

IIMHL Leadership Briefing LX

COVID-19 and Addressing inequalities among Black¹ and Marginalised Communities

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Janet Peters

“COVID-19 has laid bare and exacerbated long-standing, systemic health inequities related to poverty, racism, and other forms of discrimination”.²

“In October 2020 a public health consultation documented a shadow pandemic which includes deepening poverty, hunger and job loss, as well as increased social isolation, violence and mental distress. These impacts have not been equally distributed across Toronto, they have been disproportionately shouldered by residents already experiencing systemic marginalization.”³

Introduction

Three key documents from Canada, the US and the UK are described in this Briefing. All look at the effects of COVID-19 on inequalities involving the social determinants of health for Black and marginalised communities. Actions are suggested by all, and include an overall health-equity approach for COVID-19 testing and immunisation. It includes Black-led and community-led access to mental health, addiction and physical health care, access to clear public health information about the pandemic, digital support, educational and employment support, ways to address food insecurity and housing among others.

Canada

City of Toronto: COVID-19 Equity Action Plan

December 2020

The COVID-19 and the Social Determinants of Health: Community Consultation Report was undertaken to outline key public health issues for Black and marginalised communities in October 2020:

<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2020/hl/bgrd/backgroundfile-157257.pdf>

¹ Authors note: This term is used in the countries cited, it is not employed in some other countries e.g. Aotearoa/New Zealand or Australia.

² <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2020/hl/bgrd/backgroundfile-159098.pdf>

³ <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2020/hl/bgrd/backgroundfile-157257.pdf>

The report describes the actions the City of Toronto is taking to tackle COVID-19 disparities across ten areas. Unequal access to the social determinants of health has created the conditions for COVID-19 to disproportionately impact Torontonians who are: Indigenous, Black or racialized, who are precariously employed or live on a low income, who may experience challenges taking time off from work when ill and who may be living in housing situations where it is more difficult to isolate from others.

The report highlights how vulnerable Torontonians have also been hardest hit by the unintended consequences of public health measures to flatten the curve of transmission of the virus, including service disruptions and lockdown. Throughout the pandemic, many have faced acute challenges related to hunger, loss of sanitation facilities, lack of Internet connectivity and barriers to essential social and health services.

Many newcomers to the city, including temporary foreign workers, refugees, refugee claimants and undocumented Torontonians are facing extreme challenges and uncertainty during the pandemic, particularly those without social networks in this country, who do not speak or read English, and who may not be eligible for financial supports or health care coverage. To support Torontonians who have been hardest hit by COVID-19 and to stop the virus spread, the city is taking urgent action on ten fronts, in strong collaboration with community partners.

<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2020/hl/bgrd/backgroundfile-159098.pdf>

UK

Centre for Mental Health: Young Black men's mental health during Covid-19 Experiences from the Shifting the Dial project

2021

Covid-19 has exposed and amplified existing inequalities in society. Young Black men are one such group who have faced historic injustices and many of the challenges they face have a devastating impact on their mental health and wellbeing.

Young Black men's mental health during Covid-19 explores evidence of the unequal effects of Covid-19 on young Black men, including those drawn from the experiences of the Shifting the Dial project in Birmingham that Centre for Mental Health is evaluating.

This briefing calls for urgent cross-government action to address the inequalities faced by young Black men, and to offer tailored support to protect their mental health and future prospects. It also calls for targeted educational and employment support for young Black men, a moratorium on all school exclusions in the aftermath of the pandemic, and a review into their policing during the pandemic.

https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/publication/download/CentreforMentalHealth_ShiftingTheDial_YBM_Covid_0.pdf

US

RAND Corporation and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation: Survey: Attitudes, Views and Values around Health, Equity and Race Amid COVID-19 2021

A national, ongoing survey explores the deep-rooted views of those with low and middle incomes, with a focus on people of colour, on health, equity and race.

This ongoing survey from RAND Corporation attempts to understand the views and values of those who are most at risk to the adverse impacts of COVID-19 by surveying people with lower and middle incomes with a focus on communities of colour. It measures the attitudes of the same group of respondents over a year with four waves of collection.

Between COVID-19 and calls for racial justice, 2020 appeared to be a turning point for tackling the root causes of inequities in health. Findings from the first and second waves of the survey show that many people—even those who may have been hit hardest by the pandemic and long-standing inequities—still do not see systemic racism as a barrier to good health.

People are becoming less worried about health risks and are increasingly prioritizing freedom over their health. Pandemic fatigue is real—the exhaustion respondents were feeling in October and November 2020 is reflected in the surge of cases, hospitalizations and deaths across the country that have unfolded this winter.

But the report suggests that there are reasons to be hopeful. More than two-thirds of respondents believe the pandemic presents a moment for positive change. Expanding access to health care is the most cited change they want to see, followed by reducing income inequality.

<https://www.rwjf.org/en/library/research/2021/01/survey--attitudes-views-and-values-around-health-equity-and-race-amid-covid-19.html>