

**Healing Justice:**

# **Racial Bias, Healthcare Access & Mental Health Support for Youth Education**



Presented by



**BLACK COMMUNITY  
RESOURCE CENTRE**

# Introduction

Healthcare is a fundamental human right, but not everyone experiences the healthcare system equally. Across Canada, racialized communities continue to face:

- Unequal access to care
- Longer wait times
- Dismissal of symptoms
- Misdiagnosis
- Language and cultural barriers
- Fear or mistrust of healthcare institutions
- Higher rates of preventable illness

This toolkit helps youth understand:

What racial bias in healthcare looks like

- How systemic racism affects health outcomes
- How to advocate for themselves and others
- How to recognize discrimination in medical settings
- How to access healthcare resources safely
- How to report mistreatment
- How to support peers experiencing healthcare discrimination



This presentation outlines the importance of well-being, signs to recognize, and how we can support ourselves and others.



# Understanding Healthcare Inequity



## What Is Healthcare Access?

### What Is Healthcare Access?

Healthcare access means:

- Being able to see a doctor when needed
- Receiving accurate diagnosis and treatment
- Having access to medication
- Being treated with dignity and respect
- Receiving care in your language or with interpretation
- Being believed when describing symptoms

When any of these are denied or limited, healthcare access is unequal

### What Is Racial Bias in Healthcare?

Racial bias occurs when healthcare providers:

- Make assumptions based on race
- Dismiss or minimize symptoms
- Provide lower-quality care
- Delay treatment
- 

Use stereotypes to guide decisions  
Fail to provide culturally safe care  
Bias can be implicit (unconscious) or explicit (intentional).

Both cause harm.

# Systemic Racism in Healthcare

Systemic racism refers to the ways healthcare systems, policies, practices, and institutions, produce unequal outcomes for racialized groups.

## Examples include:

- Lack of culturally competent care
- Fewer clinics in racialized neighborhoods
- Language barriers without interpretation services
- Medical research based on white populations
- Stereotypes about pain tolerance
- Underdiagnosis of conditions in Black and Indigenous patients
- Over-policing of Indigenous patients in hospitals
- Fear of child protection involvement for racialized families

These patterns are not accidents, they are the result of long histories of exclusion and discrimination.

## Challenges include:



Social stigma & lack of awareness



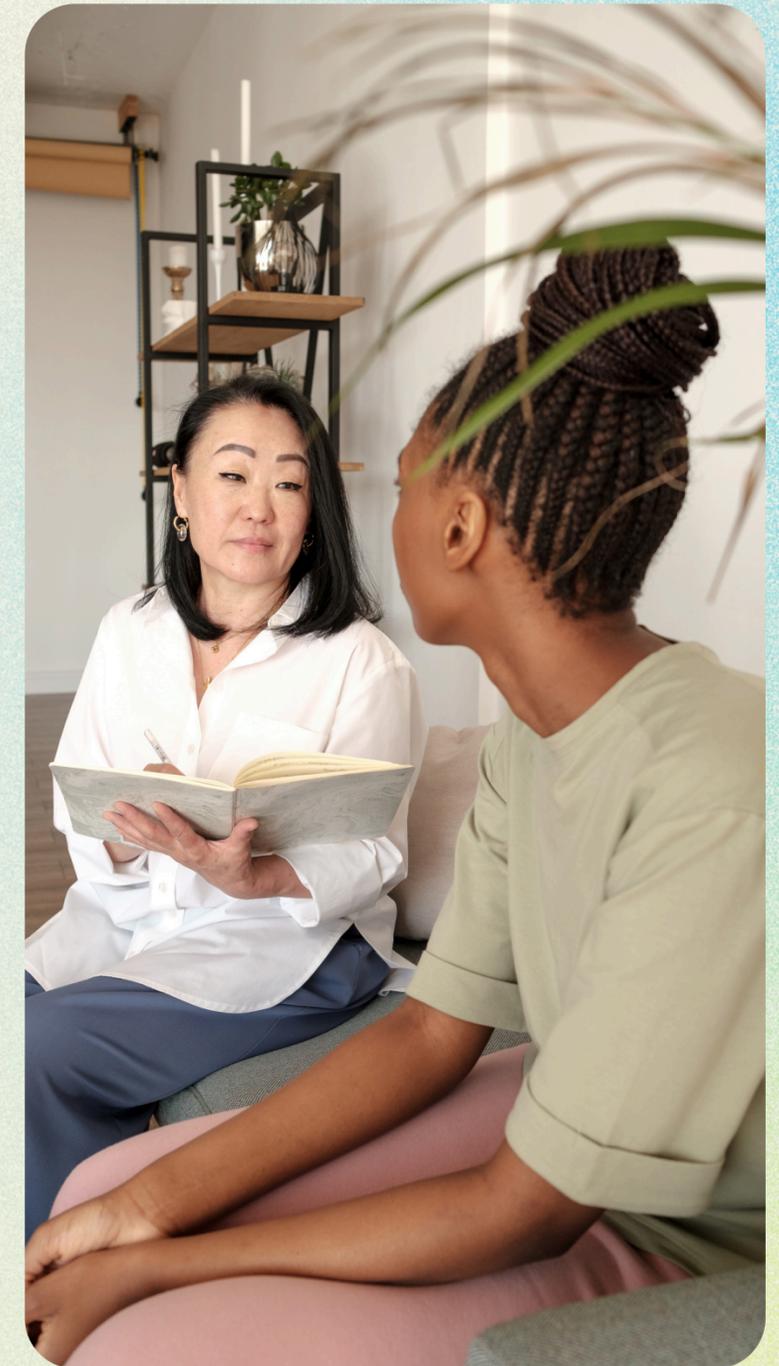
Cultural misconceptions



Inadequate access to care



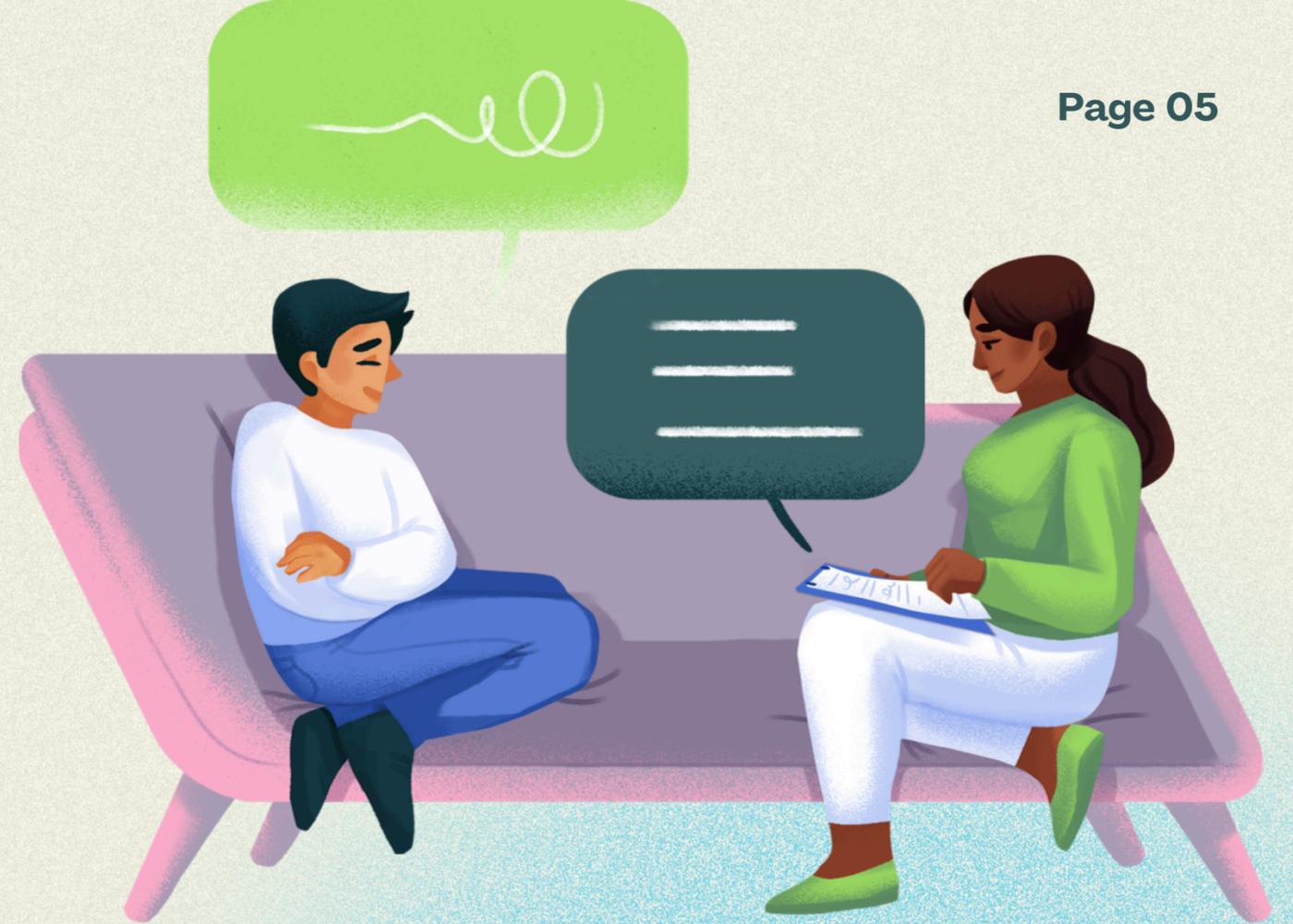
Financial constraints



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[www.bcrcmontreal.com](http://www.bcrcmontreal.com)

# How Racial Bias Shows Up in Healthcare



1

## Not Being Believed

- Patients of color often report that doctors:
- Don't take their pain seriously
- Assume they are exaggerating
- Delay tests or treatment

2

## Misdiagnosis

Symptoms may be misinterpreted because medical training often uses white bodies as the “default.”

### Examples:

- Skin conditions look different on darker skin
- Signs of infection may be missed
- Mental health symptoms may be labeled as “behavioral issues”

3

## Language & Communication Barriers

Without interpretation services, patients may:

- Misunderstand instructions
- Be unable to describe symptoms
- Receive incorrect treatment

4

## Cultural Insensitivity

Healthcare providers may:

- Ignore cultural practices
- Misunderstand family dynamics
- Make assumptions about lifestyle or beliefs

5

## Fear of Authority

Some racialized communities avoid healthcare due to:

- Past discrimination
- Fear of police involvement
- Fear of child protection services
- Negative experiences with institutions



# Impact of Racial Bias on Health

## Racial bias leads to:



- Higher rates of chronic illness
- Delayed diagnosis
- Increased maternal mortality for Black and Indigenous women
- Higher rates of mental health distress
- Lower life expectancy
- Avoidance of healthcare systems
- Trauma and mistrust

**These outcomes are preventable, but require systemic change.**

# Youth Rights in Healthcare (Québec & Canada)



## Youth have the right to:

- Be treated with dignity and respect
- Receive care without discrimination
- Access interpretation services
- Consent to certain medical treatments (depending on age and capacity)
- Confidentiality
- Ask for a second opinion
- Bring a trusted adult to appointments
- File a complaint if mistreated

## Healthcare providers must not discriminate based on:

- Race
- Ethnicity
- Religion
- Language
- Gender
- Sexual orientation
- Disability
- Immigration status



# How to Advocate for Yourself in Healthcare Settings



## During the Appointment

- Speak clearly about symptoms
- Ask for clarification
- Ask for interpretation if needed
- Ask: “Can you explain why you are recommending this?”
- Ask: “What are my options?”



## Before the Appointment

- Write down symptoms
- Bring a trusted adult or friend
- Bring medication lists
- Bring questions



## Applications

- “I feel like my concerns aren’t being taken seriously.”
- “Can you explain your reasoning?”
- “I would like a second opinion.”
- “Can you document my symptoms in my file?”

# What To Do If You Experience Healthcare Discrimination



- Stay calm and take notes
- Ask for the provider's name and role
- Request a different provider



- Bring a support person
- File a complaint with the hospital or clinic
- Contact the Québec Ombudsman



- Contact the Human Rights Commission
- Seek community support

# Scenarios for Healthcare Access & Racial Bias



## ✓ Scenarios

### **Scenario 1: Pain Dismissed in the ER**

A Black teen arrives at the ER with severe abdominal pain. Staff assume it's "anxiety" and delay treatment.

### **Scenario 2: Language Barrier**

A newcomer youth tries to explain chest pain but no interpreter is provided. The doctor misdiagnoses the issue.

### **Scenario 3: Indigenous Youth & Mistrust**

An Indigenous teen avoids going to the clinic because of past discrimination. Their condition worsens.

## ✓ Questions

### **Questions:**

- What biases are present?
- What should the patient say or do?
- What systemic issues are involved?

### **Questions:**

- What rights were violated?
- How could the situation be improved?

### **Questions:**

- How does systemic racism create fear?
- What supports could help?

# Scenarios for Healthcare Access & Racial Bias



## Scenarios



## Questions

### Scenario 4: Mental Health Bias

**1** A racialized student reports depression. The provider dismisses it as “normal teenage behavior.”

- 2 Questions:**
- What stereotypes are at play?
  - What should the youth do next?

### Scenario 5: Parental Assumptions

**1** A doctor assumes a newcomer parent “doesn’t understand” and speaks only to the child.

**Questions:**

- 2**
- How does this impact trust?
  - What is culturally safe care?

### Scenario 6: Gender & Race Bias

**1** A Black girl reports menstrual pain. The provider assumes she is exaggerating and refuses further testing.

- 2 Questions:**
- What biases are present?
  - What recourse does she have?

# Mental Health Debrief Sessions

## Debrief Sessions Led by Trained Professionals

- Trauma-informed
- Confidential
- Non-judgmental

## Why Debriefing Matters

- Prevents emotional overwhelm
- Supports healing
- Builds resilience
- Helps youth integrate learning
- Creates a safe space for difficult conversations

## What Happens in a Debrief Session

- Emotional check-ins
- Guided reflection
- Processing difficult content
- Identifying triggers
- Building coping strategies
- Connecting to mental health resources



# Glossary (Plain Language)

- **Healthcare Access:** Ability to get medical care when needed.
- **Racial Bias:** Judgments based on race that affect decisions.
- **Systemic Racism:** Racism built into institutions and policies.
- **Implicit Bias:** Unconscious stereotypes that affect behavior.
- **Cultural Safety:** Care that respects identity and avoids harm.
- **Discrimination:** Unfair treatment based on identity.
- **Interpreter Services:** Language support for patients.
- **Ombudsman:** Independent office that investigates complaints.

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