



WOMEN OF INSPIRATION

Offering Support, Knowledge Transfer & Education
and Outreach to Women Injured at Work

23 April 2020

Tom Teahen
President & CEO
Workplace Safety & Insurance Board
200 Front St. W.
Toronto, ON
M5V 3J1

Dear Tom Teahen:

Re Black Mental Health & COVID-19

As you know the Women of Inspiration (WOI) continues to advocate for a better workers' compensation system for all injured workers throughout Ontario. More specifically, the WOI is comprised of mainly racialized and black injured workers which means there are two concerns that we wish to bring to your attention especially during this time in our society. As such, here is a brief description:

First, in our monthly meetings we often discuss the negative psychological impact we endure as a result of our workplace injuries. These psychological injuries are compounded by the negative experience of having to navigate the workers' compensation bureaucracy. Despite varying negative impact, we believe that the Workplace Safety & Insurance Board's (WSIB) approach to care is one size fits all model. This approach not only fails to consider the different ethnic background but in fact tries to obliterate unique individual circumstance of the injured worker. The result of this is systematic discrimination against black and racialized workers by continuing to prescribe care that is not only ineffective but also from a Eurocentric approach. It is for these reasons that we are delighted to learn that through Bill 178, the Government of Ontario took steps to recognize black mental health awareness specifically.

Black Mental Health Awareness

On March 2, 2020 through Bill 178 Ontario declared the first Black Mental Health Awareness Day. The preamble states: "Anti-Black racism persists in the Province

of Ontario and in provincial government systems and services today. It results in inequitable treatment and unequal outcomes for Black Ontarians across all sectors, including the education, justice, employment, housing and child welfare sectors. The City of Toronto declared this day is to “recognize the impact of anti-black racism on the mental health of black Torontonians and in the Black communities”.

Regarding health care, Bill 178 provided:

“The Anti-Racism Act, 2017 is amended to require the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Long-Term Care, Ontario Health and any person receiving funding from the Government of Ontario to provide health care services to take all reasonable steps to ensure that information relating to the race of patients in Ontario is collected. The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care Act is amended. Currently, the Act lists the functions, duties and powers of the Minister. The Bill amends the list by adding the duty to ensure that health services are provided in a culturally appropriate manner”

We unanimously support Bill 187’s amendment that provision of health care service should be culturally appropriate. As such, we are requesting the WSIB to put together a task force mandated to take the necessary steps and begin the process of collecting race-based statistics. This information could be used to better understand health disparities amongst Ontario’s injured workers within the racialized and black communities. This information will also enable the WSIB to have a better understanding, design and implement care that are most appropriate for workers of different ethnic background.

COVID 19

Second, in addition to supporting the Ontario Network of Injured Workers (ONIWG) COVID-19 recommendations we would also like to add that mental and physical health are both major concerns among racialized/black communities. As the world battles this devastating disease, we believe collecting race-based statistics on Covid-19 related claims are paramount. We have learned through different news outlet that 68% of COVID-19 patients who died in the United Kingdom (UK) were black and a significant number of those who died throughout the United States (US) were black. Canada has yet to release any statistics in this regard. Many of those who became sick or died had an underlying health condition.

It is safe to say that most of the precarious front-line workers during this pandemic are low wage, racialized and black. We learn through community involvement that it is racialized and black workers working in first stage assessment in hospitals and in nursing homes. We also know that black people are more susceptible to COVID-19 due to health disparity like high blood

pressure and diabetes and reporting from jurisdictions in the United States that record race-based data has confirmed that black and Hispanic communities are disproportionately affected. But in order to craft an appropriate response to the ways that WSIB policy affects racialized communities during this crisis, we need to have the data in the first place. Hence, when a worker reports being infected with the disease having the information on race-based statistics will help the WSIB to track health conditions for these injured workers and to provide adequate appropriate care. In fact, as recently as April 22nd, Toronto's public health unit announced that it would begin collecting race and income-based data. The chair of that Board was quoted in the Toronto Star* saying "It's absolutely essential, as it has always been, that we have comprehensive data to fully understand and in turn respond to COVID-19. In the absence of appropriate disaggregate race-based data, we cannot properly respond." We hope this WSIB will follow the City's sensible lead on this issue.

The WOI would be happy to have a seat at the table to help in the discussion and decision-making process.

Sincerely,

Women of Inspiration



A collection of handwritten signatures in blue ink. The signatures include: 'Blay Brown', 'Jeannette Black', 'Mary A. Somers', 'A. S. Robinson', 'Myra Stokalla-Petrus', 'Sylvia Clarke', 'Heather Chisum van Hagen', 'Marianne Williamson injured worker', and 'Bonstomys'. There are also some illegible signatures and initials.

Audrey Parkes, Kathrin Furniss, and all of the Women of Inspiration

[*https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2020/04/21/toronto-public-health-to-start-collecting-covid-19-data-on-race-in-a-bid-to-track-health-inequities.html](https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2020/04/21/toronto-public-health-to-start-collecting-covid-19-data-on-race-in-a-bid-to-track-health-inequities.html)

c/o Injured Workers Community Legal Clinic
815 Danforth Ave., Suite 411, Toronto, Ontario M4J 1L2
Phone: (416) 461-2411 Fax: (416) 461-7135