



MEDIA RELEASE

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BC's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner calls for new legislation governing disaggregated demographic data collection to address systemic discrimination in British Columbia

VANCOUVER, B.C. – On Tuesday, Sept. 15, BC's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner (BCOHRC) will issue recommendations on how the provincial government could collect and use disaggregated demographic and race-based data to reveal systemic racism and inequities in our province.

The call for new legislation that would require government researchers to collect data in service of systemic equality—with the meaningful involvement of marginalized communities—is the lead recommendation from the report, titled "[Disaggregated demographic data collection in British Columbia: The grandmother perspective.](#)"

"It is critical that the government of B.C. collect and analyse disaggregated data to identify inequalities and advance human rights in this province and country—particularly as the COVID-19 pandemic aggravates existing injustices," BC's Human Rights Commissioner Kasari Govender said. "I am pleased to offer these recommendations to the Premier."

"This is the time for commitments to address systemic racism and oppression across British Columbia. We cannot act on what we do not know, so data collection is often the first step in making change. This is a call for knowledge and a call to action," Govender continued.

BCOHRC's report was developed in response to a recent [letter from Premier John Horgan](#), which asked that BC's Human Rights Commissioner and Information and Privacy Commissioner inform the development of a policy initiative for the collection of race-based, Indigenous and other disaggregated data to further the aim of substantive social equality while avoiding the reinforcement of existing biases and discrimination.

Govender stressed that determining the details of *how* disaggregated data is collected, stored and shared is of critical importance: "Demographic data can be—and has been—used against marginalized populations as a means to further colonization, systemic racism and oppression," she explained. "To prevent this, we emphasize an approach

that centres on relationship—one that eschews the Big Brother mentality and adopts “the grandmother perspective.”

“The grandmother perspective” is an approach offered by Gwen Phillips of the Ktunaxa Nation and informed by Indigenous ways of knowing. Phillips explained that government must only collect the information required to nurture communities as it would a family member, to be able to say, as Elders might, “we need to know because we care.”

Per June Francis, the Director of the Institute for Diaspora Research and Engagement at SFU, “this landmark report grapples with the complex history of race-based data collection and its deeply racist and colonial roots—while setting the stage for truly transformative approaches to ensure that the collection, stewardship and impact of these data on policies and practices “centres” the collective wisdom, decision-making and participation of the racialized communities most impacted.”

Dr. Kwame McKenzie, a physician and professor in the University of Toronto’s Department of Psychiatry, supports this approach.

“We cannot say diversity is our strength and then leave ourselves blind to the suffering of racialized people, so we need race-based data,” Dr. McKenzie said. “But the data has to be linked to protections and safeguards so it is appropriately used. This report will help B.C. on the right course.”

Kim McGrail, a professor at UBC’s Centre for Health Services and Policy Research and Scientific Director of Population Data BC, agrees that when it comes to ensuring race-based data are used solely for equity purposes, “one important way forward is to give more power to communities who are described by those data. This sort of democratization will be increasingly important as data increases its influence on every part of our lives.”

The full report, “[Disaggregated demographic data collection in British Columbia: The grandmother perspective](#),” is available for download at: bchumanrights.ca/datacollection

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Media contact: To request an interview with Commissioner Kasari Govender, contact Elaine O’Connor, Acting Director, Communications, at Elaine.OConnor@bchumanrights.ca or 1-250-216-4534.

Media kit: [Download](#) our media kit for new images of Commissioner Kasari Govender.

About BCOHRC: BC’s Office of the Human Rights Commissioner exists to address the root causes of inequality, discrimination and injustice in B.C. by shifting laws, policies, practices and cultures. We do this work through education, research, advocacy, inquiry and monitoring. Learn more at: bchumanrights.ca

About the Commissioner: BC’s Human Rights Commissioner, Kasari Govender, started her five-year term on Sept. 3, 2019, 17 years after BC’s last human rights commission was dismantled. Since then, our Office has been working swiftly to build a strong team, to listen deeply to the concerns of British Columbians, to issue policy guidance to protect vulnerable communities and to lay a human rights-based foundation for our work. As an Independent Office of the Legislature we are uniquely positioned to ensure human rights in B.C. are protected, respected and advanced on a systemic level throughout our society.

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