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## **Black Medical Experts Gather from across Canada to Dispel COVID-19 vaccine Myths within the Community**

**Vaccine hesitancy high among Black Canadians, despite disproportionate pandemic impacts**

TORONTO, ONTARIO, March 12, 2021—Black medical professionals will contribute their expertise to a national Town Hall event this Saturday, March 13, 2021 to increase vaccine awareness and address vaccine hesitancy amongst the Black population of Canada.

The Black Opportunity Fund and Black North Initiative have co-partnered to urgently provide more detailed education and awareness. The Town Hall, *COVID-19 and the Black Community: Answering Questions about COVID-19 Vaccines*, will give participants a chance to hear from and engage with almost a dozen Black doctors, nurses, social workers, and others, in an interactive and non-judgmental online setting.

“Black communities have been among those hardest hit by COVID-19,” said Dr. Ato Sekyi-Otu, Orthopedic Surgeon at William Osler Health System, Black Opportunity Fund Healthcare Task Force lead and Town Hall Co-Chair. “Although race-based data is not readily available across the country, where such data has been collected, it has demonstrated a disproportionate burden on individual Black Canadians, families and communities,” said Sekyi-Otu. “As an example, the City of Toronto’s review of COVID-19 illustrates case counts three times higher in Toronto’s Black population than in its white population. It’s these kinds of statistics – important race-based data – that have motivated this group of medical professionals to come together to support informed decision-making as Canada’s vaccine roll out programs move ahead.”

Though statistics across North America confirm COVID-19’s greater impact on Black populations, historical exclusion, marginalization, criminalization, and discrimination have created an overall distrust of Canadian institutions of power, including the medical system. These historical impacts have led to an elevated degree of vaccine hesitancy, one of many issues that will be addressed during the March 13 Town Hall. “Black communities have had less access to good medical care than white communities for generations said Dr. Upton Allen, Chief, Division of Infectious Diseases, University of Toronto, Black North Initiative Health Committee and Town Hall Co-Chair. “Distrust of the medical establishment doesn’t just go away because we’re in a pandemic. When you combine those concerns with the overwhelming volume of misinformation that is circulating about the pandemic and the vaccines, the Black community is understandably hesitant to sign up to receive the vaccine.”

The goal of the town hall discussion is to provide a forum for unfiltered health information and education, and while the event is free and open to participants across the country, more resources are required for Black community organizations that provide health support, across Canada.

With almost a dozen Black medical and allied practitioners from across the country gathered in a single online forum, the Town Hall will provide access to an unparalleled degree of both experience and expertise, with a sole focus on supporting informed and effective decision-making by Black Canadians.



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“It is rare for clinical and other professionals from so many facets of the medical spectrum to be able to commit the time to taking part in this kind of collaborative education forum,” said Sharon Davis-Murdoch, Co-President of the Health Association of African Canadians. “The fact that so many of my colleagues and peers have made this event their priority on a Saturday afternoon is a testament to the importance we place on supporting population health, and ensuring that members of our communities, which have suffered more than most, are provided with the best possible information we can provide.”

More information on *COVID-19 and the Black Community: Answering Questions About COVID-19 Vaccines* and how to attend can be found at <https://www.blackopportunityfund.ca/current-events/covid-19-vaccine-town-hall/>.

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