessment

Addressing systemic discrimination is a complex and multifaceted task that requires a deep understanding of the ways in which discrimination is built into the systems and structures that make up our society. It also requires a commitment to making real, lasting change, rather than just addressing the symptoms of discrimination.

Meaningful and lasting change comes from taking an intersectional approach. This means understanding and addressing how different forms of discrimination, such as racism, and sexism, intersect and compound each other, affecting various marginalized communities. It's vital to consider how discrimination affects different marginalized communities in different ways and to understand the specific impacts on those communities.

An important aspect of addressing systemic discrimination is education and awareness raising, to create a more inclusive and equitable society, it's important that everyone understand the ways in which discrimination operates and how they can take action to dismantle it. This could include things like training for employees, creating educational resources for schools and universities, and raising awareness through media and other platforms as well as work collaboratively in communities.

Another key step in addressing systemic discrimination is to understand the ways in which it affects different marginalized groups. This requires gathering data and conducting research on the experiences of these groups, as well as listening to their voices and perspectives. The next step is to give anti-discrimination template to all role holders. For example, female employees end up doing more office chores like taking notes, arranging lunch than male employees in all kinds of

organizations. These administrative tasks aren't part of anyone's official job description but because of deeply ingrained biases they fall to women¹.

Another important step is to change the policies and practices of institutions that perpetuate discrimination. This can include things like reforming laws and regulations, reallocating resources, and changing the way that institutions operate. For example, to address biased hiring practices, a more effective and efficient approach would likely be to remove names from the resumes before they were sorted by removing bias inducing information people would automatically judge the resume without regard to race or gender.¹

Alongside the institutional work, it's also crucial to empower marginalized communities by providing resources and opportunities that help them to build strength and resilience, this could be via education, job training programs, legal representation, or other types of support. Providing these resources can help to mitigate the impact of discrimination and create more equitable outcomes. In conclusion, addressing systemic discrimination is a complex and multifaceted task that requires a deep understanding of the ways in which discrimination is built into the systems and structures that make up our society. It also requires a commitment to making real, lasting change, rather than just addressing the symptoms of discrimination. It requires systems to gather data, listen to the marginalized communities, change institutional policies and practices, empower them with resources, education, and awareness raising. An intersectional approach is also crucial to consider how different forms of discrimination intersect and compound each other, and to understand the specific impacts on different marginalized communities.

As Ruchika Tulshyan says in her book: Inclusion on purpose², "inclusion is inherently uncomfortable, however it is not a "one and done" activity. The philosophy of *Ubuntu* which can be translated in English as "I am because we are" requires every single one of us. It benefits not only Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) but all human beings".

Research papers on Systemic Discrimination

Systemic Discrimination in GTA policing 2021

In Journal of Community Safety and Well-being Rajnish R. Saini from School of Graduate Studies, Wilfrid Laurier University has published a paper¹ in 2021 on Systemic Discrimination in Policing: Four Key Factors to Address. Part of the abstract is as follows:

Canada in the 21st Century is heterogeneous, multicultural, multi-ethnic society with diverse indigenous groups, people with variety of religious beliefs and sexual orientation. Saini explores occupational segregation and racial harassment in police department. And further reports "While police services are proactively diversifying the constabulary level within their respective organizations, they are negligent about diversification strategies in the senior ranks".

Systemic Racism and COVID-19

More Exposed And Less Protected In Canada: Systemic Racism And COVID-19 is an article published by Western University's Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children.² The article demonstrates how systemic bias in healthcare contributed to poorer health outcomes for Black, Indigenous, and people of colour (BIPOC) in Canada. It showcases how BIPOC women were overrepresented in jobs with high risk of exposure to COVID-19, particularly lower-paying positions in care work, food production, and in the "gig" economy.

The report narrates how racism, colonialism, and classism intersected and placed BIPOC and newcomers to Canada in living conditions that put people at greater risk of exposure during the pandemic.

Regulating social pollution of systemic discrimination

In an article “Regulating the Social Pollution of Systemic Discrimination Caused by Implicit Bias”, Sarine draws parallels between the concept of environmental pollution caused by ignorance, negligence or sometimes by hierarchy and the concept of social pollution.

The author says that systemic discrimination which stems from implicit bias should be declared as social pollution. Like Environmental Protection Acts, strong federal reforms are needed to fight the side effects of systemic discrimination for example wealth disparity, limited access to education and lower social acceptance.

We need such laws to make organizations and agencies around the globe accountable to control toxic environments and social pollution, which affects thousands of people. It will be certainly a step forward towards fair and inclusive society.

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Systemic discrimination – What is it?

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Relevance of the discussion on systemic discrimination

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OHRC multi-year strategic plan 2023-25

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<https://hicksmorley.com/2023/01/24/ontario-human-rights-commission-strategic-plan-and-the-right-to-read/>

If you want further information about the OHRC strategic plan 2023-25 check out the following link:
<https://www3.ohrc.on.ca/sites/default/files/Strategic%20Plan%20Human%20Rights%20First%20ENGLISH%20-%20OHRC%202023-25.pdf>

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Peel District School Board

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