

**The Ontario Harm Reduction Network (OHRN) stands in solidarity with Black communities in Canada, the U.S. and around the world to actively resist anti-Black racism, white-supremacy, police violence and systemic injustices against Black communities. We call for justice for Black communities who have been subjected to police violence and the inexcusable deaths that have resulted.**

OHRN acknowledges the difficult and traumatic events of recent weeks, and their place in our legacy of violence against people who are Black. In Toronto, Ontario we witnessed the death of Regis Korchinski-Paquet; in Brampton, Ontario, D’Andre Campbell; and across the U.S., George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and Tony McDade, in just a few months. Their deaths have given renewed focus to persistent and ongoing colonial legacies including systemic racism, police violence, discrimination, and inequities that exist in societies around the world, including here in Ontario, Canada.

Given OHRN’s role as a knowledge sharing program, we have gathered some information to assist our networks in specifically reflecting on how systemic racism exists within Canada’s “criminal justice system”, is embedded within Canada’s drug policies and is perpetuated towards Black People Who Use Drugs (PWUD).

Canada’s drug policies and laws are rooted in colonialism and racial prejudice and have been developed, enforced and applied in ways that disproportionately impact Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC). As well, society and individuals’, values and attitudes toward PWUD are often formed by racist stereotypes. Although Canada does not do a good job collecting race based data, there is still much showing that Canada’s “criminal justice system” systematically disadvantages people based on their background and appearance, and that Black (and Indigenous) people are the subjects of unfair and unequal treatment - from society’s judgements, to contact with police, to sentencing and parole.

- In 2010, the *Toronto Drug Strategy Implementation Panel* conducted focus groups to hear directly from people who use drugs about their experiences of stigma and discrimination. PWUD reported experiencing multiple forms of discrimination, including classism, racism, sexism and ageism, in addition to the discrimination they experience related to their drug use. As noted in the report:

*Some of the racialized focus group participants felt that the stigma and discrimination they experienced related to their substance use was more severe because of their race or ethnicity. Some of these participants felt they were penalized more harshly than Caucasian/white people for their substance use, and were unfairly targeted or “profiled” by police.*

***“Sometimes being black, you can’t be ‘chillin’ with people on the street. ‘Cause on my street, if I’m seen chillin’ with certain white people the cops would just pull me aside and see if I’m selling crack or something.” (focus group participant)<sup>1</sup>***

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<sup>1</sup> Stigma, Discrimination & Substance Use - Experiences of people who use alcohol and other drugs in Toronto, An initiative of the Toronto Drug Strategy Implementation Panel, September 2010, City of Toronto [www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/93e2-stigmadiscrim\\_rep\\_2010\\_aoda.pdf](http://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/93e2-stigmadiscrim_rep_2010_aoda.pdf)



- Black people with no history of criminal convictions have been three times more likely to be arrested by Toronto police for possession of small amounts of marijuana than white people with similar backgrounds.<sup>2</sup>
- Black youth, especially males, report being stopped regularly or searched by police – approximately double the rate for white youth.<sup>3</sup>
- An analysis of 10,000 arrests in Toronto showed that Black people were 50% more likely to be taken to a police station for processing after arrest, and 100% more likely to be held overnight than were white people, even taking into account criminal history and age. When given bail, they had more conditions imposed.
- Race and Federal Prison<sup>4</sup>
  - Black people make up about 2.9% of the Canadian population but 8.6% of federal prisoners.
  - Across Canada, 54% of Black women sentenced to federal prison are serving time for a drug offence (1/4 are foreign nationals).
  - Indigenous people make up only 4.3% of the Canadian population, but 38% of women and 26% of male prisoners are Indigenous.

Black and Indigenous people are stereotyped as more likely to use drugs and are more likely to be targeted by police. As a result, they are subjected to more searches and interrogation where they are more likely to experience police violence, and more likely to then be charged. They often have less access to resources and capital to then defend themselves, making convictions more likely. The end result is over representation in prisons, broken families and fractured communities.

The harm reduction movement<sup>4</sup> is built on principles of social justice and challenges structural norms. In recognizing the most recent of a long history of tragic events, we at OHRN hope that the community will collectively acknowledge that racism, harassment, discrimination and violence are simply not acceptable in our society.

As we move forward, we will be providing harm reduction capacity-building trainings to ethno-specific AIDS Service Organizations. **OHRN commits to further our own ongoing education and dialogue within our network to confront white-supremacy, to resist anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism and police violence, to challenge racist drug policies and to advocate for the decriminalization of drug use. We invite our harm reduction network to join us in these commitments through reflection, education and action.**

*Below, please find a list of readings and other resources that focus specifically on the intersections of race, drugs, drug policy and harm reduction - this is just a small collection and we also invite you to send others our way.*

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<sup>2</sup> [www.thestar.com/news/insight/2017/07/06/toronto-marijuana-arrests-reveal-startling-racial-divide.html](http://www.thestar.com/news/insight/2017/07/06/toronto-marijuana-arrests-reveal-startling-racial-divide.html)

<sup>3</sup> [www.johnhoward.ca/blog/race-crime-justice-canada/](http://www.johnhoward.ca/blog/race-crime-justice-canada/)

<sup>4</sup> [www.drugpolicy.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Vandu-Report-Mar-9-2018.pdf](http://www.drugpolicy.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Vandu-Report-Mar-9-2018.pdf)



## If you are a person from the BIPOC community looking for support:

- Find BIPOC, queer positive counsellors, some who offer sliding scale [bit.ly/QueerCCC](https://bit.ly/QueerCCC)
- *Across Boundaries* provides a dynamic range of mental health support and services and works within Anti-Racism/Anti-Black racism and Anti-Oppression frameworks. [www.acrossboundaries.ca/referrals-intake](https://www.acrossboundaries.ca/referrals-intake)
- Free Fresh Food Boxes for members of ACB community [blackfoodtoronto.com](https://blackfoodtoronto.com)
  - [https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=hoaz\\_PQE30GUI4rMF9HMuv7tfXrw8CdLvlzx8Rf6OPZUMTRHUU5KU0xKQUw3QTZVSDhTTUhYS1RENC4u](https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=hoaz_PQE30GUI4rMF9HMuv7tfXrw8CdLvlzx8Rf6OPZUMTRHUU5KU0xKQUw3QTZVSDhTTUhYS1RENC4u)
  - Members of the Toronto African, Caribbean, Black (ACB) community can sign up on one of these lists to receive a free box of fresh fruit and vegetables.
- TAIBU Together - COVID 19 Helpline [twitter.com/TAIBU\\_CHC/status/1267863445136986113](https://twitter.com/TAIBU_CHC/status/1267863445136986113)  
416-803-8654  
[covid-19en@taibuchc.ca](mailto:covid-19en@taibuchc.ca)  
English & French  
CHC serving the ACB community. Helpline for health and social supports.
- Women's Health in Women's Hands [whiwh.com](https://whiwh.com)  
[@WHIWHCHC](https://twitter.com/WHIWHCHC)  
Community Health Centre for racialized women in Toronto + GTA
- Warden Woods Community Centre  
Social Support line related to COVID-19  
647-327-0206
- Black Mental Health Supports [www.blogto.com/city/2020/06/black-mental-health-toronto/](https://www.blogto.com/city/2020/06/black-mental-health-toronto/)
- Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention – Black CAP  
Phone and online support services during COVID  
[www.blackcap.ca/page.php?u=/programs-services/available-services](https://www.blackcap.ca/page.php?u=/programs-services/available-services)
- Resources for Black Healing and Support [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1de4xePkB6WzYqSWDaadJcujqNtN4X-T8\\_tkvWV1\\_FDM/mobilebasic?fbclid=IwAR0rZOEduMyMhHJTq-44jgyb-qJGTNtcyjr0v2ApAHVwAlbbmzooauD0h4](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1de4xePkB6WzYqSWDaadJcujqNtN4X-T8_tkvWV1_FDM/mobilebasic?fbclid=IwAR0rZOEduMyMhHJTq-44jgyb-qJGTNtcyjr0v2ApAHVwAlbbmzooauD0h4)



## If you would like to donate:

**Justice for Regis – Donation page for the family of Regis Korchinski Paquet**

[www.gofundme.com/f/justice-for-regis/](http://www.gofundme.com/f/justice-for-regis/)

**Donate to Black Lives Matter – Toronto**

[www.blacklivesmatter.ca/donate/](http://www.blacklivesmatter.ca/donate/)

**Black Legal Action Centre**

[www.blacklegalactioncentre.ca](http://www.blacklegalactioncentre.ca)

**Support the COVID-19 Black Emergency Support Fund**

[www.ca.gofundme.com/f/black-emergency-support-fund](http://www.ca.gofundme.com/f/black-emergency-support-fund)

## Readings and other resources

**Cannabis and criminalization of Black Canadians with Akwasi Owusu-Bempah – PODCAST, Policy Options Podcast - PO Podcast 95, 2020 (40:41 minutes)**

[www.soundcloud.com/irpp/po-podcast-95-cannabis-and-criminalization-of-black-canadians](http://www.soundcloud.com/irpp/po-podcast-95-cannabis-and-criminalization-of-black-canadians)

**The unbearable whiteness of weed: Canada's booming cannabis industry has a race problem - OPINION PIECE, The Globe and Mail, August 02, 2019**

[www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-the-unbearable-whiteness-of-weed](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-the-unbearable-whiteness-of-weed)

**Race, Crime and Justice in Canada - BLOG POST, John Howard Society, October 19, 2017**

[www.johnhoward.ca/blog/race-crime-justice-canada](http://www.johnhoward.ca/blog/race-crime-justice-canada)

**Drugs: What's race got to do with it? – AUDIO, CBC Radio, July 17, 2017 (34:45minutes)**

[www.cbc.ca/radio/ondrugs/drugs-what-s-race-got-to-do-with-it-1.4206616](http://www.cbc.ca/radio/ondrugs/drugs-what-s-race-got-to-do-with-it-1.4206616)

**Toronto marijuana arrests reveal 'startling' racial divide – ARTICLE, Toronto Star, July 06, 2017 (15 minute read)**

[www.thestar.com/news/insight/2017/07/06/toronto-marijuana-arrests-reveal-startling-racial-divide.html](http://www.thestar.com/news/insight/2017/07/06/toronto-marijuana-arrests-reveal-startling-racial-divide.html)

**Drug use arrest and crime in Canada and BC 2015-2016 - REPORT, Susan Boyd for VANDU**

[www.drugpolicy.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Vandu-Report-Mar-9-2018.pdf](http://www.drugpolicy.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Vandu-Report-Mar-9-2018.pdf)

**Race Crime and Criminal Justice in Canada, Akwasi Owusu-Bempah and Scot Wortley - BOOK CHAPTER, The Oxford Handbook of Ethnicity, Crime, and Immigration (2014)**

[www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199859016.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199859016-e-020](http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199859016.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199859016-e-020)



**A Need for Racial Justice in Harm Reduction** – WEBINAR and LITERATURE REVIEW, Harm Reduction Coalition, United States (2012)

[www.harmreduction.org/publication-type/webinar/racial-justice-harm-reduction/](http://www.harmreduction.org/publication-type/webinar/racial-justice-harm-reduction/)

**Stigma, Discrimination & Substance Use** – REPORT, City of Toronto (2010)

[www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/93e2-stigmadiscrim\\_rep\\_2010\\_aoda.pdf](http://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/93e2-stigmadiscrim_rep_2010_aoda.pdf)

**Perspectives on Canadian Drug Policy, Volume 1** - The John Howard Society of Canada (2003)

[www.johnhoward.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Perspective-on-Canadian-Drug-Policy-Volume-1.pdf](http://www.johnhoward.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Perspective-on-Canadian-Drug-Policy-Volume-1.pdf)

**Race and the Drug War** – BLOG POST, US Based, Drug Policy Alliance

[www.drugpolicy.org/issues/race-and-drug-war](http://www.drugpolicy.org/issues/race-and-drug-war)

**The Drug War, Mass Incarceration and Race**– FACT SHEET (English/Spanish), US Based, Drug Policy Alliance blog

[www.drugpolicy.org/resource/drug-war-mass-incarceration-and-race-englishspanish](http://www.drugpolicy.org/resource/drug-war-mass-incarceration-and-race-englishspanish)

**Jay Z - The War on Drugs: From Prohibition to Gold Rush** - VIDEO (3:49 minutes)

[www.youtu.be/HSozqaVcOU8](http://www.youtu.be/HSozqaVcOU8)

## **Reading Towards Abolition: A Reading List on Policing, Rebellion, and the Criminalization of Blackness**

COMPILED BY THE ABUSABLE PAST COLLECTIVE

The co-editors at the Abusable Past have compiled this list to provide readers with quick access to collected resources for teaching, learning, and acting in the wake of the most recent wave of police killings, including the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, MN, Breona Taylor in Louisville, KY, and Tony McDade in Tallahassee, FL. This list is not comprehensive as there are multiple ways to contextualize this current moment of rebellion. We hope to collaborate around a practice of self-study towards a freer world. We welcome suggestions for additional resources, which you can tweet to us @AbusablePast or email [abusablepast@gmail.com](mailto:abusablepast@gmail.com).

[www.radicalhistoryreview.org/abusablepast/reading-towards-abolition-a-reading-list-on-policing-rebellion-and-the-criminalization-of-blackness/](http://www.radicalhistoryreview.org/abusablepast/reading-towards-abolition-a-reading-list-on-policing-rebellion-and-the-criminalization-of-blackness/)