



# ADJUSTING THE SPOTLIGHT:

Re-centering Neglected  
BIPOC Youth Voices  
Surrounding Mental Health

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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**The New Mentality (TNM)** is a program of Children’s Mental Health Ontario that engages and amplifies youth voices in the Ontario child and youth mental health system. Through our Youth Action Committee (YAC), youth members from across Ontario work together to develop youth-led policy recommendations with the goal of creating change in the mental health system.

In early 2020, YAC members decided to focus their policy recommendations on equity. After much discussion, the topic was narrowed down to racial equity and addressing how race affects mental health treatment in Ontario. Youth cited their lived experiences and persistent racial inequities worldwide that impact access and understanding of the mental health system as their reasoning for choosing this topic.

YAC members released a survey targeted to BIPOC youth aged 13-25 years old in Ontario to better understand the role that racism plays in accessing and receiving mental health services for BIPOC youth. The data collected from these surveys was followed up with two online consultations with BIPOC YAC members that resulted in insightful discussions on race, racism, and mental health.

This policy paper outlines three main findings from the YAC survey and consultations and six recommendations based on the main findings.

## THE THREE MAIN FINDINGS ARE:

- **Finding #1:** BIPOC youth face barriers from racism, discrimination, cultural insensitivity and cultural stigma that prevent access to mental health services and create negative experiences upon usage.
  - BIPOC youth experience racism and discrimination due to their unique and intersecting identities.
  - Current mental health services lack cultural sensitivity.
  - White service providers lack an understanding about intergenerational trauma due to a lack of lived experience.
  - Cultural stigma is unique to BIPOC youth and is not acknowledged within the system.
  - The implication of culturally incompetent care is that youth will seek informal support when in crisis.

- **Finding #2:** The existence of economic disparities amongst BIPOC communities and inadequate access to financial resources poses barriers when accessing services and when attempting to continue with necessary care.
  - Financial barriers prevent BIPOC youth from accessing services.
  - While child and youth mental health services are publicly funded, youth may lack access to equitable economic resources such as transportation or technology that would enable them to access mental health services.
  - There are significant economic disparities amongst racialized communities.
  - The disproportionate effects of COVID-19 on financial stability for BIPOC communities further exacerbate their already scarce resources.
  
- **Finding #3:** Social exclusion within schools, communities and institutions can lead to serious mental health effects for BIPOC youth and prevent adequate access or usage of mental healthcare.
  - Negative social influences and racially targeted bullying within schools affects the mental health of BIPOC youth and poses significant barriers.
  - Social exclusion prompts BIPOC youth to access informal support in times of crisis.
  - There are significant geographic concerns and long wait times which prevent BIPOC youth from getting effective care.
  - There are parallels between the healthcare and the mental health system for BIPOC individuals related to social exclusion.

**The following recommendations are made in this policy paper as per the findings. Each recommendation is followed by short-term and long-term goals.**

- **Recommendation #1:** Offer more relevant anti-racist and anti-oppressive training to staff working in the child and youth mental health sector, with mandated follow-ups and continuous development, to create culturally sensitive environments and increase cultural competency.
- **Recommendation #2:** Hire more diverse service providers and allow youth to make requests for specific service providers.
- **Recommendation #3:** Provide effective anti-racist education and anti-oppressive practices within schools.
- **Recommendation #4:** Implement more types of mental health services.
- **Recommendation #5:** Ensure effective navigation and discovery of mental health services.
- **Recommendation #6:** Mandate race-based data collection.

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