

Black Community Housing Advisory Table (BCHAT)

Coalition to eliminate housing inequity for Black residents across the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA)

On Friday July 14, 2023, numerous housing providers, refugee serving organizations, frontline service workers, health organizations and civil society organizations – including members of our very own Black Community Housing Advisory Table (BCHAT) - hosted a press conference to call for urgent action to immediately provide emergency shelter and supports to unhoused refugees and asylum seekers at 129 Peter Street in downtown Toronto, and across the Greater Toronto Area.

This effort was led by BCHAT member, Kizito Musabimana, Founder and Executive Director of the Rwandan Canadian Healing Centre, with support from fellow BCHAT member Debbie Douglas, Executive Director, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI); and co-chairs Diane Walter, Executive Director, Margaret's Housing and Community Support Services (Margaret's) and Cheryll Case, Founder and Executive Director, CP Planning; as well as others. BCHAT members ensured that the press conference and calls to action included a fair representation of Black experts and persons with lived experience on the matter.

We appreciate the support of elected officials, from the City of Toronto Mayor Olivia Chow, Councillor Alejandra Bravo, and Ausma Malik, who were in attendance. The leadership and inclusion of Black people in the hosting of the conference and formation of the calls to action is crucial, as an overwhelming majority of refugees and asylum seekers on the street are African.

We also acknowledge the African, Black and Caribbean organizations who have served on the frontlines despite the systemic barriers they face, including being historically underfunded or unfunded.

Our calls to action continue to include diligent support of the municipal government efforts to secure funding for shelter and housing for refugee claimants and asylum seekers. They also prioritize funding and other supports to Black-led organizations to provide welcome, shelter, housing, and support services to refugees and asylum seekers.

As an advisory group of Black housing professionals and experts in the GTHA, we robustly echo the calls by service users, civil society organizations, and housing leaders, on all levels of government to:

- Urgently establish reception centers to immediately shelter and support refugee claimants.
- The federal government in particular to ensure that refugee claimants have dedicated shelter space that includes the unique supports they need including legal services, healthcare and appropriate wraparound assistance including immediate emergency street outreach and mobile resources.

- The federal government must also take the lead in funding shelter spaces, personnel and support services;
- All governments must identify and immediately support Black-led and Black-serving agencies to remedy historical underfunding or no funding, and build community capacity to provide culturally appropriate wraparound services for refugee claimants.

Our coalition also reiterates our previous request sent to the City of Toronto's Mayor, Olivia Chow, on July 11th, to take the following actions to address Black poverty and homelessness in the City of Toronto by publicly committing to:

- Address barriers to the direct economic development and improved outcomes for Black communities through the support of Black-led and Black-serving programs and nonprofits in Toronto currently working to create permanent housing solutions for Black residents experiencing homelessness.
- Intentionally and with immediacy, facilitate and invest in increased opportunities for Black urban planners, developers, consultants and tradespeople to contribute to the planning and development of housing.

Sincerely,

The Black Community Housing Advisory Table (BCHAT)

Representatives:

Diane Walter (Co-Chair), Margaret's Housing and Community Support Services,
Executive Director

Cheryll Case (Co-Chair), CP Planning, Founder and Executive Director

Kizito Musabimana, Rwandan Canadian Healing Centre, Founder and Executive Director

Craig Wellington, Black Opportunity Fund, Executive Director

Debbie Douglas, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, Executive Director

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