

THE TRUST GAP – IDEA STARTERS

BUILDING SAFE COMMUNITIES WITH COMMUNITY

BUILDING SAFE & LIVABLE COMMUNITIES FOR ALL

THE CONTEXT

Toronto is considered among the top ten safest cities in Canadaⁱ – but the reality across the Toronto region paints a very different picture. We are seeing increasing threats to safety in our streets, our transit, our schools and places of worship, causing heightened anxiety. Automobile theft is at a record high. Systemic prejudice and racism remain serious factors, along with the acknowledgement that safety can mean very different things depending on your gender, sexual orientation, race, age, or ability.

The challenge of building safe communities is multi-layered, multi-dimensional, and complex – and it requires many scales of collaboration to address the root causes. **How can we collectively work to (re)build trust and safety for communities across the GTHA?**

WHY IT MATTERS

In a 2021 report, the Canadian Civil Liberties Union (in partnership with community-serving organizations across Toronto) called for the need to think about community safety more inclusively.ⁱⁱ

Given that a sense of safety is often directly dependent on factors that impact levels of social inclusion, this conversation requires us to also look at interventions that tackle homelessness, mental health, food insecurity and other social determinants of health to reverse downward social inclusion trends in our region.

WHAT WE KNOW

Systemic racism and prejudice remain deeply prevalent issues.

- Between 2019 and 2020, there was an 80% increase in police-reported hate crimes. The Black population was targeted the most, followed by Southeast Asian, Indigenous and South Asian.
- Younger and lower-income residents express much lower levels of trust and confidence than most Toronto residents; Black Torontonians also consistently express lower levels of social trust, as do those who identify as LGBTQ2S+.¹
- The proportion of people that say others can be trusted increases among people that are seniors, homeowners, university educated and have higher incomes.
- Anti-Black racism is still the reality for many in Toronto. Black Ontarians are 3-4x more likely than non-racialized Ontarians to be street checked by police and are 20x more likely to be fatally shot by police compared to White residents.ⁱⁱⁱ

The mental health crisis in our communities has not been sufficiently addressed.

- According to the Toronto Police Service Public Safety Data Portal, 15.4% of all reported Use of Force incidents in 2020 were mental health-related.^{iv} The data suggested in the TPS' Race and Identity-Based Data Collection (RBDC) strategy also indicated that there were differences in Use of Force related to race: Black, South Asian and East/Southeast Asian people were more likely to experience higher uses of force compared to White people.
- According to a survey conducted by the City of Toronto to inform the SafeTO Plan in March 2021:
 - Only 53% of Toronto residents were satisfied with their current state of well-being.
 - 52% indicated a lack of stable housing; 46% indicated lack of crisis mental health supports; and 43% indicated lack of economic opportunities as barriers to well-being in their neighbourhood.
 - 27% were impacted by a violent crime, of which 38% indicated that they felt they did not have access to support.
 - Mental health (49%), housing and homelessness (46%), crime (42%), discrimination and racism (41%), and community violence (35%) were identified as the most important well-being issues in neighbourhoods.

Social cohesion and trust are on the decline.

- The 2022 Toronto Social Capital Study found that more residents are reporting to have fewer close friends or family members to rely upon.^v
- Fewer residents are participating in recreational groups such as sports or religious/cultural affiliated memberships.¹
- Those with lower social capital scores (smaller social networks, lower civic engagement, less civic engagement and social trust) are less likely to trust that government agencies are intended to provide them with support in hard times.¹
- Public perception of the police dropped, with 56% of the population in 2022 expressing a high level of confidence with the police, compared to 65% in 2018.

SPOTLIGHTING ACTIONS & SUCCESSES

SafeTO: Toronto’s Ten Year Community Safety and Well-Being Plan

The City of Toronto adopted SafeTO in July 2021, a ten-year plan to advance community safety and well-being. By working collaboratively across sectors, the plan seeks to address root causes of lack of safety across communities. The plan is driven by the idea that communities that experience more inequity related to social determinants of health experience more harm, trauma and violence. By investing in a systems-level and people-first approach, SafeTO aims to advance community safety and increase overall well-being for people in Toronto.

Social Planning Toronto: Safety Networking Development Pilot

From January 2021 to January 2022, Social Planning Toronto (SPT), in partnership with City of Toronto’s Community Safety and Wellbeing Unit and Community Crisis Response Program (CCPR) worked together on the Safety Networking Development Pilot. This program was developed to build on and enhance capacity at a community level to support local leadership and mobilization to address community violence. SPT’s role was to support safety networks, tables and committees across Toronto by hosting training, providing resources and delivering community-designed initiatives. As a result of this partnership model, members of the safety network were able to conduct safety audits, build community trust, deliver workshops and increase youth and senior engagement. From this pilot, four key recommendations were identified to support this work: provide supports and resources, co-design with community, build capacity with an anti-oppression lens and build knowledge, confidence and interdependence with peer spaces.

KEY TERMS

Anti-oppression:

Recognizing the impact of power and inequality in the ways that we work and intentionally combatting these.

Systemic/institutional racism

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. These policies, practices, or behaviours often seem neutral but effectually exclude racialized individuals.^{vi}

NOTE: This document is intended to provide general background and spotlight actions and innovations in the space. It is not intended to be a complete or definitive set of facts about the topic. Wherever possible, sources have been cited. We apologize for any errors or omissions.

REFERENCES

i. Jiang, K. "Safest city in Canada is in Ontario, new report finds. Here's where Toronto falls on the list." Toronto Star, 5 July 2023, https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/safest-city-in-canada-is-in-ontario-new-report-finds-here-s-where-toronto-falls/article_9f86f5ad-8ed4-5f18-8042-8d61eb02a Accessed 21 August 2023

ii. Ibid.

iii. [The Pervasive Reality of Anti-Black Racism in Canada.](#)

iv. "Race and Identify-based Data Analytics" Toronto Police Service: Public Safety Data Portal, <https://data.torontopolice.on.ca/pages/rbdc-analytics>. Accessed 22 August 2023

v. [Toronto Social Capital Study 2022](#)

vi. [City of Toronto Racial Discrimination and Harassment Resource.](#)