



# Nursing Declaration Against Anti-Black Racism in Nursing and Health Care

The United Nations General Assembly reiterates that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights and have the potential to contribute constructively to the development of their societies... Any doctrine of racial superiority is scientifically false, morally condemnable, socially unjust and dangerous, and must be rejected, together with theories that attempt to determine the existence of separate human races.

*Principle of Equality  
United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>1</sup>*

## Context

As millions of people around the world protest in response to the murders of Black people, many have become even more aware of the need for social justice reform that addresses racism and realigns structures to combat discriminatory actions and achieve health equity for all.<sup>2</sup>

The history of Black people in Canada is both long and varied, dating back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century during which the slave trade brought Black people to Canada from New England and the West Indies.<sup>3</sup> Following the gradual abolition of slavery in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Canada began seeing migration of Black people as settlers, mostly from the U.S., seeking refuge from slavery. Although many returned after the Civil War ended, Black communities continued to build roots in Eastern and Central Canada, living and working in this country as settlers for centuries. Since the elimination of these policies in the 1960s, immigration of Black people has risen sharply, creating a diverse culture of Black people in Canada from Caribbean and African countries.<sup>4</sup>

Historically, Canadian nursing schools, administrators, associations, and regulatory bodies have also contributed to establishing white, European-centric models of nursing and health,<sup>5</sup> thereby explicitly or implicitly maintaining anti-Black racism. For example, in academia, prospective Black students were refused admission into nursing schools until the 1940s, and institutions continue to lack anti-racist and anti-oppressive curricula within nursing education.<sup>6</sup> To this day, anti-Black racism impacts recruitment, retention, advancement, and leadership potential within the nursing and health professions. It also contributes to a lack of representation of Black nurses in leadership and advanced practice positions.

Anti-Black racism remains pervasive and systemic in Canada and constitutes a public health emergency. As the Canadian Human Rights Commission observed, "It is historically embedded in our society, in our culture, in our laws and in our attitudes. It is built into our institutions and perpetuates the social and



economic disparities that exist in everything from education to healthcare, to housing and employment... Even the most subtle forms of racism contribute to the conditions that permit overt racism and violence to occur".<sup>7</sup>

Anti-Black racism has a direct impact on physical and mental health outcomes and on the type, volume and quality of health care delivered. Research has found that race is related to other social determinants of health, leading to significant disparities for Black communities in terms of life expectancy, diabetes, household food insecurity, and rates of those who are considered the working poor. In addition, the impact of experiencing racism affects psychological and physiological wellbeing.<sup>8</sup> However, Canada's health data infrastructure does not systematically collect race- and ethnicity-based data, thus limiting available research of the health of Black communities.

The Canadian Human Rights Commission framed our obligations clearly: "It is not enough to say that we embrace diversity and human rights as founding principles of our democracy. Racism violates basic human rights. Whether conscious or unconscious, subtle or overt, it diminishes human dignity and it erodes democracy. When we are complacent, we are complicit. When we are silent, we are complicit."<sup>9</sup> As nurses we will no longer be complacent or silent.

## Declaration

**As nurses,**

### **1. We unconditionally condemn all acts of racism and discrimination.**

We believe that every nurse, regardless of designation, domain of practice, or position, can have an impact on the fight against racism. Now is the time for all nurses across all domains of practice in Canada, to listen, learn and reflect on the ways white privilege and systemic racism contribute to injustice and inequality in this country.<sup>10</sup> Nurses can be change agents by responding to racism when they experience or see it occur, further their understanding of implicit and unconscious bias, and work within their own institutions to develop cultures of inclusivity and belonging. We vow to stand up against the violence, victimization, and health disparities affecting Black individuals and communities of colour.

### **2. We will look inwards to identify and address the biases, fears, assumptions and privilege within ourselves, our organizations, across the profession of nursing, and across health care broadly.**

We vow to combat bias and prejudice in our own interactions with others, as well as in our organizations and communities. We will conduct system-wide reviews of our governance structures, regulations, policies, processes, and practices to identify and address any racist systems and approaches. We will provide mandatory, system-wide anti-racism and anti-oppression education for staff, volunteers, and



boards of directors in our organizations. We will advocate for anti-racism and anti-oppression policies and practices in our profession and workplaces. We will monitor our organizations for instances of stereotyping, discrimination, and racism, and will take corrective actions. We will publish the results of our system-wide reviews and reports to evaluate corrective actions.

**3. In conducting our work, we will seek, recognize, and respect the leadership of voices from Black communities and learn from lived experiences of anti-Black racism in Canada.**

We will develop strategic plans with measurable goals to identify and close the gaps in health outcomes for racialized communities. In conducting our work, we will seek, recognize, and respect the leadership of voices from the Black communities and learn from their lived experiences of racism in Canada.

**4. We will advocate for policies that are anti-racist at the local, provincial, and national levels that address health and social inequity.**

Working with other healthcare professionals, leaders, stakeholders, and policy makers, we will confront bias and address behaviours and unfair practices, policies and clinical guidelines that lead to discrimination against Black individuals and communities of colour to improve wellbeing now and lay the foundation for excellent health for all. We will look critically at policies guidelines being used by nurses in their practice and call them into question. We will create and sustain cultures of understanding, belonging, and inclusivity in our workplaces, profession, and communities.

We will call on governments at all levels to implement fully the actions put forth in Canada’s Anti-Racism Strategy 2019-2022, including the support of initiatives to combat inequities in employment, social participation, and justice; collection of reliable, usable, and comparable race- and ethnicity-based data and evidence regarding discrimination and racism; addressing and combatting hate crimes and online hate; and conducting a national public education and awareness campaign to raise awareness of the historic roots of racism and its impact on racialized communities.<sup>11</sup>

**5. We acknowledge that cultural safety can only be achieved through cultural and structural competence and humility.**

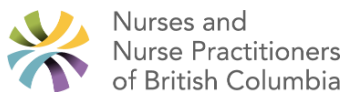
We will advocate for and provide educational opportunities that support nurses in the provision of culturally and structurally competent and relevant care and require all nursing students and nurses, pre- and post-licensure, to learn about the history of racism in Canada.

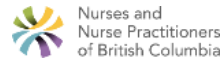


**THIS DECLARATION WAS DEVELOPED AND IS ENDORSED BY THE LEADERS OF THE FOLLOWING NATIONAL AND PROVINCIAL ORGANIZATIONS:**

Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing  
 Canadian Black Nurses Alliance  
 Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions  
 Canadian Nurses Association  
 Canadian Nursing Students' Association  
 Nurse Practitioner Association ` Canada

Association of Regulated Nurses of Manitoba  
 Coalition of African, Caribbean and Black Nurses in BC  
 Quebec Nurses Association  
 Nurses and Nurse Practitioners of British Columbia  
 WeRPN Registered Practical Nurses Association of Ontario







## Resources

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

<sup>2</sup> American Academy of Nurses & American Nurses Association. (2020). *Call for social justice to address racism and health equity in communities of colour*. Retrieved December 15, 2020, from <https://www.nursingworld.org/news/news-releases/2020/the-american-academy-of-nursing-and-the-american-nurses-association-call-for-social-justice-to-address-racism-and-health-equity-in-communities-of-color/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/immigration/history-ethnic-cultural/Pages/blacks.aspx><https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/black-history-until-1900>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.emancipation.ca/early-black-canadian-history>  
<https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/immigration/history-ethnic-cultural/Pages/blacks.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> Flynn, K. (2009) Beyond the glass wall: Black Canadian nurses, 1940–1970. *Nursing History Review*, 17, 129–152. DOI: 10.1891/1062- 8061.17.129

<sup>6</sup> Jeffries et al. (2018). Understanding the invisibility of black nurse leaders using a black feminist poststructuralist framework. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 27(15-16), 3225-3234. <https://doi-org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/10.1111/jocn.14505>

<sup>7</sup> Canadian Human Rights Commission. (2020). *Statement - Anti-Black racism in Canada: time to face the truth*. Retrieved December 15, 2020, from <https://www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/eng/content/statement-anti-black-racism-canada-time-face-truth>

<sup>8</sup> Public Health Agency of Canada. (2018). *Key health inequalities in Canada: A national portrait*. Retrieved from: [https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/phac-aspc/documents/services/publications/science-research/key-health-inequalities-canada-national-portraitexecutive-summary/key\\_health\\_inequalities\\_full\\_report-eng.pdf](https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/phac-aspc/documents/services/publications/science-research/key-health-inequalities-canada-national-portraitexecutive-summary/key_health_inequalities_full_report-eng.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Government of Canada. (2019). *Building a foundation for change: Canada’s anti-racism strategy 2019-2022*. Retrieved December 17, 2020, from <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/anti-racism-engagement/anti-racism-strategy.html#a5a>