
NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2024AG0020-000521
April 11, 2024

Ministry of Attorney General

New legislation aims to remove systemic barriers for Indigenous, racialized people

VICTORIA – Indigenous and racialized people in B.C. will face fewer barriers when accessing public programs and services with new legislation aimed at removing systemic racism from provincial institutions.

With this legislation, government will take action on systemic racism uncovered through race-based data collection and lived experiences of Indigenous and racialized communities. Building on the 2022 Anti-Racism Data Act, the anti-racism legislation was co-developed with Indigenous and racialized communities. It fulfils Action 3.6 of the Declaration Act Action Plan, which commits the Province to introducing anti-racism legislation that addresses Indigenous-specific racism.

“For too long, too many people have faced racial barriers when trying to access government services, just because of their identity,” said Niki Sharma, Attorney General. “This historic legislation is about changing the system and making sure everyone in B.C. can equitably access the programs and services they need with the safety, dignity and respect they deserve.”

The legislation requires the Province to strengthen checks and balances in its programs and services in hospitals, schools, courts and other public spaces. A new anti-racism committee will draw up a whole-of-government action plan to address systemic racism and, for the first time, public institutions will be required to critically evaluate day-to-day operations and remove policies and practices that harm Indigenous and racialized people. It will also advance the recruitment, hiring, retention and advancement of Indigenous, Black and racialized public servants to ensure that public sector workers in B.C. reflect the population they serve.

“Today’s introduction of the Anti-Racism Act (ARA) is an important step toward addressing systemic racism in this province, building on the milestone Anti-Racism Data Act,” said Kasari Govender, B.C.’s independent human rights commissioner. “The ARA, a result of wide-ranging consultations including significant contributions from my office, is vital to ensure B.C. uses the data it collects about people’s experiences of racism to advance human rights in this province and this country. Transparency in how data is being used to address racism and the ability to hold our government and public bodies to account is essential to move from promises to action. For too long, colonialism and systemic racism have created systems that only work for the privileged few. This legislation holds real potential to address these injustices.”

Under this legislation, Indigenous and racialized communities will be able to apply for grants to help identify and eliminate racism, and address its impact on people, so those most affected by institutional racism do not have to bear the financial burden of fixing the system.

“For generations, Indigenous and racialized people in B.C. have been vocal about the racism

and discrimination they face when trying to do daily tasks like getting a driver's licence or enrolling their children in school," said Mable Elmore, Parliamentary Secretary for Anti-Racism Initiatives. "This legislation brings B.C. one step closer to being a place where no one has to worry about their skin colour when reporting a crime or walking into an emergency room."

The broad public-engagement process for the legislation included more than 2,100 responses to an online questionnaire in 15 languages and 225 community-led discussion events with more than 5,000 racialized participants.

This is another key action that will work alongside other community-led anti-racism initiatives to build a safer, more equitable B.C. for everyone.

Learn More:

To read the anti-racism legislation engagement reports, visit:

<https://antiracism.gov.bc.ca/history/what-they-heard-reports/>

To learn more about the Anti-Racism Data Act, visit: <https://antiracism.gov.bc.ca/data-act/>

For more information about B.C. legislation, visit: <https://strongerbc.gov.bc.ca/legislation/>

Two backgrounders follow.

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BACKGROUND 1

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What to know about the anti-racism legislation

The anti-racism legislation will apply to all public bodies, such as provincial ministries, agencies, health-care and social services providers.

Under this bill, the Province must establish a provincial committee on anti-racism to develop and implement an anti-racism action plan. The action plan will lay out how government plans to address systemic racism, how success will be measured and what accountability measures will be put in place. Indigenous partners will be consulted in the development of the action plan.

Other provisions under this legislation require public bodies to:

- develop and implement a training curriculum on Indigenous history;
- set targets for the recruitment, retention and advancement throughout the organization, including senior levels for:
 - Indigenous people, specifically; and
 - non-Indigenous racialized people;
- regularly assess policies, programs and services against the anti-racism framework created by the committee;
- release annual reports to the public documenting progress made on anti-racism initiatives, including potential failures to act, and goals for the next year; and
- engage directly with Indigenous and racialized people on the findings of these reports.

In addition, this legislation includes grant funding for groups and organizations working with racialized communities to help with implementation.

To ensure compliance, the bill authorizes the attorney general to call at any time a compliance review of any public body believed to not be following the law. The attorney general will also have the authority to issue a compliance order to any public body that is failing to follow the law.

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BACKGROUND 2

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What people are saying about the new legislation

Cheryl Casimer, political executive, First Nations Summit –

“We continue to bear witness to the offensive and unacceptable impacts of interpersonal and systemic racism against First Nations people in B.C. This long overdue legislation, together with the Anti-Racism Data Act, provides the necessary framework and mechanisms to assist in eradicating racism and creating a proper space for our work in reconciliation.”

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, president, Union of British Columbian Indian Chiefs (UBCIC) –

“There is a disturbing and pernicious growth in anti-Indigenous racism and rhetoric in Canada and beyond. UBCIC welcomes the anti-racism legislation being introduced today, which sets out critical planning, measurement and investment accountabilities necessary to prevent this regressive movement. We look forward to working together on implementation as we strive to eliminate racism and create a just society for all British Columbians.”

Regional Chief Terry Teegee, BC Assembly of First Nations –

“By challenging existing colonial structures that perpetuate inequalities in resource allocation and power dynamics, this legislation paves the way for new norms to be established through consultation with First Nations and evidence-based actions. I look forward to collaborating with partners as we work toward healing racial trauma and fostering a society grounded in universally embraced principles of equality, fairness and justice.”

Lissa Smith, president, Métis Nation BC –

“It's time the provincial government tackles systemic racism by gathering data that reflects Métis experiences. We're optimistic that the work being done by the Government of British Columbia is a solid step toward finally recognizing our history and making real progress in fighting racism.”

Judy Hanazawa, co-chair, Multicultural Advisory Council --

“I hold my hands up to all communities and others who engaged in and contributed to the development of this anti-racism legislation. I respectfully acknowledge current and previous members of the Multicultural Advisory Council for their preliminary work advocating for a provincial anti-racism law. It is with heartfelt relief, gratitude and pride that we all finally witness together the introduction of B.C.'s anti-racism legislation.”

Vinu Abraham Chetipurackal, co-chairperson of the Deaf IBPOC Committee of the Greater Vancouver Association of the Deaf –

“This legislation signifies a step forward toward inclusivity, acknowledging the multi-faceted experiences of deaf BIPOC individuals in B.C. As we look forward to the implementation of this act, we are filled with hope for the transformative changes it promises, changes that we believe will not only significantly improve the quality of our lives but also fortify our accessibility and ensure equity.”

Kayon Davis, Grade 12 student and member of the Mustang Justice Program –

“To me, the anti-racism bill signifies a pivotal moment in our province’s journey toward equality and justice. It represents a concrete step toward creating a society where every individual, regardless of their race, ethnicity or background, can thrive without fear of discrimination or prejudice.”

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