



Black Doctors Call On Government To Fight Bias

For Immediate Release

March 12, 2021, Toronto---More than two-thirds of Black Canadians are reluctant to get vaccinated because they don't fully trust the health care system, so a coalition of Black medical scientists and community organizers is calling on government to make the system more fair.

"These disparities are rooted in systemic anti-Black racism," says Dr. Onye Nnorom, President of the Black Physicians Association of Ontario (BPAO), citing a Statistics Canada report showing only 34% of our Black population has no hesitation to take a Covid19 vaccine.

At a time when the pandemic is hitting Black and racialized communities hardest, the BPAO and the Black Health Alliance, along with the Black Opportunity Fund, BlackNorth Initiative and the Black Scientists' Task Force on Vaccine Equity are especially alarmed about this vaccine hesitancy.

"Too many Black Canadians are vaccine-hesitant because for generations our community has experienced discrimination in public health systems," Dr. Nnorom says.

"If the goal is to increase the Covid19 vaccine acceptance rate amongst Black Canadians, the government needs to make significant changes to the system," says Dr. Ato Sekyi-Otu of Black Opportunity Fund.

According to the coalition, the distrust of the medical system is primarily a result of systemic conditions that have also led to disproportionate negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Black communities.

Black Canadian public health, medical and community health organizations are coming together to issue a joint position statement calling on the government, public health authorities, healthcare institutions, and pharmaceutical companies to deal with this community health crisis once and for all. The group is asking to:

- **Develop plans that prioritize Black communities and neighbourhoods for vaccine distribution, testing sites, and other COVID-19 mitigation efforts.**
- Implement effective social policies which will also improve outcomes. For example, paid sick leave, better housing, and enhanced worker protection. These are contributing factors that have put Black Canadians and other marginalized lower-income Canadians at increased risk of COVID-19.



- **Allocate adequate resources to support community-led health promotion efforts including awareness campaigns, peer educator, and health ambassador programs to support COVID-19 vaccine uptake within Black communities**
- Partner with and resource community organizations from affected communities to support vaccine uptake
- Take swift and immediate steps to eliminate anti-Black racism in health and public health and address its impacts on health in Black communities
- Ensure governments and pharmaceutical companies are more proactive in building vaccine confidence and demonstrating the safety of the COVID-19 vaccine
- **Ensure race-based data is collected in collaboration with Black communities to identify, address and evaluate best practices to meet Black population health needs**
- Increase Black representation at decision-making tables, particularly on hospital and advisory boards
- Establish partnerships with Black health organizations to improve health outcomes.
- Ensure that policy- and decision-makers are firmly committed to rebuilding communities and populations that have been hardest hit by COVID-19.

A holistic community approach is crucial to building vaccine confidence and increasing vaccine uptake. Black populations will be best protected against COVID-19 through a combination of more equitable public health responses.

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