Mental Health Policies & Procedures: *A Manager's Toolkit*

Systemic Barriers: Fact Sheet

> ➢ **Access to our location is difficult**
> ➢ **I don't know where to refer my clients**
> ➢ **I don't ask my clients about mental health concerns**

Most people don't want to believe they have systemic barriers in their own organizations, especially in the 'helping' industries; but if you answered 'yes' to any of these questions, you may be unintentionally adding barriers to your services. And as managers, we can't talk about mental health/addictions in settlement services without building a healthy framework, and this starts with acknowledging and changing systemic barriers.

> **Definition:**
> *Systemic Barriers/Discrimination*
>
> "Consists of patterns of behaviour, policies or practices that are part of the social or administrative structures of an organization, and which create or perpetuate a position of relative disadvantage for racialized persons."
>
> "Surfacing Racism in the Workplace: Qualitative and Quantitative Evidence of Systemic Discrimination"

According to the Ontario Human Rights Commission's (OHRC) *"Policy and Guidelines on Racism and Racial Discrimination"*, it expects organizations to use three considerations "as a basis for proactively monitoring for and, if found to exist, addressing systemic discrimination internally". And note: In the case of a complaint, it is these considerations that will guide the OHRA in its assessment of whether systemic discrimination exists within an organization. The three considerations are:

1. *Numerical Data:*
   - Is there under-representation in an organization relative to the availability of qualified individuals in the population or in the applicant pool?
   - Is there unequal distribution of racialized persons in your organization (for example, high concentration in entry-level positions and low representation in managerial positions)?

2. *Policies, practices and decision-making processes:*
   - How do you and staff make decisions with clients? Is it informal, based on subjective/individual choice (which can be biased)?
   - Are your forms (intake, testing) culturally biased?

3. *Organizational Culture:*
   - Do you emphasize evening events? Do you reward 'confidence' and 'enthusiasm'? These are just two examples of "shared patterns"; informal social behaviour, such as communication, decision-making and interpersonal relationships. An organizational culture that is not inclusive can marginalize or exclude racialized persons without realizing it.

Examples of systemic barriers:

- Avoiding a topic (e.g. mental health) with a client
- Not referring clients to appropriate mental health/addiction services
- Complicated/industry-specific language on material
- Voicemail, flyers only in the predominant language
- Posters/flyers don't visually represent diversity
- Policies and procedures that don't recognize community diversity/needs
- Inadequate/avoiding training of staff
- Programs/intake with built-in barriers (e.g. only assist in person, not by phone)

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Eliminating Systemic Barriers in Your Organization: Best Practices

Take Action:

1. Set up a steering committee.
   Communicate changes with staff.

2. Develop an anti-racism vision (see sample in this Toolkit).
   Share with all stakeholders.

3. Assess your organization for systemic barriers.
   Use the "Organizational Diversity, Inclusion & Equity – A Self Assessment Tool" found in this Toolkit.

4. Analyze demographics of staff/Board.
   Is there under/over representation?

5. Review your procedures.
   Ask staff and clients for input to pinpoint barriers.

6. Make a plan. Implement. Evaluate.

Develop Diversity & Inclusion Goals for Your Organization:
Below are a few samples to consider:

- **Leadership support and accountability:** Senior leaders participate in at least one diversity/inclusion training session and/or lead a diversity/inclusion activity within the organization.

- **Link diversity and inclusion to performance management:** Employees at all levels must identify and reach a diversity and inclusion objective (e.g., organizing a diversity-focused teambuilding activity, seeking out female or minority-owned vendors, etc.)

- **Integrate diversity and inclusion into talent management:** Recruit, develop, and retain talent from diverse backgrounds.

- **Build diversity and inclusion into business practices:** Seek diversity in suppliers and vendors.

- **Develop and review policies and procedures:** Review annually and add to staff training.

- **Test yourself as a manager**: Use the tool found in this Toolkit called: "Diversity & inclusion (D&I) Leadership Capability Self-assessment Tool". Rate yourself and commit to strengthening your competencies.

It's the Law!

The Supreme Court of Canada has made it clear that systems must be ***designed*** to be inclusive of all persons. The racial diversity that exists in Ontario should be reflected in the design stages of programs so that barriers are not created.

An organization has a responsibility to ensure its practices create inclusiveness, and not merely to make exceptions to allow individuals to fit into an existing system

Source: Ontario Human Rights Commission's *"Policy and Guidelines on Racism and Racial Discrimination"*

Learn More:

Canadian Mental Health Association
Diversity Lens Checklist: http://www.cmha.bc.ca/files/diversity.pdf

Ontario Human Rights Commission
Policy & Guidelines on Racism and Racial Discrimination:
http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/resources/Policies/RacismPolicy/pdf

A Review of the Literature on Aspects of Ethno-Racial Access, Utilization and Delivery of Social Services:
http://ceris.metropolis.net/Virtual%20Library/other/reitz1/reitz1.html

> **A Word of Caution:** Many people believe the most important contribution they can make in creating a more inclusive culture is to be "colour-blind." The implication is that an individual's race and/or cultural background are irrelevant and people's contributions should be evaluated equally. While it sounds like a colour-blind approach would be compassionate, it isn't… ***because in a colour-blind approach, the different needs, assets, and perspectives of people are disregarded: they are "unseen."***
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> Source: The Denver Foundation, www.nonprofitinclusiveness.org