



Queering Black Prairie Futures

Zetna Collective Needs Assessment

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Report design in partnership with Community-Based Research Centre

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Introduction

Being Black as well as 2S/LGBTQIA+ in Edmonton means navigating exclusion from multiple directions, often alienated from predominantly white queer spaces, disconnected from Black cultural communities, and underserved by institutions that claim to support them. The reality is stark: Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ individuals frequently find themselves searching for spaces where they are fully seen and valued, but those spaces remain scarce.

This report captures the experiences and hopes of Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ individuals in Edmonton. It is based on the lived realities of people who have spent years, some over a decade, building lives in Canada, yet still face systemic racism and queerphobia in a city that prides itself on diversity. Above all, this report amplifies a critical truth: Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ people in Edmonton are here. They deserve more than tolerance. They deserve belonging, safety, and joy.

President's Statement

This project is, above all, a labour of love for Edmonton's 2S/LGBTQIA+ Black community.

Although the body of knowledge for Black queer and trans people has grown over the past decade, Western Canadian voices have remained absent from the national conversation. My fundamental goal was to bring our distinct perspectives to the forefront.

I was born in England to Caribbean parents just months before Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, and arrived in Canada in the early 1970s. My family answered the call for nurses and hospital staff, settling in rural Alberta alongside other Caribbean immigrants. There, we built communities that sustained one another and cared for elderly Canadians for decades.

As a small-town child, I yearned for books that reflected my reality. I searched for images of Black people to aspire to, but they were scarce. I navigated a school system that pushed Black boys out and only reluctantly acknowledged high-achieving girls like myself. When I came out to my family in midlife, I understood deeply that young queer and trans people needed to see an older person who looked like them.

Alberta, for all its strengths, could not contain my curiosity. So I moved to Toronto in the 1990s, where I met Black queer and trans icons—Faith Nolan, Courtney MacFarlane, Carol Thames, Dionne Brand, and others. I was there as initiatives like Blockorama took root. Decades later, in a full-circle moment, I sat at the elders' table at The Enchanté Network's first National 2S/LGBTQIA+ Black Futures Summit, where I thanked Courtney, Carol, and so many others for the paths they paved.

I founded the Zetna Collective to bring our community together in Edmonton. We may be small, but this report demonstrates that our voices are mighty. We now have something tangible to share with our community and the allies who stand beside us. We have created a document that centres and honours the Black experience in Edmonton. And we have laid out a pathway—to build meaningful projects and, at long last, to celebrate our own stories.

I am grateful to our funders, supporters, and contributors for making this project possible. Future readers, I hope you see yourselves in this work.

This report is dedicated to the late Dr. Michael Alexander Marshall, founder and Director of The LGBTQ+ Wellness Centre.

Thank you all.

Dawn Carter

Founder and President, Zetna Collective for Black Advancement

About Zetna Collective and Dawn Carter

Zetna Collective for Black Advancement was founded to create safe and inclusive spaces for African, Caribbean, and Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ individuals in Edmonton. Their mission is to provide culturally appropriate resources, services, and programming that foster positive lived experiences, community, empowerment, and joy.

Dawn Carter, the founder and visionary behind Zetna Collective, is a writer, educator, performance poet, public speaker, entrepreneur, and community advocate of Barbadian British Canadian heritage. As the first Black woman to run a major 2S/LGBTQIA+ organization in Western Canada, Dawn has been a trailblazer in her field.

www.zetnacollective.ca

About Syriah Bailey

Bailey is a curator, consultant, and creative focused on inclusive data and storytelling. With a strong background in strategic planning and diverse narratives, they have played pivotal roles on multiple Boards of Directors across the UK, U.S., and Canada. Their portfolio includes curating artistic programs such as film festivals and providing consulting and evaluation to predominantly 2S/LGBTQIA+-serving organizations. Holding a Master's in Postcolonial Culture and Global Policy, Bailey operates within a decolonial and anti-racist framework, centering inclusion, accessibility, and representation.

www.syriahbailey.com

Purpose of the Needs Assessment

The purpose of this needs assessment was to build upon existing research and apply a localized lens to the experiences of Black, African, and/or Caribbean 2S/LGBTQIA+ individuals in Edmonton, Alberta. This evaluation sought to answer:

- What do you need to thrive and prosper in Edmonton as an Black, African, and/or Caribbean 2S/LGBTQIA+ person? What support do you need to achieve this?

The findings from this assessment will guide Zetna Collective in developing programs, services, activities, and partnerships that support community members. Additionally, we aim to share these insights with other organizations that serve our community, advancing broader systemic change. This is also an opportunity to measure individual and collective capacity-building alongside our grant obligations to Women and Gender Equality Canada's [2SLGBTQI+ Community Capacity Fund](#).

Methodology

To gather comprehensive data, we employed a multi-faceted approach:

- **Literature Review:** We examined primary research, including reports from the Enchanté Network and other relevant studies.
- **Online Survey:** A survey was distributed via email and social media, receiving 19 eligible responses (Appendix A). To maximize participation, we engaged in active social media outreach and incentivized respondents with a prize draw.
- **In-person Summit:** We hosted a two-day summit for community learning, networking, and meaningful discussions. Note-takers documented key insights throughout the event.
- **Pre-Summit and Post-Summit Surveys:** Attendees completed surveys before and after the summit to assess shifts in perspectives regarding their future.

Limitations

We initially anticipated 50 summit attendees; however, due to factors such as inclement weather, Zetna's relatively new presence, illness, and personal commitments like work (volunteering and entrepreneurship), we had nine people attend over two days. We attribute the underrepresentation of newcomers due to long work hours and work days, which would limit their ability to attend a two-day event. Despite this, the smaller group size facilitated deeper conversations and stronger community connections, and we recorded the keynote presentation to enhance accessibility.

Acknowledgements and Thanks

Thank you to the summit and survey participants. Deep gratitude to Elder Edward Lavallee, Dr. Andrew B. Campbell, and local drag legend Pepper for their years of service to the 2S/LGBTQIA+ community.

The Zetna Collective for Black Advancement acknowledges the financial support of Women and Gender Equality Canada.

This project is funded in part by the Foundation for Black Communities, with partial support from the Government of Canada.

The Foundation for Black Communities (FFBC) was established to ensure every Black person can thrive and all Black Communities have agency in defining their own future. Founded in 2020, FFBC is Canada's first-ever philanthropic foundation dedicated to ensuring that Black-led, Black-serving, and Black-focused organizations have the sustained resources needed to make a meaningful impact.

The Zetna Collective for Black Advancement acknowledges the financial and communications support provided by the CBRC.

Summit Design and Community Considerations

The summit was intentionally structured as a safe space for Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ individuals. To uphold this, registrants underwent a vetting process to confirm their ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender. Those identifying as racialized but non-Black, as well as those identifying as Black and not part of the 2S/LGBTQIA+ community were asked not to participate in order to preserve the space, a decision they understood and accepted. Approved attendees signed our Accountability and Community Policy and a Media Release Form consenting to or declining photography.

From an African Evaluation perspective, assessments should not be extractive or imposed but participatory, reciprocal, and rooted in Indigenous knowledge systems. An Ubuntu-aligned evaluation framework prioritizes storytelling, communal dialogue, and relational accountability, ensuring that impact is measured not just by data, but by the restoration of dignity, the strengthening of bonds, and the sustainability of solutions within the community. The summit embraced an African Evaluation perspective that encouraged open dialogue.¹

Key elements of the summit included:

- Rooting the summit and survey around the Social Determinants of Health for Black Canadians, using an Ubuntu Framework to inform the summit design.
- An Africentric Land Acknowledgment developed by Kaye Johnson in October 2020 (Appendix B).
- The participation of Treaty 6 Two-Spirit Elder Edward Lavallee, who listened to community stories and shared wisdom.
- Dr. Campbell's presence, made possible by meeting him at a national Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ conference in Ottawa and bringing his knowledge back to Edmonton in the spirit of Sankofa ("to bring back").

¹ African Evaluation Association. (2021). The African evaluation principles. <https://afrea.org/AEP/AEP-2021-ENGLISH-18112021.pdf>



- Tables arranged in a long “dining table” format, creating an inclusive, conversational environment.
- Flipcharts and sticky notes, which allowed participants to share thoughts and community reflections as and when they came up.
- Black creatives who deeply understood Indigenous rights and heritage. Most presenters were from Treaty 6 territory.
- Meals sourced from a collective of Black-owned restaurants in Edmonton, reinforcing cultural connections while supporting local businesses. Extra food was ordered to share with the venue staff, drop-in visitors, and participants to take home. One participant shared that the food evoked memories of their Jamaican grandmother.

What do we mean by Black?

During the course of gathering our data, we learned of a shift to use the phrase “Black” to encompass all Black people in Canada, instead of African, Caribbean, and Black (ACB) to acknowledge our African diaspora.² When we applied for project funding, we used ACB. After learning of this broader and specific definition of Black used by the Medical Council of Canada and Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ medical researchers like Dr. Omisoore Dryden, we used this definition to inform our survey, summit preparations, and delivery.

For the purposes of our report, we will use ACB based on the original questions we asked.

To ensure inclusivity, event helpers could come from any background, provided they adhered to our Accountability and Community Policy. Each helper received a \$100 honorarium, recognizing the often uncompensated labour of Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ individuals. One helper donated their honorarium to support Black friends in need.

² Cénat JM. (2022, July 18). Who is Black? The urgency of accurately defining the Black population when conducting health research in Canada. CMAJ. ; Uwamahoro MC, Idowu J, Chowdhury N, Bele S, Popeski N, Boakye F, Odame-Ankrah C, King R, Rabi D, Turin TC. (2024, June). Defining the Black population in Canadian health research: a scoping review protocol. BMJ Open. ; Medical Council of Canada. (2024, April). Black Health. <https://mcc.ca/objectives/medical-expert/population-health-and-its-determinants/black-health/>.

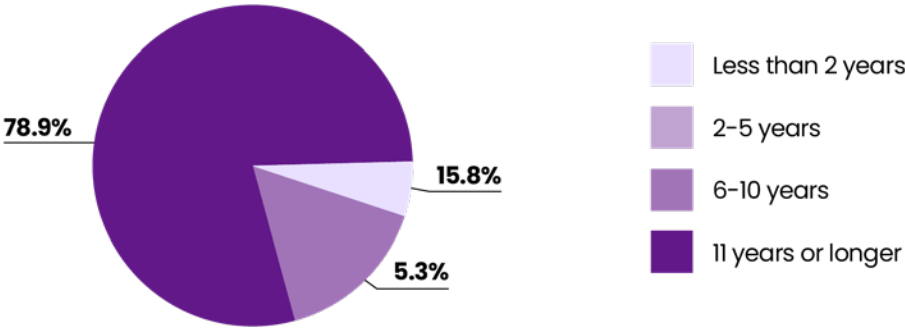
Key Takeaways and Future Considerations

Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive, with strong interest expressed in a 2026 summit. Many attendees suggested expanding the survey across the Prairies to include rural voices, aligning with the project’s overarching goals. These insights will guide the evolution of our future initiatives, ensuring we continue to serve and uplift our community effectively.

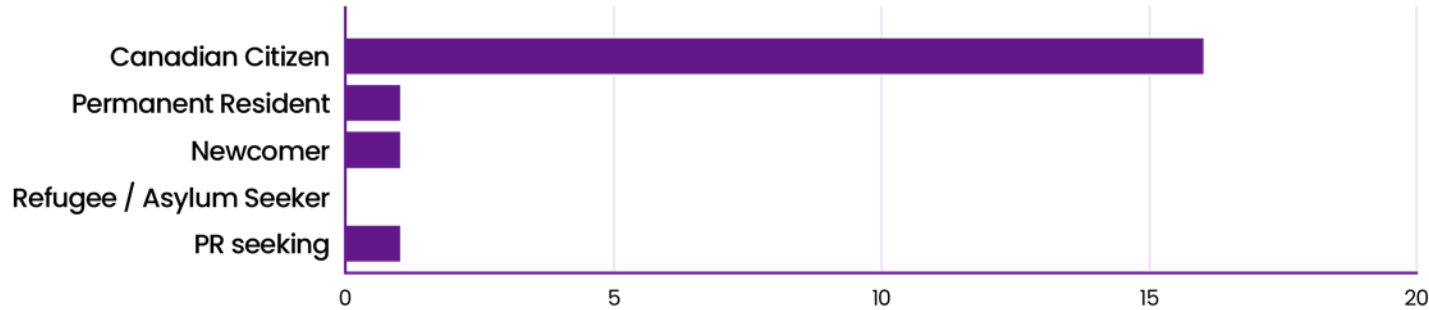
Findings

Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ Experience

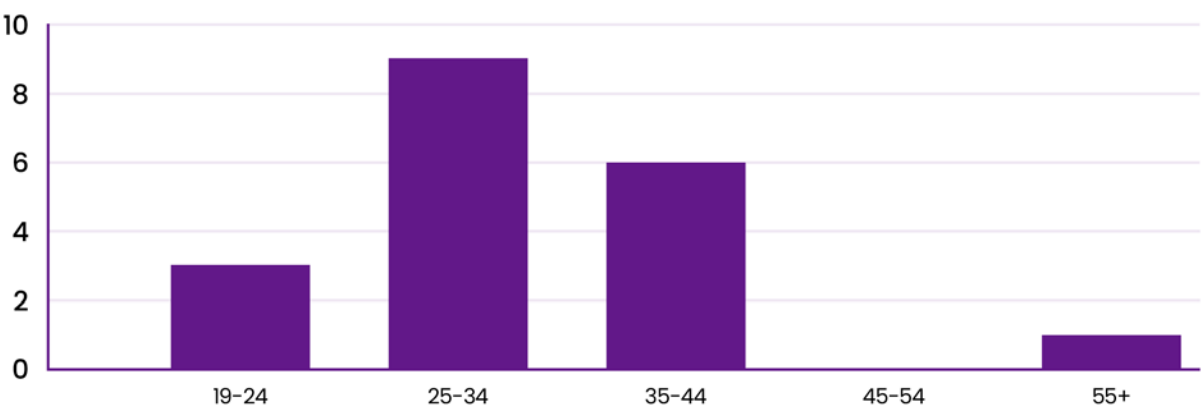
How long have you lived in Canada?



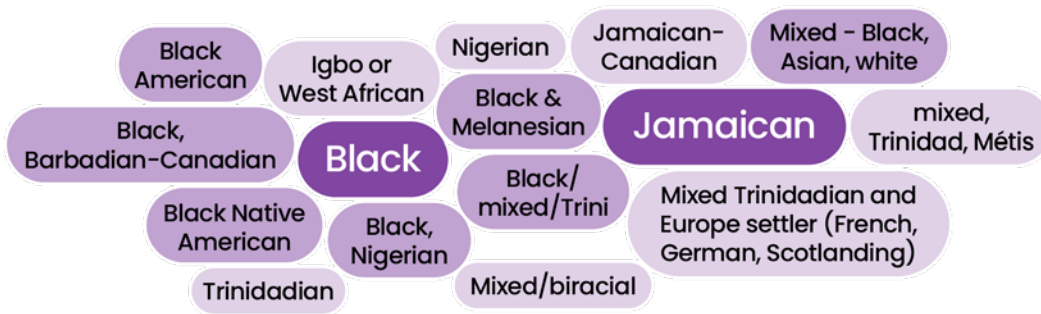
What is your status in Canada?



All responses to Age



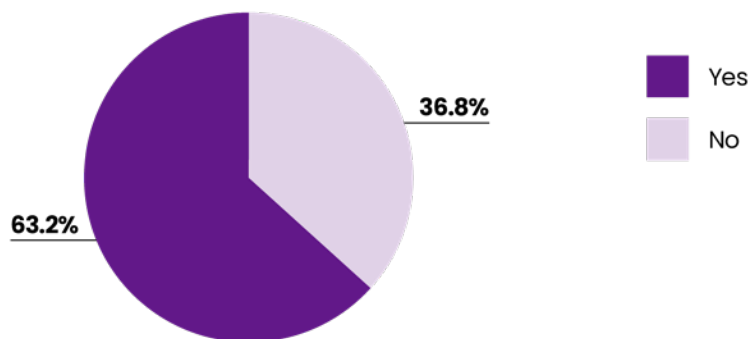
All responses to Race, ethnicity and/or cultural background



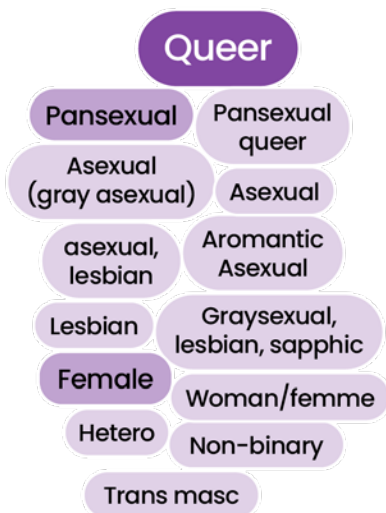
Languages



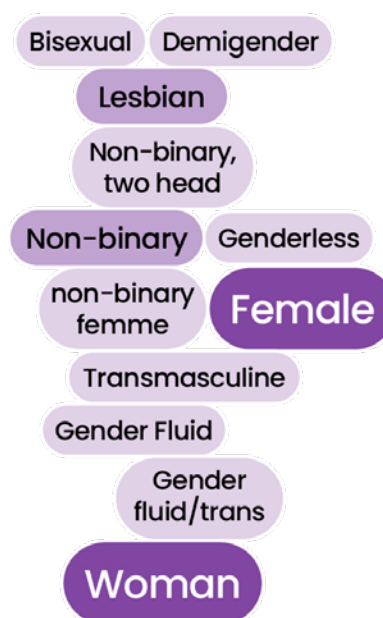
Do you identify as a person with disabilities?



All responses to sexual orientation



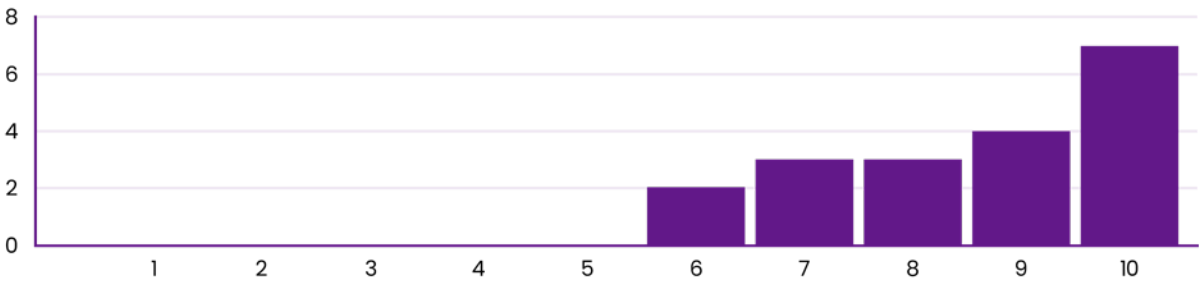
All responses to gender identity



The majority of those who participated in the survey are Canadian citizens who have lived in Canada for 11 years or more, making them long-term residents with deep connections to Edmonton. This suggests they may be well-established members of their communities. Over 50% of respondents disclosed they identify as a person with disabilities.

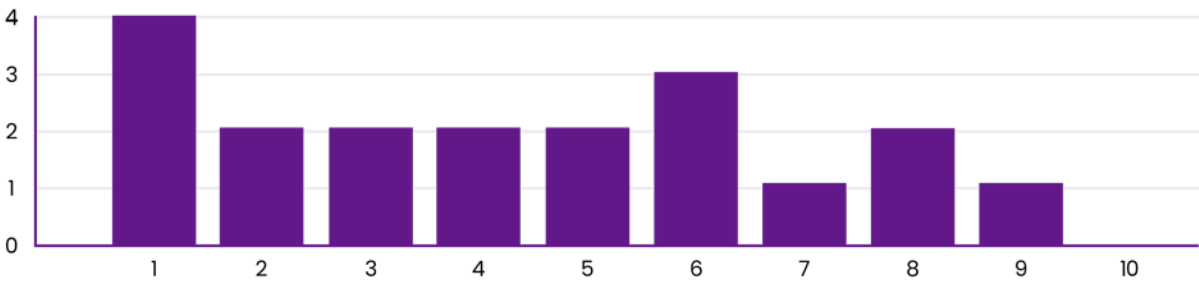
Furthermore, participants demonstrated a strong awareness of their own skills, knowledge, and experiences, as measured on a scale from 1 (completely disagree) to 10 (completely agree).

I know and understand my skills, knowledge and experiences well

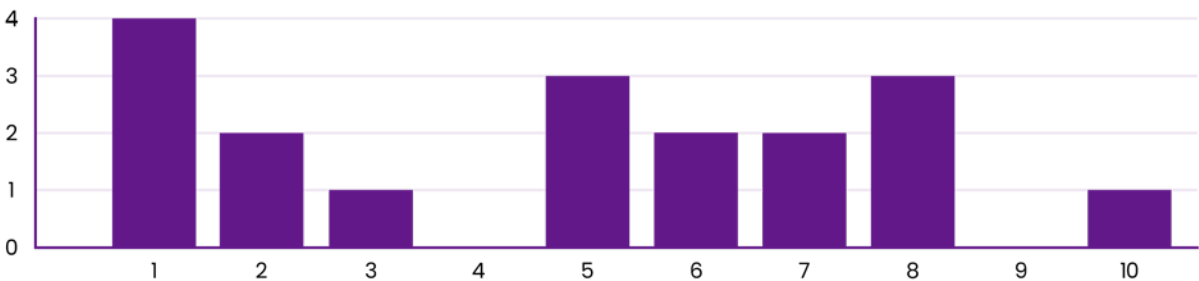


Community

I feel connected with Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ communities in Edmonton



I feel a sense of belonging with Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ communities in Edmonton



Although many respondents had lived in Edmonton for over 11 years, many were still seeking spaces to exist fully and authentically.

Participants described a constant negotiation of identity, such as:

- Being “too queer” for Black spaces.
- Being “too Black” for queer spaces.
- Additional intersections such as disability, religion, or immigration status.
- Still facing systemic racism, queerphobia, and exclusion in the broader society.

While Edmonton has Black spaces and 2S/LGBTQIA+ spaces, there are almost no spaces designed for those who exist at the intersection of both. Many felt like they had to compartmentalize different parts of their identity rather than finding a community that embraced them fully.

“[Moving to] Edmonton was a complete culture shock. Being black in Edmonton is the hardest thing I’ve ever experienced.”

For some, this has led to exhausting emotional labour, where they must hide parts of themselves depending on the space they are in. Others have chosen to carve out their own communities, creating intentional grassroots spaces where Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ people can feel safe, affirmed, and supported.

“There are times when I feel like I don’t belong anywhere—not in the Black community, not in the queer community. But then I remember the people who love me exactly as I am. That’s where I belong.”

Experiences Within Cultural Communities

The experiences shared about being 2S/LGBTQIA+ within cultural communities highlight issues of acceptance, identity, and belonging. Many have faced rejection, losing family, friends, and entire support systems due to queerness. For some, coming out meant being cut off not just from immediate relatives but from entire cultural networks by people they had never even met but who still disowned them.

Religious conservatism plays a major role. Many Black and immigrant communities in Edmonton are deeply tied to faith, “fiercely traditional,” and queerness is often viewed as incompatible with cultural or religious values. For many Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ people, Black cultural spaces do not always feel safe or affirming.

We did not ask survey participants about their religious backgrounds but added it to our summit application to create a welcoming space for worship and prayer.

“Spaces that are more prominent often have religious overtones and much of the black and black immigrant communities are not queer positive.”

In the face of these challenges, there are glimmers of connection. Many Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ folks have found solace in each other, holding on to their chosen family tightly. Some have discovered community through specific events like The Blackening, the Hoedown, or the Ballroom scene, which feels like home due to its deep-rooted Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ history. Others have supportive immediate families, even if the broader community remains unwelcoming.

“I feel most at home/comfortable in the Ballroom community because of its origins so really happy to see it growing here, otherwise I don’t feel very connected but am still excited when there are Black focused events like The Blackening and the Hoedown.”

Still, finding spaces that are both culturally affirming and queer-inclusive is difficult. Many feel like they have to compartmentalize their identity, or avoid bringing up queerness in cultural spaces for fear of being distanced or ostracized. While some have seen slow progress, particularly among younger generations, there is still a long way to go before queer people feel fully embraced within their own cultural communities.

“I am lucky to have parents, siblings, and niblings who affirm and support me 100%! But I do not bring up my queerness in other spaces or with other people. [I find] there’s a pulling away or distancing.”

Finding Inclusive 2S/LGBTQIA+ Spaces in Edmonton

For Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ individuals, navigating Edmonton's queer community paints a complicated picture of both yearning for connection and deep frustration with exclusion and anti-Blackness. Many people express feeling unsure of where to even begin, while others have carved out their own spaces or found pockets of comfort in specific events, like drag shows or university-run groups. But overwhelmingly, the sentiment is that Edmonton's queer spaces are predominantly white, both in leadership and culture, making them unwelcoming or even hostile to racialized people.

Those who have explored 2S/LGBTQIA+ spaces in the city of Edmonton describe a mix of experiences:

- University-affiliated groups and grassroots events have provided some with a sense of belonging.
- Many spaces remain overwhelmingly white, making it hard for Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ individuals to feel truly included.
- A lack of intersectionality in queer activism leaves racial identity and systemic oppression unaddressed.

"I've had to create my own safe space as I didn't see anything for me in Edmonton."

Queer spaces in Edmonton also tend to revolve around nightlife, which isn't accessible to everyone. What's more, dance nights and club events tend to cater to white audiences while sober, intergenerational, and community-centered alternatives are rare.

For many, the search for intersectional queer spaces in Edmonton remains an ongoing challenge.

"A lot of queer spaces cater to queer men over Sapphics, or white queers over others, but at the same time I feel like many are working harder to be more inclusive and diversify music, talent and activities."

"I'm yet to find and connect with them. I don't know where to start."

"Social events centered around expression and crafting are lovely."

Anti-Blackness in Queer Communities

A recurring theme in participants' experiences is the persistent anti-Blackness within Edmonton's mainstream 2S/LGBTQIA+ spaces:

- Black individuals often feel sidelined or erased in predominantly white queer spaces.
- Many queer events cater to white audiences, with little to no consideration for Black cultural expression.
- Participants described a pattern of microaggressions, dismissiveness, and hostility from white queer individuals within the community.

"[Spaces] are predominantly white unless specified for POC. Conversation and ideology often feels extremely narrow and usually leave out the additional intersections POC queer people face. When in political spaces, often hear talks of not being 'too radical' and alike. This usually rubs me the wrong way because the white representation we have for our community does not understand how our existence is exponentially radicalized when you add minority intersections."

Past experiences with racism have left lasting scars. The 2019 Pride protests were a pivotal moment for some, with people leaving in solidarity only to face backlash from white and non-Black friends. This led to fractured relationships and a growing disillusionment with what were supposed to be “safe” spaces.

There’s also deep disappointment in major queer events and organizations. One particular example was a local Pride event quoting P.T. Barnum, a man who profited from the exploitation of an enslaved Black woman, while claiming to be anti-racist. These moments reinforce the belief that mainstream queer spaces rarely centre Black liberation in meaningful ways.

Some find joy in grassroots spaces built around food, dance, and art. Places that feel more intentional and community-driven rather than performative. Others continue to show up, hoping for more diverse and inclusive spaces to emerge. But the message is clear: Edmonton’s queer scene has a long way to go in creating spaces that genuinely reflect and uplift all members of the community, especially those who are Black, Indigenous, and people of colour.

“I have found spaces or built spaces to meet the community but it is long work here. I feel like many nonprofit spaces say a lot but do little. I’ve seen more joy and consistent community built in other grass roots ways, around food, dance, art.”

Education

School Climate and Safety

Many participants recalled facing both homophobic and racist bullying in school, often with little to no intervention from teachers or administrators. The absence of Black and 2S/LGBTQIA+-inclusive curricula further alienated them, as their histories and identities were rarely acknowledged.

“My education was in the suburbs and I switched schools so many times I never felt grounded because of racism.”

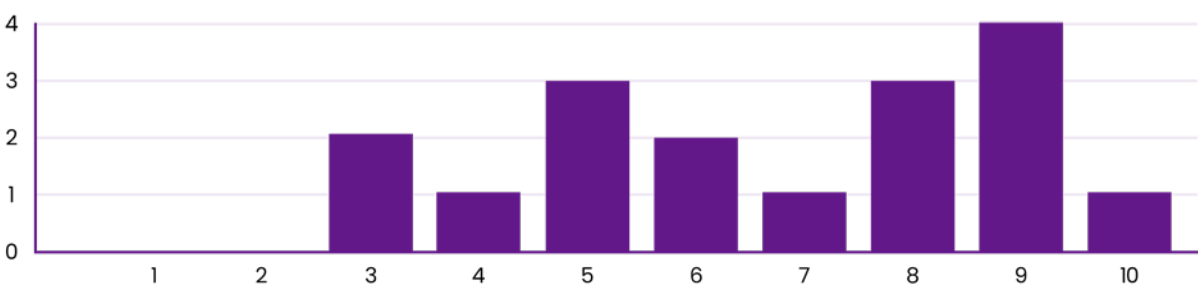
For Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ students, education was about more than just learning, it was about survival. They navigated racism, exclusion, and a profound lack of representation in academic spaces. Some were forced to switch schools due to racial discrimination, never feeling truly safe or grounded. Others described how predominantly white educational institutions required them to code-switch constantly e.g. modifying their speech, mannerisms, and aspirations to fit into environments that failed to recognize their worth.

“I selected 5 because I feel safe in the way I am able to present as an individual and use my own resources to access a safe workplace and safe housing. However, most of this is due to code switching to present correctly and using my education/student identity to bolster “accountability”. I rarely work in places with other black folks and there are rarely other black humans in my buildings. I would face far more issues and exacerbation of current social assumptions of black people if I didn’t play into white society’s standards.”

“One where you don’t have to code switch with different groups just to feel “sort of” safe. Health advocates who help community members access the support they need. More cultural education within community groups and the curriculum as a whole. (No one wants to lose their traditions, but it needs to be accessible and inclusive so no one is missing out).”

For some, education also served as a form of protection. One participant shared that their student status and credentials provided a sense of security in workplaces and housing, though they acknowledged that this “safety” was contingent on conforming to white societal expectations rather than true acceptance.

I feel safe in my place of education and/or employment in Edmonton



The Representation Gap

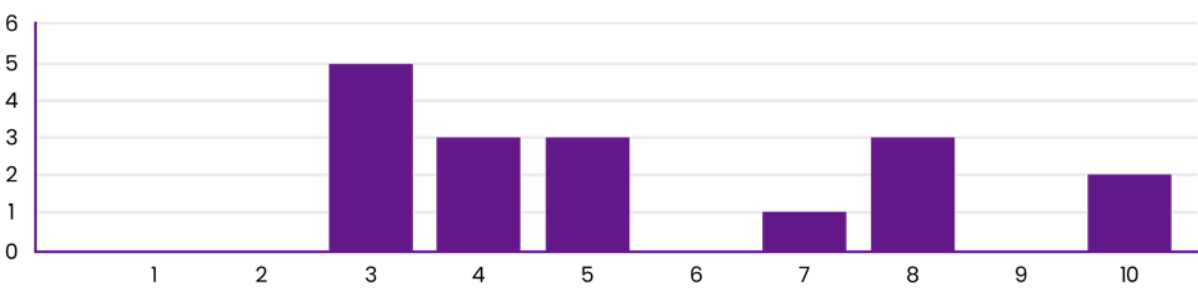
Black professionals remain vastly underrepresented in many fields, limiting both career opportunities and access to culturally competent services. One participant highlighted the severe lack of Black representation in the Dietetics and Registered Dietetics Program, making it harder for Black individuals to enter the profession, find mentors who understand their experiences, and ensure culturally competent health care.

This underrepresentation extends beyond dietetics—Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ educators and professionals are scarce in fields like health care, fitness, STEM, the arts, and skilled trades. Without visible role models and mentors, Black students often feel discouraged from pursuing careers in these areas, reinforcing cycles of exclusion and limiting access to essential, culturally informed services.

For many Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ individuals in Edmonton, education is a double-edged sword. While it can provide pathways to success, it also exposes them to systemic racism. The need for greater Black representation in education and professional spaces is urgent, not just for individual success, but for the long-term well-being of the entire community. There is a strong desire for community-driven education programs.

Employment and Entrepreneurship

I feel able to access employment resources in Edmonton



Workplace Discrimination and Bias

Many Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ individuals described being overlooked for promotions, undervalued, and subjected to microaggressions in the workplace. Several participants shared they were the only Black person in their workplace, leading to imposter syndrome and a sense of isolation.

"I have found it very hard to find jobs outside of customer service/hospitality, even now that I have volunteered so I can gain experience in other fields. I've had difficult race based experiences at most of my jobs and this makes work more anxiety causing."

"I'm a sex worker and I think the gap on my resume is keeping me from getting a job and I'm stressed out."

"Finding employment was difficult, needing accommodation as a disabled person makes it hard to find employment. I ended up being able to be self-employed."

Many participants spoke about being overlooked, underestimated, and undervalued in the workplace.

"I am often looked at as under qualified or like I am hiding something."

"People don't trust you can do a job well if you are a black female, let alone queer and disabled so I usually keep those hidden."

Participants described systemic discrimination in hiring, with many saying they were perceived as underqualified or untrustworthy, even when they had the necessary experience.

- One person described how, despite being part of a diverse government training program, they were the only one in their cohort who was not promoted, even though they had completed all the required tasks. When they asked for an explanation, they were simply told they "weren't ready," with no clear path for advancement.
- Another person shared that as a Black queer and disabled individual, they felt the need to hide parts of their identity in order to be taken seriously in job applications and workplaces.

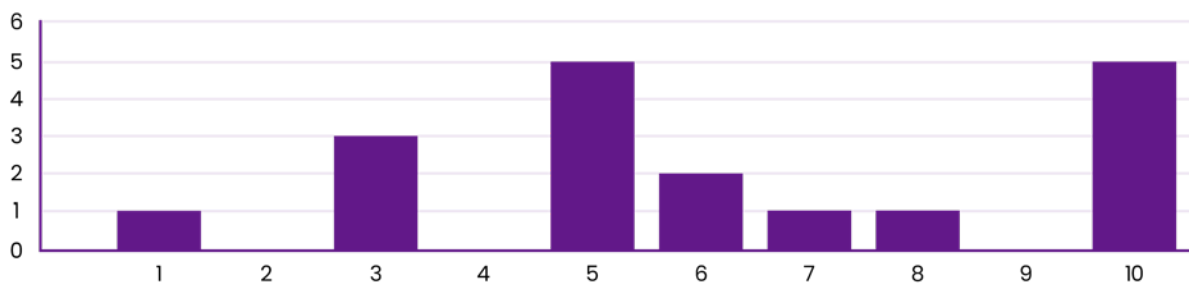
Challenges for Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ Entrepreneurs

Many participants turned to self-employment as a way to escape workplace discrimination but lacked access to financial resources to sustain their businesses. Many participants identified as experienced entrepreneurs, with some having over five years in business. However, they faced significant barriers, including:

- Grants and funding were difficult to access. Many wanted to learn about grant writing but struggled to find support.
- Many queer business spaces in Edmonton are overwhelmingly white, making it difficult for Black vendors to participate. A QTBIPOC market once existed but shut down due to burnout, as organizers were also managing other mutual aid and harm reduction responsibilities within the community.
- Mentorship opportunities were rare. Many expressed the need for peer mentorship programs in business and other fields.

Housing

I have access to stable and safe housing in Edmonton



The findings around housing highlighted several critical issues faced by participants, with many struggling to find affordable, safe, and accessible living spaces. Many participants shared experiences of racial profiling, rent hikes as a means of eviction, and discrimination from landlords.

Affordability and Discrimination

Some participants reported not being able to afford Edmonton's cost of living, forcing them to stay with family outside the city.

"I don't live in Edmonton but I've not been able to afford it so I live with my family outside of the city."

Others' shared experiences of landlords openly discriminated against Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ renters:

- One person was interrogated about their gender and sexual orientation before being allowed to rent.
- Another was questioned about their income sources and incarceration history (yet had never experienced the prison-industrial complex, or been arrested).
- A non-binary renter had their rent increased by \$500 in an attempt to push them out.
- A person visiting a queer-serving organization for assistance said they were assumed to be a newcomer seeking newcomer services, even though they lived here for a long time.

"Open discrimination in leasing offices, including being asked if I earn money legally, being pressed on my incarceration history (I've never been arrested/charged) and some folks straight up asking my ethnicity then making notes when it's confirmed my partner and I are Black."

"My landlord interrogated me to make sure I wasn't queer or trans, especially before allowing [me] to live where I am now".

For many, these experiences made housing feel unstable and unsafe.

"Finding accessible and independent housing is near impossible, finding inaccessible housing is possible but I worry if my blackness will feel threatening or if my queerness will be offputting. Sometimes it feels if I can hide my queerness I will, I can't hide my blackness as a dark skin person."

Aging Concerns

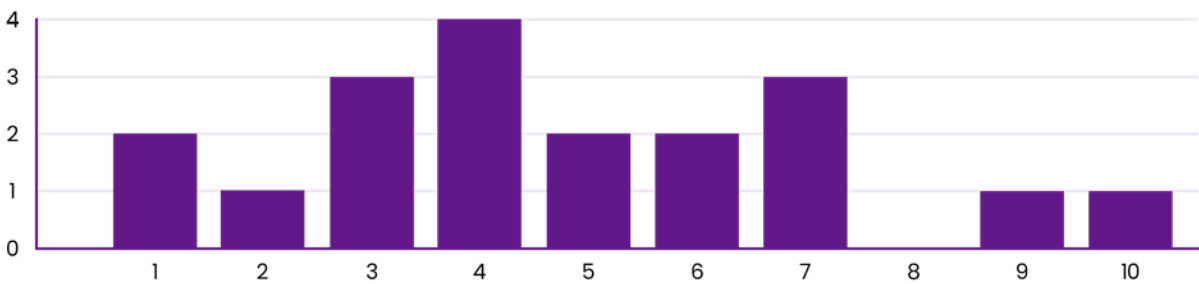
Participants expressed concerns about aging safely in a queer-affirming space, highlighting the lack of long-term housing solutions for aging Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ individuals.

"[I want to see myself] grow old here, loved here."

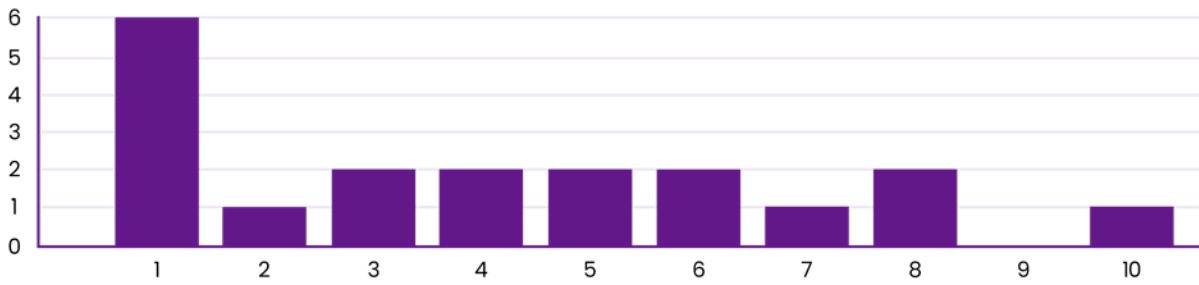
Health Care and Mental Wellness

Although there were high ratings when it came to knowing and understanding themselves well, many participants felt that they did not have access to safe and affirming health care, mental health care and/or wellness in Edmonton.

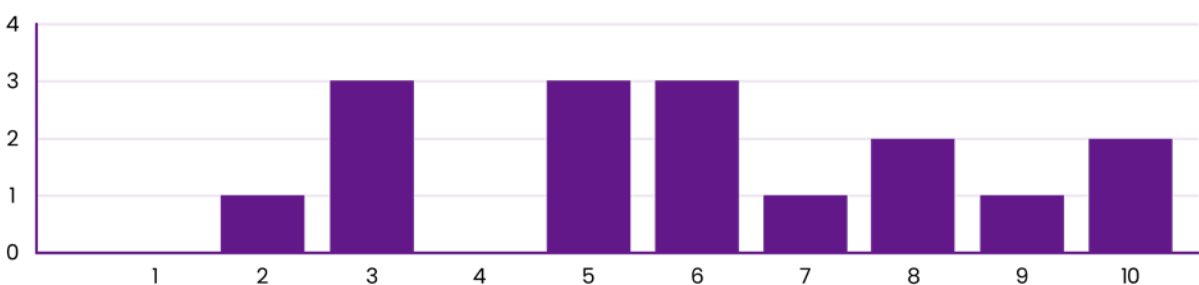
I have access to safe and affirming health care in Edmonton



I have access to safe and affirming mental health care and wellness in Edmonton



I have access to safe and culturally relevant HIV and Sexually Transmitted and Blood Borne Infections testing services and resources



Medical Racism and Barriers to Care

Participants described experiencing medical racism, including being misdiagnosed, dismissed, or given inadequate pain management. These experiences contribute to medical distrust and prevent many from seeking timely care.

- One participant was diagnosed with diabetes just by appearance and later found out they never actually had the condition.
- A trans person experienced mismanagement of hormone treatment because their doctor didn't account for how hormone levels differ in Black bodies.
- A woman in menopause was denied gender-affirming hormone therapy and forced to pay out-of-pocket at a private clinic, despite her doctor's office housing a public menopause clinic that could have helped her.

"[I'd like] mental health services [that are] confidential and non judgemental."

The high cost of therapy and lack of publicly funded options make mental health care inaccessible to many Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ individuals. Participants expressed interest in alternative healing practices, such as group therapy, peer support networks, and Afrocentric wellness programs.

Lack of Black 2S/LGBTQIA+-Affirming Health Professionals

"I would love to see anything specifically for queer or trans Black folks, many Black mental health professionals just tolerate queerness but aren't really encouraging us to love and be fully ourselves."

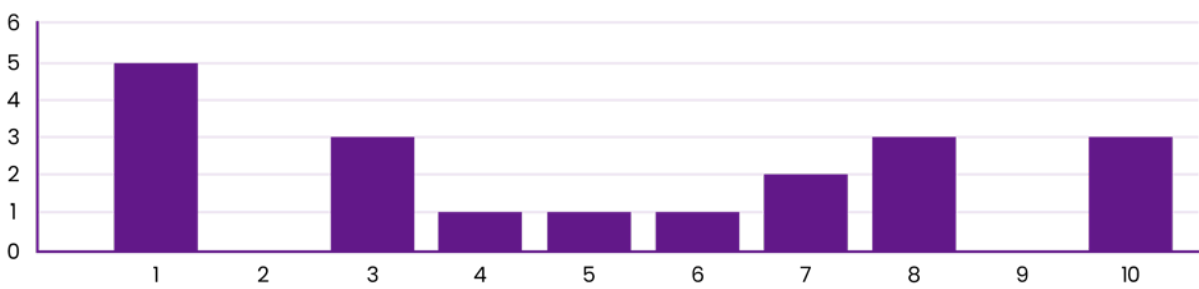
Finding a doctor who understood both Blackness and queerness was nearly impossible. Many had to choose between a Black doctor who might not understand trans identities and a white queer-affirming doctor who might not understand anti-Black medical racism.

"I have found that it's difficult to find Black AND queer/trans inclusive health care professionals, so I have to pick which aspect of my identity I want to affirm. i.e. do I want a non-Black doctor who might not understand the nuances of Blackness and how we are treated by the healthcare system, or do I want a Black doctor who might not be aware of the nuances of being trans (specifically trans) and queer? This is the dilemma I have faced regularly finding any kind of health and wellness care/support."

It was noted that some Black therapists claim to be queer-friendly but fail to provide genuinely affirming care. One participant accesses therapy from a Black, queer-affirming provider in Calgary, partly because they could not find a Black, queer-affirming provider in Edmonton.

A Vision for Black Futures

I feel hopeful about my future as a Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ person in Edmonton



The vision for a healthy, happy, and thriving future for Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ people in Edmonton is deeply rooted in community, safety, and true belonging. At its core, it’s about access to *“Third spaces for every stage of life (young adults; adults; elders)”* where people can simply be themselves and be actively cared for, where Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ voices are not just included but centered.

“[I] would love to see more of us, and for existing queer spaces to be more aware of how their whiteness impacts the spaces they’re in/create.”

Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ residents want to live safely and peacefully. Safety is about being able to walk down the street without *“feeling nervous someone will antagonize us”*—to exist without the constant weight of vigilance. It’s about seeing a future in Edmonton where we grow old, are loved, have spaces to gather, to rest, to grow food, share tea, and build legacies. It’s about seeing Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ ancestors honoured and represented in everyday life, knowing that their contributions are acknowledged and woven into the city’s history.

Recommendations

Community is the heartbeat of transformation, resilience, and collective well-being. The African principle Ubuntu *“I am because we are”* centres the interconnectedness of humanity, emphasizing that true progress is rooted in relationships, shared responsibility, and mutual care.³ When we approach community-based solutions through an Afrocentric lens, we recognize that solutions must emerge from the lived experiences, values, and wisdom of the people they serve.

True transformation happens when communities are not just consulted but are the architects of their own development. By embracing Ubuntu as both a philosophy and a framework, we move beyond transactional interventions toward holistic, human-centered approaches that honour history, culture, and the sacred power of collective action.

“We need people like you to spearhead more things, white people can never understand our struggle like our own people can.”

Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ people in Edmonton have always existed, contributed, and built vibrant communities despite systemic exclusion. From Black Pride parades to intergenerational mentorship programs, these are possibilities waiting to be realized. With community-driven initiatives, policy changes, and collective action, Edmonton can become a city where Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ people are not just seen, but celebrated.

³ City of Toronto. (2023, February). UBUNTU Framework. <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/8b1b-CABR-Website-Ubuntu-Framework01252023.pdf>

The call for better services and programming in Edmonton's Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ community is loud and clear: people want spaces where they can exist without feeling like outsiders, where their needs are prioritized, and where they don't have to fight for a seat at the table. Many are looking for community-driven, Black-led initiatives that reflect their experiences rather than spaces that try to lump all BIPOC together while centering whiteness in practice.

"Services specifically made for Black Queer people in mind. There are plenty "BIPOC" but our experiences differ so much."

There is a desire for intentional Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ safe spaces where people can simply show up and be themselves without feeling like "the only one." There's a strong push for drop-in centres where people can relax, read a book, have coffee, and connect with others in an affirming environment.

The following list is from members of Edmonton's Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ community:

Community and Cultural Spaces

- Establish a Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ cultural hub offering:
 - Social events, educational workshops, and peer support groups.
 - Skill-building programs, a library, café, community rooms, and family-friendly spaces.
 - A drop-in centre where individuals can relax, connect, and access resources.
- A YEG Black Pride Parade.
- Regular Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ artistic and cultural events outside of Black History Month.
- Ensure queer organizations address anti-Blackness within their spaces.
- Encourage cultural communities to confront queerphobia and be more inclusive.
- More Black leadership in mainstream queer organizations.

Regular and Inclusive Gatherings

- Monthly meetups to nurture connection and community.
- A Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ newcomer/welcome group to introduce new residents to safe spaces.
- Intergenerational meetups connecting Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ elders and youth for mentorship.
- A Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ digital hub to improve community connections without relying on mainstream social platforms.

Sober and Low-Energy Social Events

- Café meetups, book clubs, movie nights, and crafting circles.
- Tabletop gaming, arts and crafts, picnics, cookouts, and potlucks.
- Sober-friendly spaces featuring meditation groups, reading circles, and community libraries.

Creative and Cultural Events

- Art, dance, and history workshops for self-expression and education.
- Crafting events like paint nights, quilting, collage-making, and mural projects.
- Music and open mic nights purely for enjoyment.
- Community gardens and urban farming programs for food sovereignty and skill-sharing.
- Repair cafés for learning practical skills like fixing appliances and tailoring clothes.
- Drag and makeup classes, writing workshops, and movement-based arts year-round.
- More Queer Caribbean events to celebrate Black Caribbean 2S/LGBTQIA+ cultures.
- Amplification of Black-led events to keep the community informed and engaged.

Safety, Wellness, and Mutual Support

- Self-defense classes and legal rights workshops to navigate discrimination.
- Inclusive workshops for disabled Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ individuals.
- Black and Indigenous community events focused on food, medicine, and land.
- Queer-friendly aging spaces for Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ individuals to grow old in affirming communities.

Nightlife and Social Spaces

- Queer-friendly bar nights with music curated for Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ individuals.
- More investment in Black queer-centered spaces beyond nightlife.

Education and Skill-Building

- Black-led tutoring programs to support students and future generations.
- Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ history classes to preserve and celebrate 2S/LGBTQIA+ stories.
- Financial literacy programs to promote long-term stability.
- Career mentorship and networking programs connecting professionals, students, and emerging leaders.
- Certification support to help individuals advance in their careers.
- Black-focused “adulting” classes covering taxes, career planning, and life skills.

Employment and Entrepreneurship

- A Black business network or directory, business incubators, and mentorship programs or circles to support entrepreneurship.
- A job board for inclusive employers hiring Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ individuals.
- Stronger mentorship networks to navigate systemic barriers in the workforce.
- More Black leadership within queer organizations to ensure diversity initiatives are meaningful.
- Funding for Black-led queer initiatives, rather than white-led nonprofits tokenizing diversity.
- Queer markets that actively prioritize Black vendors.
- More Black networking events to strengthen professional and personal connections.
- More grants and funding for Black-owned businesses, especially those serving queer communities.



Housing and Safety

- Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ housing initiatives and tenant support programs to ensure access to stable housing.
- Black queer-led neighbourhood watch groups to counteract hate groups and foster safety.
- Legal advocacy for tenants fighting discrimination or unjust evictions.
- A housing network connecting people with queer-friendly rental opportunities.
- Emergency financial support (e.g., “first and last month’s rent” fund) for housing security.

Health Care and Mental Wellness

- Training for healthcare professionals to improve cultural competency.
- A directory of Black and queer-affirming therapists and service providers.
- Community-based wellness programs incorporating and led by African and Indigenous healing queer professionals.
- Support for self-testing hormones to ease access barriers in healthcare.
- Affordable gender-affirming care and more financially accessible therapy options to ensure equitable care and reduce medical gatekeeping.
- A mental health care fund to help cover therapy and diagnostic costs.

Appendix

A. Edmonton Survey

Introduction

Zetna Collective is a community organization that aims to foster positive life experiences for Black, African, and Caribbean 2S/LGBTQIA+ individuals in Edmonton. We are conducting this survey to grasp the needs and experiences of Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ people in Edmonton. The survey should take 10-15 minutes to complete. We highly appreciate your input. All feedback is anonymous. At the end of the survey you will have the opportunity to enter a draw for a chance to win one of ten \$25 gift cards! If you have any questions, please contact hello@zetnacollective.ca

This survey is for Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ people living or working in Edmonton. Please confirm your eligibility before proceeding:

Do you identify as Black, African, and/or Caribbean?

- Yes
- No

Do you identify as queer and/or trans?

- Yes
- No

Do you live or work in Edmonton?

- Yes
- No

What are the first three characters of your postal code?

Demographic Information

The following questions are to grasp the diversity of Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ people in Edmonton. All questions are optional.

What is your age?

How do you identify your race, ethnicity and/or cultural background?

How do you identify your gender?

How do you identify your sexual orientation?

Do you identify with the gender you were assigned at birth?

- Yes
- No

What languages do you speak?

Do you identify as a person with disabilities?

- Yes
- No

What is your status in Canada?

- Canadian citizen
- Permanent Resident
- Newcomer
- Refugee / Asylum Seeker
- Other: _____

How long have you lived in Canada?

- Less than 2 years
- 2 - 5 years
- 5 - 10 years
- 10 years or longer

Have you experienced barriers in any of the following areas as a Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ person in Edmonton?

- Employment
- Education
- Housing
- Health Care
- Mental Health and Wellness
- Social and Recreational
- Other: _____

Employment, Education, and Housing

The following questions are to grasp current employment, education and housing needs for Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ people in Edmonton and gaps in services and programming. Please answer what you feel comfortable answering.

I feel able to access employment resources (1 being completely disagree, 10 being completely agree)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

I feel safe in my place of education and/or employment (1 being completely disagree, 10 being completely agree)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

I have access to stable and safe housing in Edmonton (1 being completely disagree, 10 being completely agree)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

Use this space to share more about your experiences in employment, education and housing in Edmonton:

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Health Care, Mental Health, and Wellness

The following questions are to grasp current health care, mental health, and wellness needs for Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ people in Edmonton and gaps in services and programming. Please answer what you feel comfortable answering.

I know and understand my skills, knowledge and experiences well (1 being completely disagree, 10 being completely agree)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

I have access to safe and affirming health care in Edmonton (1 being completely disagree, 10 being completely agree)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

I have access to safe and affirming mental health care and wellness in Edmonton (1 being completely disagree, 10 being completely agree)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

I have access to safe and culturally relevant HIV and Sexually Transmitted and Blood-Borne Infections testing services and resources (1 being completely disagree, 10 being completely agree)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

What health care, mental health and wellness services and programming (or changes to services and programming) would you like to see for Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ people in Edmonton?

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Social and Recreational

The following questions are to grasp current social and recreational needs for Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ people in Edmonton and gaps in services and programming. Please answer what you feel comfortable answering.

Rate the following questions, with 1 being strongly disagree, 10 being strongly agree.

I feel connected with Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ communities in Edmonton (1 being completely disagree, 10 being completely agree)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

I feel a sense of belonging with Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ communities in Edmonton (1 being completely disagree, 10 being completely agree)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

What are your experiences in Edmonton’s queer spaces?

What are your experiences within your cultural community?

What kind of services and programming (or changes to services and programming) would you like to see in Edmonton?



The Future

The following questions are to grasp how you feel about the future and what you imagine for the future.

I feel hopeful about my future as a Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ person in Edmonton (1 being completely disagree, 10 being completely agree)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

What cultural, artistic, and creative activities would you like to see for Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ people in Edmonton?

What is your vision for a healthy, happy, and safe future for Black 2S/LGBTQIA+ people in Edmonton?

B. Africentric Land Acknowledgement



Reconnaissance africentrique du territoire

En tant que personnes de descendance africaine/kémétique, nous offrons cette reconnaissance des terres en solidarité avec les peuples autochtones de la Grande île de la Tortue avec les efforts et les intentions délibérés envers la décolonisation.

Nous reconnaissons que la grande île de la Tortue, n'était jamais destinée à être possédée. Nous reconnaissons que la plupart des terres confiées aux peuples autochtones, étaient partagées par choix, mais trop souvent prises de force.

Nous reconnaissons que le colonialisme historique ainsi que celui en cours, a conduit à la situation actuelle où l'on donne des reconnaissances du territoire, plutôt que territoire lui-même.

En tant que personnes d'origine africaines/kémétiques, plusieurs d'entre nous sommes venus ici par choix, tandis que beaucoup sont arrivés historiquement ici par force.

Nous reconnaissons les complexités par lesquelles, on nous avait promis des terres Qui ne nous ont jamais été donné, Par ceux qui n'avaient jamais eu le droit de donner.

En tant que personnes d'origine Afrikaine, nous reconnaissons la Grande Ile de la Tortue qui nous soutient, exprimons une profonde gratitude aux peuples des Premières Nations, Métis, et Inuit, et nous nous engageons à honorer la dignité et le divin qui, en fin de compte, nous relie tous.

~ ©par Kaye Johnson (traduit par Kaniasta)
14 octobre, 2020

Africentric Land Acknowledgement

As people of Afrikan descent, we offer this land recognition in solidarity with the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island in the efforts and deliberate intentions toward decolonization.

We acknowledge the land of Turtle Island, that was never meant to be owned. We recognize that most of the land that was entrusted to the Indigenous peoples, was in some cases shared by choice, but all too often taken by force.

We recognize the historical colonialism, and the ongoing colonialism, that has led to the present-day situation where land acknowledgements are offered in place of land.

As people of Afrikan descent, many of us have come here by choice, while many are here as a result of historical force.

We acknowledge the complexities where we were promised land that was never given, By those whose it never was to give.

As people of Afrikan descent, we acknowledge the land of Turtle Island that sustains us, express deep gratitude to its Indigenous peoples, and pledge to honour our dignity and divinity that ultimately connects us all.

~ ©by Kaye Johnson
14 October 2020

**Reconnaissance africentrique du territoire
(version courte)**

En tant que personnes de descendance
africaine/kémétique,
nous offrons cette reconnaissance des terres en
solidarité avec les peuples autochtones de la Grande île
de la Tortue avec les efforts et les intentions délibérés
envers la décolonisation.

En tant que personnes d'origine Afrikaine/kémétique,
nous reconnaissons la Grande Ile de la Tortue qui
nous soutient,
exprimons une profonde gratitude aux peuples des
Premières Nations, Métis, et Inuit,
et nous nous engageons à honorer la dignité et le divin
qui, en fin de compte, nous relie tous.

~ ©par Kaye Johnson (traduit par Kaniasta)
14 octobre, 2020

**Africentric Land
Acknowledgement (short
version)**

As people of Afrikan descent,
we offer this land recognition in solidarity
with the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island
in the efforts and deliberate intentions
toward decolonization.

As people of Afrikan descent,
we acknowledge the land of Turtle Island
that sustains us,
express deep gratitude to its Indigenous
peoples,
and pledge to honour our dignity and divinity
that ultimately connects us all.

~ ©by Kaye Johnson
14 October 2020

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