



ASSESSING CANADIAN MEDICAL EDUCATION: CURRICULAR GAPS IN BLACK HEALTH

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About the Black Health Education Collaborative

The Black Health Education Collaborative (BHEC) is a community of scholars and practitioners committed to improving Black health through education and research. The BHEC's mission is to transform medical and health professional education to improve the health of Black people and communities across Canada. BHEC addresses anti-Black racism and the interlocking systems that impact the health and wellbeing of Black communities across Canada. Through systems transformation, BHEC focuses on shifting health and educational systems to be more responsive to Black health through collaboration with academic and professional institutions and community organizations alongside working closely with Black communities to inform the work and amplify Black voices.

For any queries or concerns regarding this report or the Black Health Education Collaborative, please email info@bhec.ca.

Land & Ancestral Acknowledgment

The Black Health Education Collaborative acknowledges with gratitude the Indigenous and Afri-Indigenous Peoples across Turtle Island who continue to thrive and resist colonial violence while striving for self-determination and decolonial futures. We live, work and play in various territories including the lands of the Huron-Wendat, Haudenosaunee and Mississauga's of the Credit River; Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota and Dene peoples, the Anishinaabe, and on the homeland of the Red River Métis Nation; Kanien:keha'ka and Mi'kmaq.

We remember our ancestors, forcibly dislocated African peoples, trafficked into Turtle Island as a result of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and the histories and legacies of colonialism and neo-colonialism which continue to impact African Peoples and the descendants of the Black diaspora across the world.

We recognize that racial colonial violence harms Black, Afri-Indigenous, and Indigenous Peoples through both common and distinct logics and actions. We recognize our responsibility and obligations as African Peoples to be good guests on these lands. We offer thanks to our elders and communities from whom we learn. May your wisdom inform our actions towards a more just future.



Key Messages

- Despite progress, curricular gaps remain in the inclusion of educational content on Black health and anti-Black racism in undergraduate medical education across Canada. Integrating these topics into EDI initiatives does not fully address anti-Black racism, promote Black health equity, foster accountability, or encourage meaningful reflection on systemic anti-Black racism.
- Transformative changes within undergraduate medical education rooted in theoretical frameworks that center Black experiences and acknowledge systemic racism, including critical race theory, are essential to provide medical learners and trainees with a comprehensive education.
- Resources, such as the Black Health Primer, strengthen medical education by bridging gaps and preparing medical learners and trainees with anti-racist practices to improve health equity and empower them to act as agents of change to improve health outcomes for Black communities in Canada.



Executive Summary

The Black Health Education Collaborative (BHEC) is a pan-Canadian organization committed to transforming medical and health professional education to improve the health of Black communities across Canada. This is achieved through curricular development, continued professional development, and research. In 2022, BHEC conducted a situational assessment to understand how anti-Black racism in healthcare and Black health are included in undergraduate medical education (UGME) programs across Canada. A survey was sent to all Canadian medical schools, and responses were received from a majority of them. The survey was completed by individuals in various roles within the institutions, including faculty and leadership.

Anti-Black racism is deeply rooted in the institutions and systems that shape everyday life and contribute to health inequities experienced by Black communities across Canada. Confronting this requires ongoing commitments to addressing anti-Black racism and promoting Black health within the healthcare system and health professional education. As a social determinant of health, anti-Black racism shapes health experiences through patient-provider interactions and health outcomes. Physicians and medical trainees are in critical positions to intervene and challenge anti-Black racism, empowering them to create change and promote health equity through anti-racist practices. To achieve this, medical trainees must acquire essential knowledge about anti-Black racism and Black health to foster a healthcare system that is responsive and capable of effectively addressing the needs of Black communities in Canada.

While the inclusion of anti-Black racism in curricula has been acknowledged in medical education and higher education more broadly, significant gaps remain within Canadian medical education. Most undergraduate medical education (UGME) programs do not explicitly identify anti-Black racism or Black health in their commitments or guiding principles. Instead, these topics are often grouped within broader Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) or anti-racism initiatives, which tend to overlook the systemic and historical impacts of anti-Black racism on health.

When indicated, there were various approaches to including anti-Black racism and Black health in UGME programs, such as workshops or resources on Black health. The extent to which these topics are integrated into UGME curricula remains unclear.

Most institutions collaborated with Black subject matter experts or designated roles for Black health educators, such as Black Health Theme Leads. The representation of Black learners and faculty was one way institutions addressed anti-Black racism within their programs, including dedicated admission pathways for Black learners. Furthermore, most institutions reported that Black subject matter experts and learners contributed to the facilitation of content on anti-Black racism and Black health.

A key competency identified for learners was understanding how anti-Black racism impacts health and the social determinants of health. For faculty and educators, recognizing and utilizing their role as agents of change was deemed important. This highlights how knowledge-based content provides a foundation to empower physicians to disrupt anti-Black racism and promote Black health.

The implication of the findings emphasizes that while there has been some progress in including content on Black health and anti-Black racism in medical education, the consistency, allocation of resources, and implementation approaches remain unclear. Framing anti-Black racism and Black health under EDI and anti-racism frameworks within institutions does not appropriately address the systemic nature of these issues and adequately confront health inequities.

Transformative changes that explicitly name anti-Black racism in medical education are essential and must be coupled with the appropriate theoretical framework, such as critical race theory, which acknowledges the pervasiveness of anti-Black racism and centers Black voices. Fostering initiatives to increase the representation of Black learners and educators is essential, as is ensuring they receive the necessary support to navigate the institution. Positions such as Black Health Theme Leads ensure ongoing focus and expertise in the implementation of educational content. Additional tools, resources, and accessible educational content are necessary to support this learning. Educators, as agents of change, play a pivotal role in addressing anti-Black racism through pedagogy within UGME programs and beyond.

To bridge curricular gaps, BHEC developed the Black Health Primer, which is a multi-module, self-paced online course on Black health and anti-Black racism in healthcare that is rooted in critical race theory. Designed for healthcare professionals in all disciplines, the Primer facilitates the unlearning of anti-Black racism and fosters anti-racist practice.

Medical education has the potential to profoundly influence health outcomes for Black communities and advance health equity. Ongoing education, support, and institutional commitment are vital for sustaining progress and tackling ingrained racist practices in medical training. Ultimately, implementing anti-racist healthcare practices benefits not only Black communities but also promotes health equity and improved health outcomes for all in Canada.



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