

# Factors that Impact How Black Youth Access the Mental Healthcare System in Ontario

## Pathways to Care Project

### Method

**Focus Groups //**

- 23 focus groups (FGs) with 128 participants in 6 regions across the province
- Questions developed with PTC's Youth Action Committee

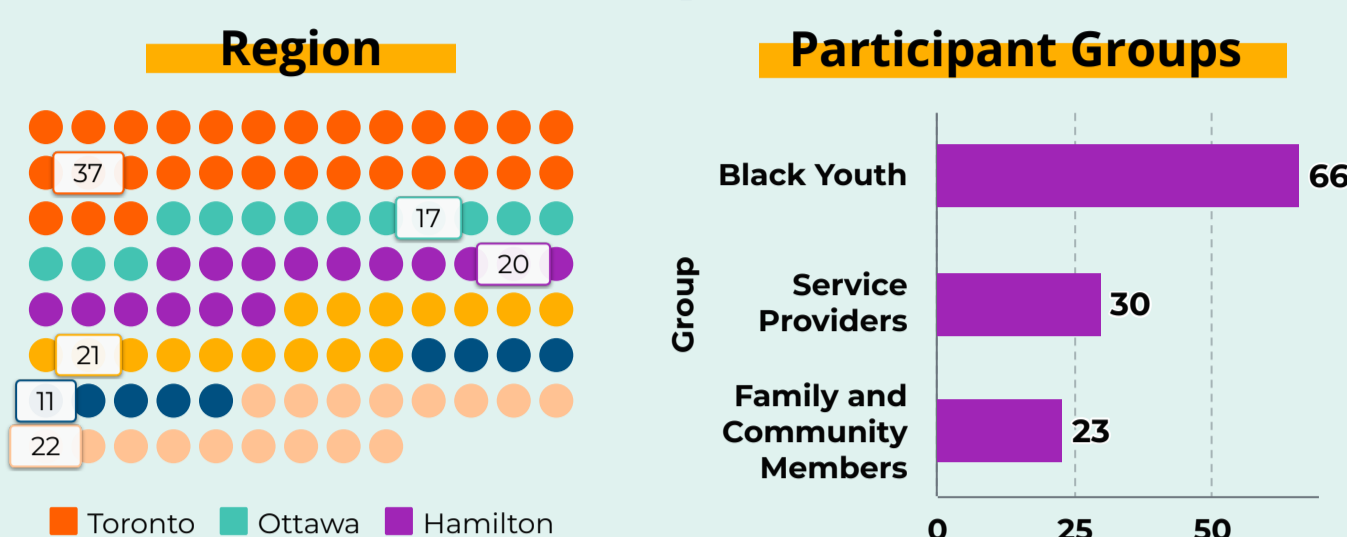
**Transcription + Analysis //**

- Focus groups were recorded via Zoom, transcribed with transcription consultants and PTC team members

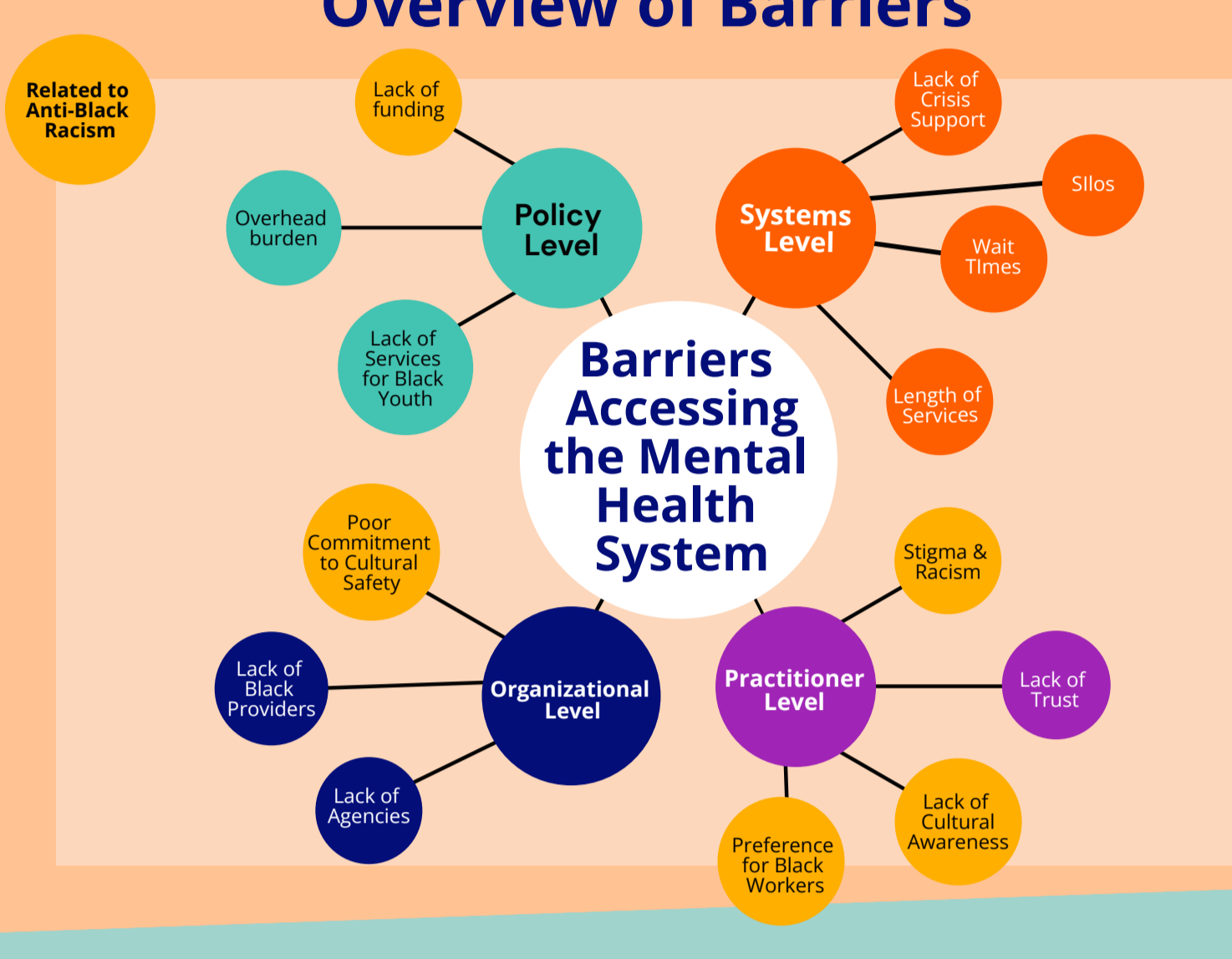
**Member Checking //**

- Findings for each focus group and city sent to participants with major findings to ensure that they reflected their experiences

### Participants



### Overview of Barriers



### Societal Challenges

- Systemic Anti-Black Racism**  
Black youth tied the global impacts of racism and colonialism to their mental well-being.
- Racial Capitalism**  
Black youth noted that the economic system exploited Black folks globally, which continues from the transatlantic slave trade to the present day.
- Financial Barriers**  
Costs prevented Black youth from accessing the care they needed.

*"Like, you try and put on a brave face, but if you're facing systemic racism or discrimination, like, it does affect you. Even if it's not showing in your expression, deep down. Mentally it's like a block, or it's like something that's affecting you deeply and emotionally."*

**- Jay, Toronto Black Youth**

### Systems Level

**Siloed Care**

Services are disjointed and Black youth often get lost transitioning from one organization to another

Youth often wait months to access care services. Youth mentioned waiting up to a year to access care

**Wait Times**

**Lack of Crisis Support**

Black youth in crisis are often unable to access emergency departments and crisis care organizations

Services were too short-term for Black youth, who wanted long-term services that suited their needs

**Length of Services**

*"I think for myself personally, one of the biggest barriers with mental health support is just the waiting times, the wait times. For example, like, you want to connect to a psychotherapist and the wait time is, like, four-plus months."*

**- Sam, Toronto 2SLGBTQ+ Black Youth**

*"You make all those connections, you build that trust with that worker . . . more and more there's this short-term service and a lot of change in workers and not as much care for that continuity of care. A lot of my clients just come back and they're like, 'I am not explaining the story all over again, I'm done with this,' but you haven't gotten to the end of the work."*

**- Kayla, Toronto Service Providers**

### Policy Level

**Lack of Funding**

Many organizations are funded for a particular kind of care, making it hard for Black youth with multiple mental health challenges to get the care they need

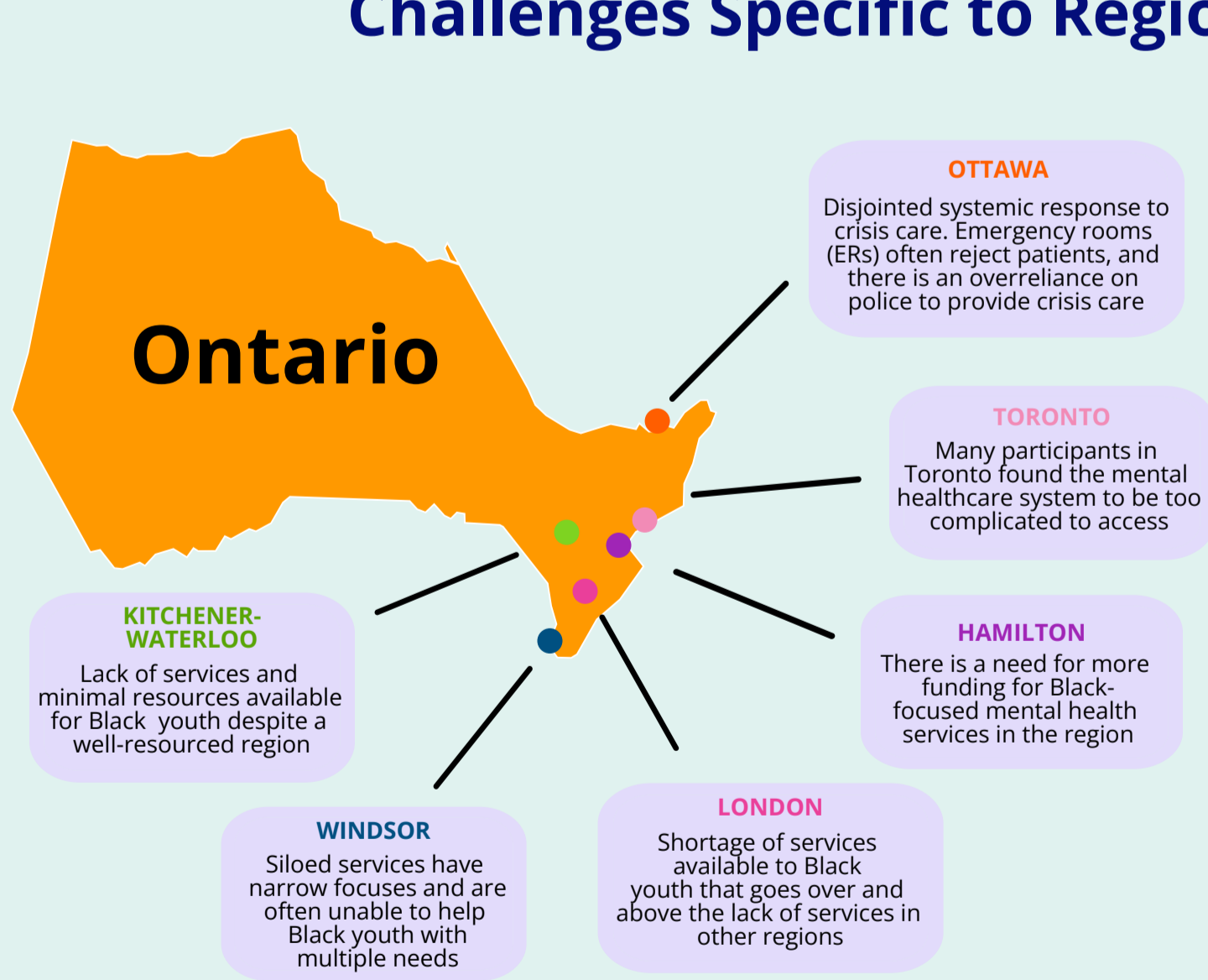
The rules for what is funded are narrow or they require a lot of oversight. This leads to overhead burden, especially for small organizations

**Overhead Burden**

**Lack of Services for Black Youth**

There is a need for mental health services specifically for Black youth. The services that do exist are not meeting their needs

### Challenges Specific to Region



### Organizational Level

- ORGANIZATIONS NOT COMMITTING TO CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS**  
Cultural responsiveness is not meaningfully integrated into organizational practice. Organizations are 'reactive' instead of 'proactive'
- A LACK OF BLACK PROFESSIONALS**  
Organizations had a hard time recruiting and retaining Black mental health workers. Black youth wanted to providers who knew their stories and histories
- A LACK OF AGENCIES SPECIFICALLY FOR BLACK YOUTH**  
There are a lack of agencies that service Black youth specifically

### Practitioner Level

- STIGMA & RACISM FROM PROVIDERS**  
Stigma from providers often worsened Black youth's experience. Youth felt looked down on and faced disbelief about racism's impact on them
- LACK OF TRUST**  
Racism impacted youths' trust in the system, especially if they felt misunderstood by providers
- LACK OF CULTURAL AWARENESS & ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF RACISM**  
Many providers lacked an understanding of racism's impact on youth and differences in their culture and home lives
- PREFERENCE FOR BLACK MENTAL HEALTH WORKERS**  
Black youth desired Black mental healthcare workers who would understand their experiences

### How to cite this infographic:

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Infographic findings are drawn from focus groups that took place between May 2020 and August 2021 via Zoom and took place in six regions across Ontario: the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), Ottawa, Hamilton, Kitchener-Waterloo, London and Windsor. Focus groups were led by the Pathways to Care team at Black Health Alliance.

Author: Tiyondah Fante-Coleman, Researcher, Black Health Alliance