

Who is Black? Canadian health research must clearly define Black communities or risk failing their needs

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The use of precise, accurate language in defining Black communities in health care research must improve in Canada, or there is a risk that health research will fail to meet the needs of Black people in Canada, argues a University of Ottawa professor in a commentary published in *CMAJ (Canadian Medical Association Journal)*.

In "Who is Black? The urgency of accurately defining the Black population when conducting health research in Canada," Dr. Jude Mary Cénat, an associate professor in the School of Psychology, writes that definitions of "who is Black" vary widely, which leads to broadly reported research results that may not align with the realities and needs of Black populations.

"Accurate, reliable and unambiguous data should be used for research to inform public health policies, training policies for [health care workers](#) and culturally appropriate and antiracist health care practices for Black communities," writes Dr. Cénat, who is also Director of uOttawa's Interdisciplinary Centre for Black Health and V-TRaC Lab.

"Inability to find a common term to describe Black people in health research in Canada may perpetuate inequities and hamper useful research on Black health in Canada."

Use of vague terminology, including "African-Canadian," "Caribbean," "African" and others, constrains researchers' ability to compare the findings of studies and may also lead to inclusion of people who do not identify as Black in studies.

"Thus, the answer to the question "Who is Black?" in health research is nuanced: self-identifying Black people of diverse ethnic backgrounds (e.g., African, Caribbean, South American or Canadian)," writes Dr. Cénat, who suggests using the phrase "Black individuals, peoples or communities" combined with asking participants to identify country of origin for their family and/or a subgroup with which they identify, such as generation status, among others.

Addressing this can provide more clarity to ensure that [health research](#) tangibly affects public policies, health care programs, strategies and action plans for Black communities in Canada.

More information: Who is Black? The urgency of accurately defining the Black population when conducting health research in Canada, *Canadian Medical Association Journal* (2022). [DOI: 10.1503/cmaj.220274](https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.220274)

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