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**For Information**

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**REPORT TITLE:**      **Equity Related Issues Impacting Racialized and Vulnerable Communities**

**FROM:**                Kathryn Lockyer, Interim Commissioner of Corporate Services

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**OBJECTIVE**

To inform the Diversity, Equity and Anti-Racism Committee about equity related issues impacting racialized and vulnerable communities that align with concerns raised during COVID-19.

**REPORT HIGHLIGHTS**

- Every Region of Peel resident has a right to fair and equitable treatment with respect to Regional programs and services, without discrimination or harassment, as outlined in the Ontario Human Rights Code.
  - Several Canadian organizations across public service, education and health care sectors are adopting diversity, equity and inclusion practices to achieve greater equity and inclusion in the workplace and in their communities.
  - The Region has an opportunity to build on its progress and adopt an equity approach to guide how we plan and deliver programs and services to Peel residents.
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**DISCUSSION**

**1. Background**

The Region of Peel is committed to a vision of Community for Life, where everyone enjoys a sense of belonging and access to the services and opportunities they need to thrive at each stage of their lives. Every Region of Peel resident has a right to fair and equitable treatment with respect to Regional programs and services, without discrimination or harassment, as outlined in the Ontario Human Rights Code. Identifying and removing barriers to full participation in the community is key to creating equitable access to opportunities and benefits that serve Peel residents.

The COVID-19 pandemic and emergency response measures from all levels of government have drawn attention to the disparities experienced by equity-seeking groups across Canada. Equity-seeking groups<sup>1</sup> are communities that face significant collective challenges participating in society due to attitudinal, historic, social and/or environmental barriers.

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<sup>1</sup> Canada Council for the Arts/Glossary/equity-seeking-groups

## Equity Related Issues Impacting Racialized and Vulnerable Communities

Several local community groups and leaders have expressed concern about COVID-19's impact on racialized and vulnerable communities. These include but are not limited to the Centre for Education and Training, Coalition of Black Health Leaders, Colour of Poverty – Colour of Change Network, Indus Community Services, Peel Multicultural Council, Peel Newcomer Strategy Group, Regional Diversity Roundtable, The 519.

### a) Definitions

**DISCRIMINATION** is an action or decision that treats a person or group badly or unjustly for reasons such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, immigration status and other intersecting factors (Canadian Human Rights Commission).

**EQUALITY** is treating all individuals the same regardless of their differences, circumstances or advantages/disadvantages.

**EQUITY** refers to fair, just and respectful treatment that recognizes and acknowledges the need to treat people differently depending on their needs and circumstances. Involves the removal of barriers to address historic and current disadvantages for under-represented and marginalized groups.

**EQUITY LENS:** the assessment and examination of current structures, policies and practices from an equity perspective. Decision making and implementation of policies, practices and systems that support access and equity, particularly for those that face systemic barriers.

**EQUITY-SEEKING GROUPS:** communities that face significant collective challenges participating in society. This marginalization could be created by attitudinal, historic, social and/or environmental barriers based on age, ethnicity, ability, economic status, gender, nationality, race, sexual orientation, etc.

**INEQUITY** is a lack of justice or fairness. It's characterized by preference, favouritism and/or bias toward one person or group over another.

**SYSTEMIC BARRIERS** refer to policies, practices and systems that result in some people receiving unequal access or being excluded from participation. This is also experienced as discrimination.

**SYSTEMIC DISCRIMINATION** refers to policies or practices that appear to be neutral on their surface but may have discriminatory effects on individuals based on their identity or background e.g. age, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, immigration status and other intersecting factors (Ontario Human Rights Commission). Systemic discrimination and exclusion of vulnerable populations can lead to disparities in access to services and supports and inequitable outcomes. For example, systemic barriers in education and employment for racialized, 2SLGBTQ and Indigenous youth.

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### 2. Findings

Findings from local reports, consultations and papers show that systemic discrimination and equity are issues within Peel Region. Specifically, the literature<sup>2</sup> points to:

- A lack of culturally appropriate/responsive services given Peel demographics
- Disparities and disproportionalities of Indigenous and Black youth/families in policing, child welfare and educational institutions
- Systemic racism within public-serving institutions e.g. education, health care, police
- Discrimination experienced by Indigenous and racialized communities in accessing affordable housing
- Increasing homelessness amongst racialized, 2SLGBTQ and Indigenous youth
- Higher unemployment rates for persons with disabilities, racialized, and Indigenous populations
- Biased perceptions from the media and general population of racialized, Indigenous and 2SLGBTQ populations in Peel
- Increased hate crimes toward Islamic and Jewish communities

The COVID-19 pandemic has drawn further attention to disparities experienced by equity-seeking groups including women, Indigenous people, racialized people, 2SLGBTQ communities, newcomers, immigrants, refugees, older adults, youth, persons living with a disability, those experiencing homelessness, victims of violence and those who are mentally unwell, living in poverty and struggling with addictions/substance abuse.

In the United States, racial disparities are evident with almost three times as many Black people dying from the Coronavirus compared to white people<sup>3</sup>. New York City's first race-based breakdown showed that lower income neighborhoods were hit harder than wealthier neighborhoods, and when death rates were ranked by zip code, eight of the top 10 had majority racialized populations. Up until recently, Canada was not tracking race or ethnicity as part of its' COVID-19 data collection. In an open letter to the Ontario government<sup>4</sup> a group of black medical professionals stated that "Without an evidence base, the inequitable experiences of marginalized populations are dismissed as anecdotal and interventions are not prioritized."

In April 2020, Peel Public Health and Toronto Public Health announced that they were going to begin collecting race and occupation-based data on COVID-19 patients to determine if people of certain backgrounds (or that work in certain sectors) are impacted worse than others. Shortly thereafter on May 6, 2020, the province of Ontario announced that it would

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<sup>2</sup> Black Experience Project GTA 2017 (EnviroNics); Colour of Change Reports, Colour of Poverty; Fighting an Uphill Battle, F.A.C.E.S of Peel Collaborative, 2015; HCSC 2016 Youth Unemployment Mississauga; National Council of Canadian Muslims; Peel Alliance to End Homelessness

<sup>3</sup> The Guardian. "Black Americans dying of Covid-19 at three times the rate of white people." Theguardian.com. The Guardian International Edition, 20, May. 2020. Web.

<sup>4</sup> Alliance for Healthier Communities. Statement from Black Health Leaders on COVID-19's impact on Black Communities in Ontario. 2, April, 2020.

## Equity Related Issues Impacting Racialized and Vulnerable Communities

begin collecting race-based data during the COVID-19 pandemic to better understand how communities are being impacted by this virus. Findings regarding race-based data in Peel will be published through weekly epidemiology updates.

### 3. Proposed Direction

Several Canadian organizations across public service<sup>5</sup>, education and health care sectors are adopting diversity, equity and inclusion practices to achieve greater equity and inclusion in their communities. Such practices include but are not limited to the collection of disaggregated data, gender inclusive language, gender neutral washrooms, equity impact statements, unconscious bias training for staff and applying an equity lens to policies, practices and systems. The Cities of Hamilton, Toronto and Ottawa are examples of municipalities that apply an equity lens to their policies and processes in order to identify and remove systemic barriers and advance inclusion in the community. The Region of Peel will look at best practices such as the equity lenses contained in the Appendices<sup>6</sup> as we continue to enhance our programs and services.

The Region of Peel is making progress in the area of equity. Regional initiatives (each at various stages) that consider equity include but are not limited to:

- Accessibility Advisory Committee
- Community Investment Program
- Community Response Table
- Community Safety and Well-being Action Tables
  - Family violence
  - Mental health and addiction
  - Systemic discrimination
- Diversity, Equity and Anti-Racism Committee of Council
- Employment Systems Review
- Peel Public Health's Health Equity Strategic Priority
- Poverty Reduction Strategy
- Workforce Census

The Region has an opportunity to build on its progress and adopt an equity approach to how we plan and deliver programs and services to Peel residents. Approaching work from an equity perspective considers the needs and inclusion of all groups and supports decision making which leads to more equitable outcomes for all members of the community.

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<sup>5</sup> City of Toronto. Equity, Diversity & inclusion. 2020; City of Ottawa. Inclusion and Equality. 2020. Tse, Ryan. "Hamilton introduces equity, diversity and inclusion lens." thesil.ca. In The Silhouette, 14 March. 2019. Web.

<sup>6</sup> Appendix I - City of Hamilton Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Draft Handbook 2019, Appendix II - City of Ottawa Equity and Inclusion Lens Handbook 2018, Appendix III - City of Toronto Equity Responsive Budgeting Lens 2018

## Equity Related Issues Impacting Racialized and Vulnerable Communities

### RISK CONSIDERATIONS

The reach of COVID-19's impact is pervasive, having social, economic and human rights implications. As the Region plans and prepares for recovery, there is likely to be an increased demand for social services, housing, and health care. If not approached carefully, unintended discrimination and even greater divide in our communities may occur. Adopting an equity approach to the decisions we make as a Regional Government will be extremely important in order to mitigate any potential negative outcomes for the community.

### CONCLUSION

As a Regional government committed to building a Community for Life for Peel residents it is imperative that issues of inequity in the community are addressed. As an organization, the Region will continue to build on current equity work and identify opportunities to do more in order to increase equitable outcomes for all members of the community. This focus will be incorporated into the Diversity and Inclusion Strategy. Progress on this strategy will be reported on and shared with the Diversity, Equity and Anti-Racism Committee.

### APPENDICES

Appendix I - City of Hamilton Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Draft Handbook 2019  
Appendix II - City of Ottawa Equity and Inclusion Lens Handbook 2018  
Appendix III - City of Toronto Equity Responsive Budgeting Lens 2018  
Appendix IV - Alliance for Healthier Communities - Open letter to the Ontario government  
Appendix V - References

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#### ***Reviewed and/or approved in workflow by:***

Department Commissioner and Division Director.

Final approval is by the Chief Administrative Officer.



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N. Polsinelli, Interim Chief Administrative Officer