



Confronting Racism with Data: Why Canada Needs Disaggregated Race-Based Data



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Introduction

The Edmonton Social Planning Council is acutely aware of the influence that data has in advocating for effective policy change. Our role is to showcase the power that policy has on various marginalized populations in the community. We join others who recognize and call for a coordinated, collaborative framework to collect race-based data as a tool to dismantle racist systems and discriminatory policies within our country.



Defining Race



The purpose of collecting race-based data is to provide measurable evidence to address inequities, racism, and discriminatory practices. Quantifiable indicators can highlight stark inequities in society, providing evidence to decision-makers to show clear patterns and trends. To date, proof of racial injustice is predominantly anecdotal, which is often overlooked as a reliable form of data.

Broadly, race-based data is the collection of racial information broken down into component categories (for example, Black, Indigenous, or Asian). This kind of data is commonly collected in a handful of ways, by a handful of systems (including health care, justice, and education). However, further disaggregation, that is, drilling down into more specific components (such as Black Caribbean, Inuit, South Asian, etc.), provides data users with a more robust understanding of the realities experienced by distinct groups of people. Distinguishing patterns between, and among, these groups supports more targeted and effective intervention strategies.

There are two elements at work here—race and ethnicity—that are often used interchangeably in this context. The differences are subtle, but powerful. Race classifies “groups based on perceived physical differences such as skin colour and facial features,” [1] tied to collective geographic or historical factors. [2] Ethnicity, on the other hand, “refers to a sense of group belonging based on shared characteristics such as geographic origins, cultural traditions, language and/or religion.” [1] These two terms are distinct social constructs. Race-based data can help to address racial and biased inequalities within and across systems, while ethnicity data is best suited to address inequities in service and programming. [1] Both play a vital role in understanding systemic racism and discrimination, and together provide the evidence needed to start addressing injustices that are not common knowledge or that require empirical data. This report will focus on, and use, the term *race-based data* in line with common discourse, while recognizing the variance and intersection between the social conceptualizations of ethnicity and race.

Race-based data can help to address racial and biased inequalities within and across systems, while ethnicity data is best suited to address inequities in service and programming.

The biggest challenge in race-based data collection is how to collect discrete, quantifiable data about a variable that is neither quantifiable nor discrete. Racial categories are often context-dependent and can be easily conflated with measures like ethnicity. [3] Survey participants often struggle to distinguish their own racial identity and may give completely different responses depending on where, when, and how the question is posed. [4] An individual's perception of racial identity is also not fixed, which can affect the ability to reproduce data results over time. [5] Furthermore, the tension between prioritizing personal racial identity or public racial identification is pervasive, as there can be a wide disparity between the two measures. [6]

Data collection strategies must have clear objectives and afford space for data analysis and interpretation that supports meaningful use. Data for data's sake ultimately does not benefit those who are scrutinized, nor those who do the scrutiny—at its worst, data can be used to misconstrue important issues and waste valuable time and resources.

The ongoing debate on the merits and harms of collecting race-based data has been fast-tracked as Canada's population diversifies and racialized communities around the world assert the value of measurable information. Canadians are beginning to recognize that disaggregated data must be a key player in eliminating racial disparity while shining a spotlight on how racism persists to this day. Racialized communities have long known and continue to experience the impacts of discriminatory policies. Quantifiable figures must now complement anecdotal experiences, which carry far less weight in westernized, colonial societies. Broad, systemic change requires measurable data in order to prove that racism is not merely a concept, but a persistent and damaging reality. [7] The combination of anecdotal and measurable data can better contribute to effective anti-racism efforts.

This report outlines considerations based on the risks and rewards of collecting race-based data; current and required data needs and uses; the importance of Indigenous data sovereignty; and how data collectors, using intentional collection strategies, can provide data results for practical use in anti-racism activity.

Broad, systemic change requires measurable data in order to prove that racism is not merely a concept, but a persistent and damaging reality.

Risks and Rewards

Data has historically been used as a tool to validate colonization.

Despite intensified calls for Canada's public institutions to commit to collecting high-quality race-based data, we must first consider its history alongside the risks and rewards.

The collection of racial and ethnic data in Canadian society is not new. Questions about race and/or ethnicity have featured on almost every national census form since Confederation, and documents such as the *Indian Act* require at least some degree of racial and ethnic data collection. [5, 8] There is also a dark side to the history of racial data collection, evidenced by its past use to justify racist and discriminatory policies. [9, 10]

Historical Data Exploitation

Data has historically been used as a tool to validate colonization, with those in power mining information from registries, the census, and other official forms to sanction racist policies and reinforce disenfranchisement.

Here in Alberta, data facilitated efforts to discriminate against Black farmers who had arrived from Oklahoma to the Canadian prairies in the early 20th century. [11, 12] Political leaders took advantage of race-based identity data to petition the federal government to discourage further migration and to segregate those already settled in the province, citing concerns around the increasing number of “colored homesteaders,” and “the probability of a further large increase in those numbers.” [11]

Identity data also led to the restriction of civil liberties for 80,000 Ukrainian Canadians during the First World War and the internment of over 700 Japanese Canadians during the Second World War. [13]

Throughout Canada's political history, data exploitation has reinforced oppression and framed Indigenous communities through negative stereotypes and deficit narratives [8], leading to harmful, targeted policies—including the *Indian Act*, the residential school system, and the Sixties Scoop. [14] Canadian-based laws, policies, and programs that claim to support Indigenous communities have originated from colonial, westernized values that are culturally irrelevant or inappropriate, discriminatory, and have done more harm than good. [8]

Race as a Construct

Because race is a socially-constructed category that has everything to do with class and almost nothing to do with biology, it is difficult to define. [15] Difficulties also arise when deciding how and when to tease apart race and variables like ethnicity, appearance, and identity. [16] That's not to mention the strong link between race and context, or the distance that often exists between personal racial identity (how someone might identify themselves on a survey) and public racial identification (how someone's race is perceived by onlookers). [6]

That being said, the importance of responsible race-based data collection is a reality of our racialized society. Race may be socially-constructed, but its effects are very real. We can only begin to address and dismantle racist systems if we first have a concrete understanding of their scope, depth, and impact. Widespread race-based data collection is an important step towards doing so, but it cannot be taken indiscriminately. Its collection is a neutral act whereby

value relies on researchers' intentions and methodology, as well as their use of the data. As previously mentioned, race-based data collection can cause more harm than good if done irresponsibly. Before beginning any data collection effort, it is important to first discuss some of the risks associated with race-based data collection in particular.

Validation of Biological Race Concepts

The greatest concern regarding race-based data is its potential to be misunderstood as validation for biological concepts about race. [17] Race-based data collection must acknowledge that race is a social construction. Failure to do so runs the risk of presenting race as the cause of perceived trends, when in fact these trends are the result of racist systems that produce, and then act upon, race. [18] Although there is more genetic variation *within* racial categories than there is *between* them, the opposite is often the case with respect to social outcomes. [19] The different outcomes between racial groups can easily be painted as proof of biologically-based racial differences to the untrained—or ill-intentioned—eye. It is therefore essential that data collection efforts are pre-empted by the understanding that race in and of itself holds no explanatory power.

Attitudes and Practices

Another risk that researchers must keep in mind when undertaking race-based data collection efforts is their own attitude and approach. Researchers typically emphasize distance from their subject, and while that may be perfectly fine for clinical research practices, in the context of racialized communities it can quickly shift into an ineffective observer-observed relationship. [20] Many modern research practices came out of the same racist systems that compel us to collect race-based data. Researchers must be willing to abandon traditional research methods in favour of approaches that emphasize collaboration, as well as racialized communities' autonomy, ownership, and control. This is especially vital here in Canada as we embrace reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

Presentation, Interpretation, and Use

Questions regarding the interpretation, presentation, and use of race-based data are the final—and most important—hurdles to overcome before undertaking any data collection effort. Race-based data collection with no clear objective can lead to the continuation of harmful practices and ultimately work to the detriment of racialized communities. Race is also almost never the only level of analysis, and presenting it as such can result in incomplete and misleading narratives. [21] Race-based data may expose part of the story, but it seldom ever provides a complete explanation.

What Do We (Not) Know?

Canada is heralded as a diverse country. The 2016 federal census reported a total population of 35,151,728 citizens. Of those, 4.9% self-identified as “Aboriginal,” up from 3.8% in 2006; and 22.3% self-identified as a “visible minority” (that is, non-white and non-Aboriginal), up from 16.2% in 2006. [22] These are factors that play an important part in understanding the direction that the government must take to comprehend the lived realities of the diverse communities that call this land home. Currently, race-based data is largely collected in only a few key systems, including health care, justice, and education. Unfortunately, the needs for rigorous data in our current social climate are far greater than the inadequate collection strategies that result in limited data availability.

Racial Diversity in Canada, Percentage of Total Population

	2006	2016
Aboriginal	3.8%	4.9%
Visible Minority	16.2%	22.3%

Figure 1 Source: Statistics Canada, 2017

Health Care and COVID-19

The health care system is one of the few sectors where race-based data is routinely collected. However, data collection is inconsistent and unreliable, making it hard to use as a means to improve health access and outcomes among marginalized and racialized populations. [23] This has been particularly apparent since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The past 12 months have been disproportionately hard for Black, Indigenous, and other racialized communities. In particular, racialized populations have had higher infection rates and higher adverse—often fatal—outcomes. [24] Research out of the US and the UK confirms that racialized communities have experienced the highest infection rates, proportional to their population rates. [25] Results from studies in Ontario show similar overrepresentation in local case numbers [26], thereby suggesting analogous outcomes across the country.

The pandemic has also resulted in instability among low-wage jobs earners, where work stoppage and lost income have been most prevalent. [27]. High rates of racialized individuals work these low-wage jobs, leading to disproportionate experiences of lost employment, increased housing instability, and food insecurity. [28] But communities also face ongoing occupational risks—the high representation of racialized individuals that make up essential worker demographics (nurses, continuing care staff, cashiers, and other low-wage front-line positions) has placed heavier emotional, financial, and health-related burdens on some communities. [29]

Ongoing inequities in health care service delivery and limited outcome reporting highlight critical data gaps and the importance of disaggregated data for the health and well-being of all Canadians. [30] In particular, federal reporting has been woefully inadequate concerning Indigenous communities. Due to the jurisdictional segregation of Indigenous peoples living on and off reserve, COVID-19 cases among Indigenous peoples, as reported by federal sources, are counted only on reserve despite high urban Indigenous populations. Indigenous communities do not, however, exist in isolation of one another. Mobility between on and off reserve settings increases the complexity of qualifying race-based data by location, and developing interventions that work for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples—regardless of region.

The limited data in Canada has highlighted the importance of measurable evidence in understanding the impact of the virus on various communities, its association with potential risk factors, and the relationship between socio-demographic characteristics and the disproportionate outcomes among particular racialized groups. Furthermore, these numbers are vital in monitoring overall case numbers and the success rate of intervention efforts.

The connection between health outcomes and the social determinants of health is, additionally, more impactful with high-quality disaggregated race-based data. Research indicates that population health is 85% social determinants and only 15% biology. [31] Therefore, “any action to improve health and tackle health inequity must address the social determinants and their impact on daily life.” [31]

Communities are experiencing the pandemic in different ways. A coordinated race-based data collection strategy across the health care sector can provide the tools to recognize trends and intersections in health outcomes among, and between, these communities. The immediate need to track intervention results to improve efficacy must be prioritized by decision-makers within the sector.

Crime and Justice

Data relating to crime and justice are differentiated by jurisdiction. Crime statistics are collected based on provincial policies, whereas statistics from the justice sector fall under provincial and federal policies. No matter which authority oversees the system, the information collected must first be shared among leaders of racialized communities to seek input to a systems-level understanding of the data’s meaning and use. Without this commitment, data analysts are left with a patchwork of statistics that falls short of revealing the intersectional realities among affected individuals and communities.

Few authorities in Canada mandate the collection of race-based crime-related data, which often lacks rigor or consistency and therefore has limited value and use. The inadequate data that is available relates to incidences such as police interactions with the public (often through carding/street checks and traffic stops) or use of officer force against a civilian. Studies show that carding and street checks (and any other form of racial profiling) target primarily Black and Indigenous people in Canada, and harm communities. [32] A community’s sense of safety and security can be impacted by these practices, compounded by the personal loss of dignity and trust when assumptions are made based on racial presentation. [33]



Nevertheless, since the start of 2020 all police officers in Ontario are mandated to collect race-based data, and the province of British Columbia is exploring strategies—the only two provinces in Canada to address racial inequities within this sector. Statistics Canada and the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police have also agreed to collect race-based data to better understand how crime affects different communities across the country. [34] This data could affect policing decisions, policy, accountability, and transparency in the future—if the collection process is appropriate. However, limitations in how data is collected continue to affect the quality and reliability of the material. For example, police officers in Ontario report on the *perceived* race of civilians from a list of approximate racial categories (Black, Latino, South Asian, etc.). [35] Although

these policies are perhaps well-intentioned, robust collection strategies must be developed with community involvement to avoid results that continue to be low-quality.

Studies show that high rates of racial profiling lead directly to higher incarceration rates of racialized individuals [36] and disproportionate representation of Indigenous and Black people within inmate population numbers. “The Indigenous inmate population has steadily increased from 19% of the total inmate population in 2008–09 to 28% in 2018–19—a narrative that is, unfortunately, well-known. The Black inmate population increased from 7% in 2008-09 to 10% in 2015–16, but has been slowly reversing. Black inmates currently now represent 8% of the total in-custody population.” [37, p. 79] Compare that to their national population representation: Indigenous people make up 5% of Canada’s population; 3.5% of the general population is Black. [37] Unfortunately, we then find that for those individuals who are engaged with the system, sentencing tends to be stricter for racialized offenders—both during the judicial process and throughout imprisonment. [38]

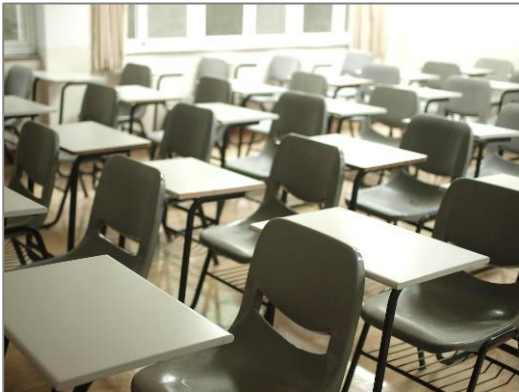
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Unfortunately, race-based data collected within the justice system is not systematic but framed by distinct provincial and territorial standards. This ultimately makes the data unreliable and generally incomparable in absence of a coordinated strategy. [39] An indication of the vulnerability of this approach emerges from the fact that Alberta has not released corrections data since 2012, causing increased data gaps at the regional and national level. [40] And yet the provincial population continues to diversify; according to the latest census data, visible minority numbers in the province grew by 42.2% over five years (2011–2016). [41] Without adequate data to understand the demographic make-up of incarcerated populations, preventative measures to address criminalization will be inadequate and the justice system will continue to reinforce discrimination and inequity.

As with the health care sector, engagement with the criminal justice system has direct connections to the social determinants of health. Challenges faced by those with a criminal record include barriers in accessing housing, health, education, and employment [36, 42]. These issues can be compounded by intersections with race and ethnicity. Racialized individuals have higher unemployment rates and are more likely to work low-wage jobs, with limited protections and security [32, 43], and are ultimately disproportionately affected by limited data and inadequate intervention strategies.

Education

Obtaining high-quality data that is comparable across education systems in Canada is essential to address equity and inclusion in a coordinated fashion. Although Ontario is the only province to date to have mandated race-based data collection, Edmonton’s local Public School Board (EPSB) has recently committed to collecting race-based data—the first jurisdiction in Alberta to do so. EPSB trustees are simultaneously calling on the provincial government to mandate the collection of this data across all provincial schools.



Since 2006, the Toronto District School Board has been collecting race-based data from across 583 schools. So far, the data has provided clear evidence that Black students are disproportionately suspended and have the highest dropout rate. [44] However, as a result of this data collection and its interpretation to address programming, several schools have introduced new initiatives to improve these outcomes. These include “a black student achievement advisory committee, student focus groups ... in racialized areas, educator training and staff-led research groups...” [44]

The Peel District School Board, also in Ontario, has been collecting race-based data since 2018, and published a comprehensive review covering issues such as discrimination, practices, leadership, and governance across its 257 schools. [45] This review illustrated that 83% of secondary students are racialized, while 67% of all instructors are White. The same report showed that Black students receive suspensions at a higher rate: representing only 10.2% of the secondary school population, they make up around 22.5% of all suspensions. [45] By 2023, all school boards across Ontario will be required to collect race-based data—adhering to the provincial *Anti-Racism Act, 2017*. [44] The results of these findings will be used to address racism and discrimination in the classroom and will be integrated into systems-level anti-racism strategies. [46]

However, the K–12 sector is not alone in its culpability to discriminate. Anecdotal evidence tells us that Canadian campuses see racism “manifest[ed] as a lack of presence and a clear imbalance in the representation of the knowledge and ideas of Black people.” [47] Post-secondary institutions are also guilty of not collecting adequate race-based data to fully understand the achievements and struggles of racialized students and educators. According to one study, only one fifth (21.2%) of university teachers are racialized. [48] This same study points out that only 2% of all university teachers are Black, and 1.4% are Indigenous. Understanding the causes and implications of these numbers is vital to supporting racialized student success and improving representation in all sectors.

The collection and reporting of relevant, meaningful race-based data across Canada could support “leaders in education to measure and address gaps, trends, and progress; proactively identify opportunities for improvement and growth; and improve the quality of evidence-based decision making.” [49, p. 35] Comparable, high-quality data is fundamental to addressing inequity and exclusion in all levels of education across all provinces and territories, ultimately improving performance and success rates for future generations in Canada.

Recognition of the value of race-based data is gaining traction, but still faces challenging times ahead. Due to its often sensitive nature, changes to the collection and dissemination processes must first be implemented for participants to gain trust and build relationships within the system.

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Indigenous Data Sovereignty

In Canada, the collection and use of race-based data pertaining to Indigenous peoples is particularly noteworthy. Historically, data has been misused to disenfranchise and harm Indigenous individuals and communities (such as through the *Indian Act*, residential schools, scrip fraud, and others). However, as more Canadians engage with reconciliation, the collection of race-based data to provide evidence to injustices and discrimination is fundamental for the social collective to move forward. First Nations, Métis, and Inuit leaders are guiding these efforts.

Inaccuracies and inconsistencies in the way that Indigenous data has been collected and reported are devastating.

Data and Colonization

The inability to find accurate, high-quality disaggregated Indigenous data is especially problematic when advocating for justice and reform. Indigenous data has historically (and is presently) collected at the national level based on outdated indicators and qualifiers, and has rarely been used or shared for meaningful community-level advancement. [8] Consequently, Indigenous communities can be resistant to sharing identity data, having experienced extensive data exploitation. [8] Yet, without community participation, data remains low-quality and incomplete. [8]

Currently, data collected by federal information systems lacks detail that would be beneficial to unique Indigenous communities. [50] For example, health information for status First Nations individuals living on reserve (and Inuit in the Inuit Nunangat) falls under federal jurisdiction, “leading to an almost complete exclusion of non-Status First Nations/ Indian, Métis, and urban Indigenous populations from the majority of federal and provincial health information systems.” [50, p. 10] Communities are unable to use health or census data effectively, as it fails to address distinctive needs of those who live off reserve, are non-status, or do not fall within specific parameters. As such, agencies, organizations, and institutions that collect data relating to urban, rural, and non-status First Nations (not to mention Métis or Inuit populations) collect information “in a piecemeal fashion or for specific reasons.... It is not clear where to go to access data on First Nations people.” [51, p. 24]. Subsequently, data combined from multiple sources and collection systems has led to limitations, including the erasure of Indigenous input into these methodologies and ethics; difficulties in accessing accurate, high-quality, and comparable data; and, consequently, a fragmented and incomplete understanding of Indigenous life and peoples in Canada. [8]

Restrictions in data due to current collection practices are illustrated when trying to assess the impacts of the pandemic on Indigenous communities. Inaccuracies and inconsistencies in the way that Indigenous data has been collected and reported are devastating. The number of federally reported COVID-19 cases and deaths among Indigenous peoples on reserve (fewer than 3,000) was significantly lower than the total number reported by Indigenous communities themselves during the first wave of the pandemic. [52] The federal government even conceded that the actual number of Indigenous peoples affected was likely four times their measure. [53] This kind of data discrepancy exposes communities to inadequate responses and services, increasing vulnerabilities among populations.

The conceptual separation between people living on reserve and off reserve is another way in which practices fail to adequately capture authentic Indigenous data. By creating this kind of dichotomy, “the realities of Indigenous peoples

are erased. Indigenous peoples do not only live on-reserve, nor do they live in . . . silos in urban and rural places.” [52] Rather, they are interconnected—living in relation with one another. And yet, the federal census reports clear divisions: that 55.8% of First Nations peoples live off reserve and 44.2% live on reserve [54]—statistics that affect how programs and services are distributed.

Disaggregated data plays a role in understanding the interconnection among Indigenous peoples and communities, rather than simple trends based on geography. Considerable time and effort has gone into instituting solutions to the misuse, mistrust, and misunderstandings caused by poor data collection strategies. Indigenous researchers and communities are reclaiming agency to address the need for improved research coordination, better data, and enhanced relationships.

Community-Based Solutions

Data matters, and data to improve accountability is exceptionally important—the necessity for high-quality, accurate data is needed now more than ever. And yet this is not a new appeal. For decades, high-profile documents, and organizations, have specifically recommended improved data strategies to address racial inequities. These include the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (1994), the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007), the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015), and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2019).

There must be a shift from data governance by systems that have reinforced racial injustice and marginalization to governance by communities.

Understanding how data can be a tool to advocate for a positive future lends itself to understanding how it can be used as a tool to dismantle racism and discriminatory practices in Canada. For data to be employed as a tool for empowerment and change, there must be a shift from data governance by systems that have reinforced racial injustice and marginalization to governance by communities that are positioned to lead in the decision-making and stewardship of their information. Two major initiatives have targeted just that: the principles of Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP), and the First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC).

OCAP is a First Nations-led set of standards for research teams working in partnership with Indigenous communities. The principles “ensure that researchers have fully considered the multi-faceted aspects of their relationships to the community and the responsibility that comes with the collection and use of community data.” [14, p. 8] Through OCAP, First Nations strengthen sovereignty over their own data, and guide its use, interpretation, and ultimately its return to benefit the community. [8, 20] The implementation of OCAP is foundational for researchers to improve methodologies and analysis, and to establish respectful relationships with research participants and partners. Though founded on a First Nations framework, the principles are flexible enough to address similar needs among the Métis and Inuit. [20]

Aligned with the implementation of the OCAP principles is FNIGC, an organization that oversees a national governance strategy for data records pertaining to First Nations peoples on reserves and in northern communities. Designed and run by First Nations leaders, it has been collecting high-quality data from its Regional Health Survey (RHS) since 1997, used to showcase local community needs and to advocate for policy change. [55] The centre has now expanded to include regional governance centres; the Alberta branch (AFNIGC) oversees support for First Nations information in Treaties No. 6, 7, and 8. [55] AFNIGC focuses on the provincial RHS, as well as the First

Nations Regional Education, Employment and Early Childhood Education Survey (REEES). The results of these surveys have already modified programming by incorporating culturally relevant elements into preschools and health services. [55] The regional centres work to benefit communities and to build and maintain partnerships that are mutually beneficial.

Other regional agreements have led to targeted race-based data collection strategies for Alberta's large Métis population. The Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) negotiated a process in 2010 to collect high-quality data on the health of its citizens through Alberta Health and the Public Health Agency of Canada. [56] This led to reports that have outlined unique health needs of Métis in Alberta and helped the MNA campaign for funding to improve the health outcomes of its members.

Data collection in collaboration with regional communities and partners tends to focus on strengths rather than deficits amongst Indigenous populations. Similar to the social determinants of health, an intentional emphasis on language, culture, and family demonstrates complex interconnections with trends in education, employment, health, and well-being. [8] This knowledge must play a role in producing policies that effectively eliminate discrimination and support the development of rigorous anti-racism strategies.



Data as an Anti-Racism Tool

The activist element of race-based data collection cannot be ignored. Addressing racial inequity requires this data, and that goal must remain at the forefront of any collection effort. That is not to say that researchers should compromise their objectivity and rigour, but history has shown that racial data can be used to uphold racist systems as well as dismantle them. Race-based data collection that is not part of a clearly defined, forward-thinking, anti-racist framework is therefore of questionable use and quite possibly dangerous.

Regional Efforts

Within Canada, Ontario is taking the lead in implementing race-based data as a systems-wide tool. In 2017, the provincial government passed the *Anti-Racism Act*, complemented by several reference documents including the *Anti-Racism Data Standards*. These standards set benchmarks to identify systemic racism and racial discrimination, and help to monitor their prevalence in the public sector. [46] The standards also “establish consistent, effective practices for producing reliable information to support evidence-based decision-making and public accountability to help eliminate systemic racism and promote racial equity.” [46]

Currently, race-based data collected across Ontario, in line with the *Anti-Racism Act*, will be used to address inequities and better understand how systemic racism impacts Indigenous, Black, and racialized communities in the justice, education, and child welfare systems. Devised in collaboration with community leaders, the Act was developed using intentional methodologies and deliberate targets. [57] This strategy demonstrates the government’s attempt to ensure that data outcomes can be used exclusively as an anti-racism tool.

The government of British Columbia likewise undertook a consultation process to determine how to collect race-based data across the province in a respectful and responsible manner. The findings from this exploratory initiative recommend a provincial *Anti-Discrimination Data Act*, data standards (including processes and tools), and a community governance board to guide the implementation of data findings to immediate community needs (such as health care, housing, education, and justice). [58] The consultation process complements the government’s recent introduction of the 2019 *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*. The Act commits the government to implement, and align provincial laws with, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. [59]

The remaining provinces and territories have been less enthusiastic, and so far few have followed in these footsteps. Some have endeavored in patchwork efforts to collect race-based data within smaller jurisdictions, but are yet to implement regional policies or strategies.

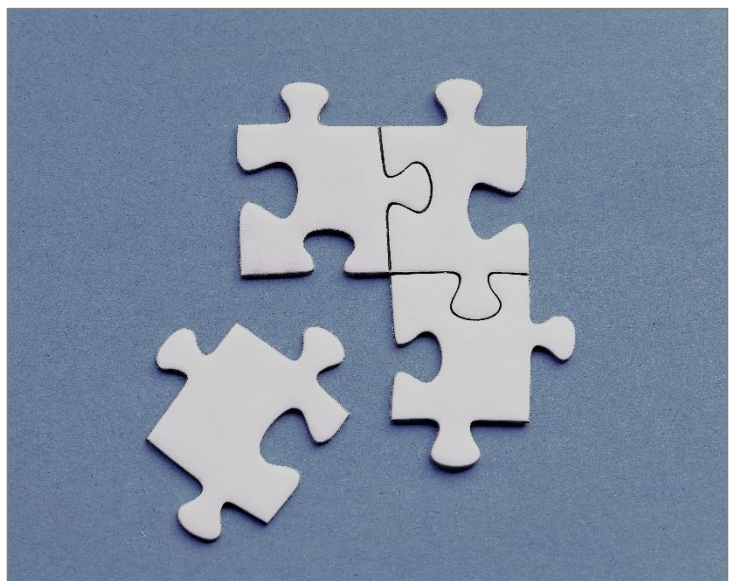
Intersectionality

Socio-economic indicators cannot be measured in isolation from one another—people, communities, and realities all interact and converge. This makes data collection complex, but is one of the most robust justifications for ensuring that communities are included in the development of collection methodologies, the interpretation, and the ultimate use of race-based data.

Highlighted throughout this report is the recognition that addressing systemic racism and discrimination requires an intersectional lens. Without knowing the many, and diverse, needs of racialized communities, addressing systemic racism is ineffective. However, “collecting regular, accurate and reliable data on the relative socio-economic status of racial and ethnic groups and other dimensions of their identity, including gender, can be instrumental in confronting and eliminating racism and racial discrimination.” [60] Social policy researchers and analysts are well aware of the intersections between race, poverty, and gender (among many other factors). [61] Federal and provincial decision-makers must also acknowledge that those who experience racism and marginalization exist in intersecting worlds; rigorous data will illustrate this actuality.

Aside from effective study design and a clear research aim, data collection strategies should include hierarchical, multi-tiered responses that allow participants to more fully represent their personal and public racial and ethnic identities. [5] Pre-survey exploration within racialized communities can also help to define the most meaningful identifiers in a given context. [62] Ultimately though, researchers must remain aware of the sensitive resolution of race-based data. Studies that include too many identifiers can increase administrative burden and lump participants into narrowly-defined groups that are too small to perform any meaningful analysis. [16] Inversely, studies that use too few identifiers can confuse participants and result in large, heterogeneous groupings. Balance is key, and it is crucial that researchers do not produce studies with outcomes that are either too broad or too granular.

Data paired with meaningful interpretation is a powerful tool to dismantle systems of oppression by advocating for change in policy, practice, and social perception. However, socio-economic indicators cannot be measured in isolation from one another—people, communities, and realities all interact and converge. This makes data collection complex, but it is one of the most robust justifications for ensuring that communities are included in the development of collection methodologies, the interpretation, and the ultimate use of race-based data.



Conclusion and Recommendations

Like any initiative worth undertaking, race-based data collection has tremendous risks and even greater rewards. Race-based data collection can play a valuable role in diagnosing inequities, holding public institutions accountable, and validating the lived experiences of racialized people—if done correctly. Careless race-based data collection can be equally harmful to participants and further damage already tenuous relationships with racialized communities. Serious discussions about intention, use, and methodology must be had before beginning any data collection effort. It is also crucial that race-based data collection efforts are centered within anti-racist frameworks actively looking to address racial inequity.

Race-based data collection can play a valuable role in diagnosing inequities, holding public institutions accountable, and validating the lived experiences of racialized people.

The patchwork collection of disaggregated race-based data in Canada thus far has restricted its potential for meaningful change across systems and policies. For some, this can only be addressed with formalized national data standards to “encourage harmonized collection and ensure high-quality and comparable data across regions, organizations and systems.” [1, p. 4] In the absence of standardizations to track data, information remains vulnerable to misuse and ultimately harmful to racialized communities. A national, coordinated system would establish a reliable source of information accessible by researchers, communities, and decision-makers alike.

Adding to the current challenges of data collection strategies is the reality that racial categories change meaning over time and between cultures. A national strategy with clear definitions, standards, and indicators would present information that speaks to the current social circumstances, but ensure that data could be measured at community and regional levels, and remain comparable at the national level. A robust framework would establish timelines to regularly re-examine race-based categories and qualifiers as needed. These evaluation indicators would ensure continuous—and relevant—improvements to policy interventions and anti-racism efforts.

The following recommendations are for researchers, leaders, and any others whose work advocates for and values race-based data as a unique tool to help dismantle racist and discriminatory policies and practices across Canada.

- Advocate for national-level standards for data collection and reporting, and encourage provinces and territories to collect race-based data using these standards.
 - Set specific strategies and objectives to address racism and other forms of discrimination using collected data.
 - Standardize benchmarks for evaluation to reflect on the validity of outcomes and to review the relevance of each standard going forward.
- Implement OCAP when undertaking research associated with Indigenous peoples and topics.
- Engage racialized communities at all levels of race-based research in a meaningful way: through development, design, collection, analysis, and reporting.
- Provide multi-category responses in data collection strategies to acknowledge and track composite identities and intersectional experiences.

For more information, the following organizations are just a few—among many—that are dedicated to the advancement of this work:

Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre – <http://www.aclrc.com>

Alberta First Nations Information Governance Centre (AFNIGC) – <http://www.afnigc.ca>

Black Health Alliance – <https://blackhealthalliance.ca>

Canadian Race Relations Foundation – <https://www.crrf-fcrr.ca>

Colour of Poverty–Colour of Change – <https://colourofpoverty.ca>

Edmonton Public School Board – <https://epsb.ca>

National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) – <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca>

Statistics Canada – https://www.statcan.gc.ca/eng/topics-start/gender_diversity_and_inclusion

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) – <http://www.trc.ca>

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