



## **The Health Research Council for People of African Descent (HRCPAD) Partners with Durham College's Social Impact Hub to Secure Funding to Address the Need for culturally responsive Mental Health Care Services in Black Communities**

*Black Canadians are among the most likely to experience psychological distress, but only 1.2% are seeking any services.*

The Health Research Council for People of African Descent (HRCPAD) is excited to partner on a \$360K research grant from the College and Community Social Innovation Fund (CCSIF), supported by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR). Through focused research, this grant aims to address the pressing mental health challenges confronting Black communities in the Durham Region, a region with one of the largest concentrations of Black people in Canada.

The lack of Canadian statistical data pertaining to Black health, much less mental health, is well-known. According to the Mental Health Commission of Canada (2022), 35.4% of Black Canadians experience significant psychological distress, yet only 1.2% seek mental health services. Despite being among those with the greatest need during the pandemic, the Black community remains underserved and highly vulnerable to mental illness (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2021).

In partnership with Durham College's Social Impact Hub, the Black Health Alliance (BHA), The Regional Municipality of Durham and Ontario Shores Centre for Mental Health Sciences (Ontario Shores), HRCPAD continues its mission to conduct and promote Black health research in Canada and globally. The Council is dedicated to undertaking Black health research to address the critical health disparities disproportionately affecting Black individuals and communities.

The 3-year research project will involve the following activities:

- Collecting and analyzing race-based health data among Durham Region residents accessing mental healthcare in this region
- Identifying whether race impacts *how* Black people enter Durham Region's mental healthcare system
- Understanding the experiences of Black community members accessing mental healthcare services in the Durham Region

- Strengthening culturally responsive clinical practices for mental health practitioners when working with Black community members
- Creating culturally responsive mental health resources to assist Black community members navigate the mental healthcare system

With support from HRCPAD, the project will be led by Dr. Crystal Garvey and Jason Vassell, faculty members at Durham College and research leads in the Social Impact Hub, as well as David Grant, HRCPAD member and PhD Candidate in Public Health Sciences at the University of Waterloo. David Grant highlights: "Black mental health research is crucial for developing culturally responsive care that addresses the unique challenges faced by Black communities. Focusing on both qualitative and quantitative research methods provide a unique opportunity. Qualitative research allows us to gather direct insights on mental health barriers and disparities facing Black community members and mental health practitioners' perspectives; while quantitative research allows us to generate health statistics, including the ability to predict the likelihood of certain outcomes affecting Black people accessing mental healthcare. There remains a significant gap in the concurrent exploration of both community members and clinicians' insights on Black mental health disparities and barriers. Without this comprehensive targeted mixed-methods research, care gaps will persist, leaving the most vulnerable underserved."

Dwight Townsend, Executive Lead of the Council, adds: "Conducting Black mental health research is essential for understanding the diverse experiences of Black communities. It's about empowering them to heal, thrive, and lead in the face of systemic challenges."

#### **About the Health Research Council for People of African Descent (HRCPAD):**

Aligned with the United Nations' Declaration of the Decade for People of African Descent, HRCPAD is dedicated to addressing the health disparities disproportionately affecting Black individuals and communities. The Council is committed to advancing knowledge and developing best practices to reduce and ultimately eliminate these disparities in Canada and globally.

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