

**LOOKING  
BACK AND  
MOVING  
FORWARD:  
  
CANADIAN  
BLACK POLICY  
NETWORK  
2019-2020  
REPORT**



# LOOKING BACK AND MOVING FORWARD: CANADIAN BLACK POLICY NETWORK 2019-2020 REPORT

A summary report about the inaugural 2019 Toronto Black Policy Conference and what's next for Canada's first-ever Black Policy Network.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to our resilient community, who continues to inspire and motivate us to do the work that we do. To Mo and Gabe, who believed in our Toronto Black Policy Conference vision from the very beginning, thank you. Lastly, we would like to thank our conference sponsors, the City of Toronto, the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy's Urban Policy Lab, the City of Toronto's Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit, and the Anti-Racism and Cultural Diversity Office at the University of Toronto.

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With many thanks to our guest speakers who provided their valuable insight and experience at the inaugural Toronto Black Policy Conference during discussions on November 30, 2019, which guided our report:

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Thank you to all Black community members and allies for supporting us in making history on a national and global scale.

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**"BLACK POLICY"** is problem-identification, policy-making, implementation, and policy evaluation with a Black-focused lens.

*Black policy begs to ask some of the following questions: 1) How does or will this affect Black individuals and Black communities?; 2) What systems, institutions and/or ideologies are in place, or have been normalized, that create barriers for Black communities to thrive?; and 3) What needs to be done to remove those barriers, thereby finding sustainable solutions to address issues facing Black communities?*

*By applying this lens, we are able to assess and analyze how Black Canadians experience public policies, programs and initiatives.*

- CBPN Co-founders, Sharnelle Morgan, Anna-Kay Russell and Eunice K. Yeboah



## A LETTER FROM THE BOARD

As we draw to the close of one of the most unforgettable years in our lifetime, it is impossible to overlook 2020's significance on movements for Black lives. In response to all that has happened this year, and in celebration of the one-year anniversary of the Toronto Black Policy Conference, the conference founders have launched the Canadian Black Policy Network to ensure that all Black lives are afforded the opportunity to not only survive, but thrive in this world.

With a global resurgence on the discourse that Black lives matter, and a pandemic phenomenon disproportionately impacting communities of colour, including Black communities, across North America, this year has starkly illustrated the importance of public policy. As policy professionals, we understand firsthand the impact and influence that policies have on our daily lives and are committed to leveraging the policy process to enhance the opportunities for success for our community members.

Canada's Black population is a vast and diverse group who share a common racial identity. For many years, our voices have been absent from policy-making. We are underrepresented in decision-making and leadership positions yet overrepresented in criminal justice and child welfare systems. It is clear that our voices are absent from the conversations on the **policies that most impact us.**

The Toronto Black Policy Conference was organized last year to meet this urgent need and get conversations started - which is exactly what it succeeded to do; yet, there was a consensus from conference attendees and organizers that we needed a larger platform to reach and involve Black communities across Canada in the policy process. That is why we started the Canadian Black Policy Network.

The purpose of this report is to look back on the 2019 Toronto Black Policy Conference and examine how that conference has inspired where we are going in the future. We will also discuss what has happened in our community and most importantly, what we can do about it in the policy sphere. And finally, this report is intended to welcome you to our growing family.

We hope you enjoy looking back on where we've been and where we're hoping to go next. Thank you so much for reading and we look forward to building with you all in 2021!

Sincerely,

Your Board of Directors  
Eunice K. Yeboah, Sharnelle Morgan, Anna-Kay Russell  
The Canadian Black Policy Network (CBPN)



## BACKGROUND

### FROM BOSTON TO TORONTO

The Toronto Black Policy Conference (TBPC) - a policy-driven forum providing unique opportunities to collaborate, innovate and find sustainable solutions for policy issues affecting Toronto's Black communities - was inspired by the longest running conference at Harvard University's J.F. Kennedy School of Government: the annual Black Policy Conference. Similar to TBPC, the Harvard Black Policy Conference was born out of the desire to create a lasting institutional legacy for Black students and alumni at the school, and an open exchange of ideas for the most current issues affecting the Black communities around the world.

After noting the lack of representation of Black students, alumni and faculty representation, and insights into how policies affect different communities - including Canada's Black communities - differently in the Master of Public Policy program at the Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy, students took action to forge a collaboration with the students at the J.F. Kennedy School of Government for the annual Black Policy Conference organized at Harvard University. This produced the first-ever Canadian and international panel at the 14th annual Black Policy Conference in 2018 in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

**Following the success of the collaboration and recognizing the potential impact of a Black Policy Conference, Munk alumnae, Sharnelle Morgan, Anna-Kay Russell and Eunice K. Yeboah co-founded and organized the city of Toronto's inaugural Toronto Black Policy Conference to provide greater opportunities for Black community members to come together to create innovative solutions to policy problems that impact them.**



## BACKGROUND

# FOR US, BY US: THE INAUGURAL TORONTO BLACK POLICY CONFERENCE

The biennial TBPC is a **policy-driven forum** which seeks to provide unique opportunities to collaborate, innovate and find sustainable solutions for policy issues affecting Toronto's Black communities. The inaugural full-day conference took place on November 30, 2019 at the University of Toronto's Campbell Conference Facility, with a focused theme of **"Black Inclusion & Innovation."**

Applying an anti-Black racism lens, the conference theme sought to explore what innovation meant to Toronto's Black communities now and in the future. TBPC explored a variety of pressing issues impacting communities - including mental health, funding for arts and culture, the future of work, and more - and looked towards finding innovative solutions to tackle some of these challenges.

The conference aimed to:

- Create a safe space for Black community members and allies to explore policy issues affecting Toronto's Black communities;
- Encourage Black community members' engagement within the policy process, both in a leadership and adequately consulted capacity; and
- Promote solidarity and unity within Black communities through open dialogue and collaboration.

To achieve these objectives, the conference included panels, discussions and opportunities to connect. The day concluded with a reception where participants and guest speakers had opportunities to network and continue the dialogue in an informal setting.



## KEY FINDINGS FROM TBPC 2019

### LESSONS LEARNED

A core component of the conference was the speakers and panel discussions. The next section of the report will summarize the conference panels and highlight key messages from the jam-packed and unforgettable day.



### INNOVATION IN BLACK COMMUNITIES

Isaac Olowolafe Jr. began the day by speaking about the aspects of Innovation for Black communities. He spoke about sacrifice, sowing seeds and giving back. Through a facilitated discussion with Professor Marieme Lo, PhD, the following key themes emerged.

#### Key Themes:

- **Our voices need to be heard in the policy-making sphere.** Not just as consultants or stakeholders, but as policy-makers and economic drivers. This theme carried throughout the day and inspired both our panelists and our attendees.
- **Innovation is about sowing the seeds for long-term change.** That may include sacrifices in the short-term, that create opportunities for growth in the future.
- **It's ok to be bold in our Blackness** and therefore bold in our business.

## KEY FINDINGS FROM TBPC 2019

### INNOVATIONS IN MENTAL HEALTH

This panel sought to engage in dialogue on mental health stigmas in Toronto's Black communities, explore ways it can impair youth and adult development in the areas of education and employment, and discuss programming and policy levers currently in place to provide a roadmap forward. The panel was moderated by Dr. Fatimah Jackson-Best of Pathways to Care and featured discussions from Dr. Beverly-Jean Daniel of the University of Toronto; Joseph Smith of Generation Chosen; and Celina Caesar-Chavannes, the former Member of Parliament for Whitby, Ontario.

#### Key Themes:

- **Mental health support is more about mental health services.** It is about access to housing, income supports and addressing anti-Black racism.
- **Who receives funding** for mental health services matters.
- **Community healing starts with us.** We need to centre ourselves and our communities by engaging with and supporting one another.
- **Improving mental health needs long-term solutions.** This will require collaboration across sectors and communities through formalized networks to support new policy and program design.



**“** We need to change the language surrounding our community. Our community has become the poster child of pathology. The dialogue and the language that we use for that dialogue must change. We have to re-conceptualize Blackness, if Blackness is marked as pathology, it is a problem. - Dr. Beverly-Jean Daniels, Toronto Black Policy Conference (2019)

## KEY FINDINGS FROM TBPC 2019

### BLACK NORTHERN TOUCH

This panel sought to explore the intersections of art, culture and Blackness through diverse speakers and a Q&A session. Moderated by Dr. Cheryl Thompson, author and Assistant Professor at Ryerson, the session heard from Cheryl Nembhard of EGM Education, the Non-Profit Art Collective; Charles C. Smith, Project Lead for Cultural Pluralism in the Arts Movement Ontario and lecturer at the University of Toronto; and Kevin Ormsby, Lead for the Afro Contemporary Dance Collective.



***We need a Black Cultural Arts Revolution to push arts-based organizations towards better practices for accurately representing and promoting Black art. - Charles C. Smith, Toronto Black Policy Conference (2019)***

#### Key Themes:

- **Social media has increased access to audiences for Black artists.** Black artists have historically been left out of formal artistic spaces (e.g. theatre companies, opera houses). However, social media has become a tool that helps remove the barriers to accessing audiences, because there's no barrier to entry.
- **There is a lack of dedicated, formal spaces for Black art.** We need dedicated spaces for Black theatre festivals to create enough space for the diversity of Black communities, represented through Black art.
- **Black art is seen as “niche,” “underground” or “uniform.”** We know Blackness is varied and complex. Yet, mainstream arts organizations include one Black artist and consider their work done. There needs to be policy push towards displaying the entire diversity of the Black experience through art.

# KEY FINDINGS FROM TBPC 2019

## ENHANCING THE BLACK ECONOMY

This panel was intended to explore the city's economic transition in progress, and how Black communities can capitalize on those changes to get ahead. The panel was moderated by financial strategist Nechelle Bartley, and featured discussions by President of the Canadian Association of Urban Financial Professionals (CAUFP), Meryl Afrika; Personal Coach, Jillisa Brown; and Social Enterprise Coach and President of the Afro Caribbean Business Network, Ryan Knight.

### Key Themes:

- **Wealth is about a seed.** It takes patience to build and create a financial plan. At the same time, it takes being aware of the financial resources that are available.
- **We need to start with youth.** Changes to the grade 10 curriculum to include financial literacy is a good start; now let's keep building on that knowledge.
- **Take advantage of Black-led financial support.** Black people face additional barriers accessing financial resources; however, there are Black-led groups that can provide support (e.g. Afro Caribbean Business Network).
- **Move from saving to investing.** Black communities are underrepresented in the city's building ownership and investment portfolios. Our financial health is about more than saving for a rainy day, it is about investing for the future and investing back into our own communities.



“

*Financial wellness for members of the Black community.* - Ryan Knight, Toronto Black Policy Conference (2019)

# KEY FINDINGS FROM TBPC 2019

## THE FUTURE OF WORK FOR BLACK COMMUNITIES

This panel sought to explore the future of work for Toronto's Black communities and the barriers that may be faced by Black professionals and youth entering or reentering the workforce. The panel was moderated by Lekan Olawoye, founder of Black Professionals in Tech Network (BPTN), and featured Rosemarie Powell, Executive Director of the Toronto Community Benefits Network; Surranna Sandy, CEO of Skills for Change; Omo Akintan, Chief People Officer at the City of Toronto; and Liban Abokor, Executive Director of Youth LEAPS.

### Key Themes:

- **We need to position ourselves well for the future of work.** This means staying on top of the trends, skills, and trades that will impact our economy in the future.
- **We need to balance soft and technical skills.** This means recognizing talents in negotiation, communication, and arts will be as important as data analysis, engineering, etc.
- **Supporting each other to navigate employment systems is key.** Employment systems are not made for us, and are often made to exclude us. We need to support each other in navigating these systems by networking and mentoring one another.
- **We need to become job creators.** Being prepared for the future of work also means becoming the future of work through start-ups and entrepreneurship.

- *We need to become job creators, and we need the policy space for that. - Rosemarie Powell, Toronto Black Policy Conference (2019)*

“  
How do we ensure solidarity as we advance economically? - Surranna Sandy, Toronto Black Policy Conference (2019)



## KEY FINDINGS FROM TBPC 2019

### POLITICAL ACTIVISM: AT THE TABLE OR ON THE STREETS?



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*We have got to make sure that folks with lived experience are also in the decision-making institutions. - Marcell Wilson, Toronto Black Policy Conference (2019)*

The conference was closed with an exceptional keynote led by two trailblazers in their own right, Member of Provincial Parliament for Kitchener-Waterloo, Laura Mae Lindo, and Co-Founder of the One by One Movement, Marcell Wilson, as they explored the topic of political activism and where it is most effective for Black community members: either at the table or on the streets. The keynote was additionally prefaced with a message from the Deputy Mayor of Toronto, Michael Thompsen, who spoke about the importance of creating a space like the Toronto Black Policy Conference and the need for a sustainable conversation of its kind.

#### Key Themes:

- **Code-switching.** Activism can mean code-switching when giving a deputation or working with the bureaucracy to speak in a manner that is meaningful to them.
- **Advocate for sustainability.** No systemic change can occur without long-term funding. We need to be radical enough to demand long-term change.
- **Centre youth voices.** Young people are our future; yet, they feel left out of the policy process. Youth need to be engaged in decision-making, that starts with building capacity around their understanding of policy-making.
- **Strive for collaboration.** Activism is more effective if there is unity. Our challenges may look different in Regent Park versus Jane and Finch, but we can move towards collective solutions.



## THE IMPACT OF 2020

### ARE HEALTH POLICIES EQUITABLE?

We have been **disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, both health-wise and economically**. Much of these disparities in health and economic outcomes, as a result of this pandemic, point to the systemic barriers our communities have continued to face long before the arrival of COVID-19.

#### Key Stats: COVID-19 and Black Communities

- Black communities in Toronto, one of Canada's largest cities, constitute **21%** of reported COVID-19 cases, yet make up only **9% of the city's population**.<sup>1</sup>
- Black Canadians are also more likely (56% to 43%) to report layoffs or reduced working hours in their household and are more worried, over the next few months, about paying rent (45% to 36%). They are also more likely than the Canadian average to say their household finances have been negatively impacted by COVID-19.<sup>2</sup>
- Income level is a determinant of health; impacting nutritional status, living conditions, mental wellbeing, etc. Despite the disproportionate health and economic impacts, Black people in Québec, Ontario and Nova Scotia are more likely to be over represented in fines for pandemic related offences.<sup>3</sup>
- In Canada, **no race-based data was collected** at the provincial and federal level, to even understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Black communities. This only changed recently, leading to Manitoba committing to collecting race-based data with Ontario and Québec pledging to follow suit.<sup>4</sup>

As governments continue to discuss the federal and provincial approach to “building back better”, they must ensure that the most vulnerable communities most impacted by this pandemic, including Black communities, do not remain on the peripheries of our nation's COVID-19 recovery.

<sup>1</sup> "COVID-19: Status of Cases in Toronto," City of Toronto, July 30, 2020, <https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-latest-city-of-toronto-news/covid-19-status-of-cases-in-toronto/>

## THE IMPACT OF 2020

### **POLICE BRUTALITY IS A POLICY ISSUE**

The verdict in the death of Abdirahman Abdi as well as the murder of Regis Korchinski-Paquet and George Floyd sparked national and global protests, and reignited discourse on the existence of anti-Black racism in Canada and abroad.

In Canada, race related data is not collected and is under-reported, making concrete conversations on racial inequities in policing and criminal justice, healthcare, employment, and education difficult. There has been more than 550 police related deaths in Canada from 2000 to June 2020, with Black people making up 8.63% of fatalities.<sup>5</sup>



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2 "The Impact of COVID-19 on Black Canadians," Innovative Research Group, September 2, 2020, <https://innovativeresearch.ca/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-black-canadians/>

3 Canadian Civil Liberties Association. (2020). "Stay off the Grass: COVID-19 and Law Enforcement in Canada." Policing the Pandemic Mapping Project (2020): <https://ccla.org/cclanewsites/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2020-06-24-Stay-Off-the-Grass-COVID19-and-Law-Enforcement-in-Canada-1.pdf>

4 Eric Andrew-Gee, "Manitoba charts new course by collecting race-based data on COVID-19," The Globe and Mail, May 12, 2020, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-manitoba-charts-new-course-by-collecting-race-based-data-on-covid-19/>

5 Inayat Singh, "CBC's Deadly Force database looks at role of race, mental health in deaths," CBC News, July 23, 2020, <https://newsinteractives.cbc.ca/fatalpoliceencounters/>

## THE IMPACT OF 2020

### IDEAS FROM OUR EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

In 2020 we began recruitment for a new Executive Committee. Here are some thoughts from some of our newest members.

#### Youth Engagement

*Canada's Black youth population is growing. And yet, our young people are experiencing some of the greatest outcomes disparities, such as lower high school graduation rates, unemployment and barriers to accessing post-secondary education. We don't need more people advocating on behalf of our young people, we need **more Black youth in the policy-making process**. - Nakema McManamna, Director of Research and Policy, Canadian Black Policy Network*



#### Community Capacity & Collaboration

*Black policy networks offer an opportunity for civic engagement while representing the priorities of Black Canadians. Now more than ever, **Black voices need to be elevated in the development and implementation of strategic policy making**. As we pursue a more equitable Canadian landscape, ongoing research, knowledge sharing, and collaboration should remain at the forefront. - Ninnera Channer, Corporate Secretary, Canadian Black Policy Network*



#### Global Accountability

*The United Nation Organization has declared 2015-2024 as the International Decade for People of African Descent, and many nations, including Canada are working to apply an anti-Black racism lens to top level approaches to equity, justice, and the improvement of Black communities. Yet, globally, we have been **disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, both health-wise and economically**. - Deborah Baiden, Director of Research and Policy, Canadian Black Policy Network*

## WHERE WE ARE GOING

### NOT JUST A NETWORK, A MOVEMENT

Contemplating the challenges this year has starkly illustrated what Black communities across the globe continue to endure, the founders of the Toronto Black Policy Conference recognized that a conference would not be enough to respond to the issues 2020 has amplified. We needed a **stronger foundation - a movement** - to nurture and facilitate conversations, coordinate policy responses, collaborate across sectors and amplify our voices with decision-makers. We needed a **network**.

The **Canadian Black Policy Network's** goal is to create a network across Canada of individuals and organizations interested in addressing issues that impact Black communities **through policy**. Through this network, we will:

1. Create a **unified voice for policies impacting Black communities in Canada**;
2. **Build community capacity** to engage with and influence the policy-making process, especially in spaces where Black leadership, communities, and experience have been historically left out; and
3. **Collaborate** across sectors and stakeholders to develop innovative policy responses to issues to ensure that current and future Black communities thrive.

Our objectives will be achieved through events, thought-leadership, knowledge dissemination and translation, and community engagement.

We will take the lessons we learned from the inaugural TBPC, and 2020, to focus our policy conversations into the new year, 2021.

## WHERE WE ARE GOING



## WELCOME TO THE NETWORK

Our ultimate goal is to build a network that advocates for and actively supports the design and implementation of policies that create the conditions to ensure Black communities can thrive today and for generations.

**Join the network.** Please contact [info@cbpn.ca](mailto:info@cbpn.ca) to learn more about the benefits of membership and subscribe to our monthly newsletter [here](#).

**Support the network.** To make this network a reality, we kindly ask for your support and engagement in our events, your insights on our strategic direction and goals, and your sponsorship and promotion of our work.

As we move forward, stay tuned on how you can get involved. Thank you for your support thus far and **welcome to the Canadian Black Policy Network.**

