



Promoting excellence and innovation  
in HIV research and care

*"The black community [in the US] is used to the institutional racism inherent in education, the justice system and jobs. And even though we do all the conventional things to raise public and political awareness ... the needle hardly budge. But COVID-19 has been slamming the consequences of all that home as we die at a significantly higher rate than whites, are the first to lose our jobs, and watch helplessly as Republicans try to keep us from voting. ... What you should see when you see black protesters in the age of Trump and coronavirus is people pushed to the edge, not because they want bars and nail salons, but because they want to live."  
- Kareem Abdul-Jabbar*

It would be easy for us to be a bit smug: "Things aren't perfect in Canada but at least we're not the US." But racism is alive and well here too. In Toronto, Black people are disproportionately affected by aggressive policing, by COVID and by HIV. Whether they are jogging, birdwatching, at home in their apartment or sitting in their car outside a convenience store, Canadians also experience disproportionately high rates of poverty, food insecurity and incarceration. Because of anti-black racism.

As people and an organization committed to social justice, what can we do to help create a more just world for all? It's up to us to let our Black colleagues know that we understand how incredibly painful and frightening things are right now, that we realize that they live each day with more fear and a greater sense of injustice than those of us who are White. We need to be willing to speak up each and every time we see racism playing out in our community and society.

As an organization, we need to ensure we have strong Black voices on our Board, within our committees and on staff. We need policies that promote equity and self-determination. We also have to invest in the young Black scholars who will become tomorrow's leaders, and work closely with the Black networks of agencies and researchers to address systemic racism.

We would like to acknowledge, with the greatest respect and admiration, the people protesting against police brutality and institutionalized racism. We would also like to acknowledge the incredible, unfair and inequitable challenges Black people face. It is extremely painful to see people who are peacefully protesting violence being treated with yet more violence. We stand together with our Black colleagues, partners, collaborators, and the entire Black community. We stand with people around the globe to speak out against racism, to promote understanding, and to create a change. We can move the needle. It is possible, but it's not going to happen if we rest or stay quiet.

In solidarity,  
the Ontario HIV Treatment Network (OHTN).