

Ottawa Black Mental Health Coalition QUARTERLY NEWS

GROWING STRONGER TOGETHER



The Ottawa Black Mental Health Coalition is celebrating our 5th anniversary in 2026!

OBMHC Fifth Anniversary Special Edition Newsletter

WHERE WE BEGAN: BUILDING TRUST, CARE, AND MOMENTUM TOGETHER

The Ottawa Black Mental Health Coalition (OBMHC) grew from a clear and urgent community need: African, Caribbean, and Black communities in Ottawa **deserved** mental health supports that felt safe, culturally relevant, accessible, and rooted in trust. A [2020 Ottawa Public Health report](#) helped put words and data to what many in our communities already knew from lived experience: too many people were facing barriers to care, gaps in culturally responsive services, and a lack of confidence in mainstream systems.

From the beginning, OBMHC has brought people together across sectors—clinicians, community leaders, academics, service providers, grassroots organizers, and residents—around one shared belief: our communities are strongest when care is shaped with us, by us, and for us.

Some of the Coalition's earliest work focused on creating practical, community-based pathways to support, including:

- *Free short-term counselling*, offered through the African, Caribbean, and Black Community Counselling portal at [Counselling Connect/Walk-in Counselling](#), beginning in 2021.
- *Peer support programming* grounded in lived experience, delivered through dedicated peer support professionals in partnership with Somerset West CHC, Canadian Women of Colour Leadership Network, and Southeast Ottawa CHC.

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OTTAWA BLACK MENTAL HEALTH COALITION AT 5

Five years in review

- professional [Community of Practice](#) that helped clinicians strengthen culturally responsive care, with support from United Way East Ontario.

These early initiatives became the foundation for who we are today: a Coalition that combines direct community support with systems advocacy, and that continues to insist that wellness, dignity, and belonging must be at the center of mental health care.

Growing Together: Recognition, Partnership, and Community Leadership

As the Coalition grew, so did the recognition of what our members and partners were building together. Each award and acknowledgement belongs to the many people who showed up, shared knowledge, opened doors, and made space for Black mental health to be discussed with honesty, care, and hope.

- [Community Builder Award \(2022\)](#) – OBMHC was recognized for helping hold systems accountable and for advancing equitable, culturally appropriate mental health services for Black communities in Ottawa.
- Partner Appreciation Award – In 2024, OBMHC was honoured by the Islam Care Centre during a special Ramadan Iftar, recognizing the Coalition's collaboration with organizations serving Ottawa's Muslim communities.
- [CAPSA 2025 Community Allyship Award](#) – OBMHC was recognized by CAPSA at the 2025 WOW Festival for its commitment to advancing substance-use health.
- In 2025, the Coalition was also recognized at the grand opening of the **Lukasa Library Project**, a community initiative that expands access to Black history and African diasporic literature in Ottawa. Through book donations and community engagement, OBMHC helped support a resource that connects wellness, culture, memory, and identity.



OTTAWA BLACK MENTAL HEALTH COALITION AT 5

Five years in review

One of the most meaningful ways this growth has taken shape is through [Black Mental Health Week](#). What began as a community-led space for conversation, healing, and awareness has become a central pillar of OBMHC's work. Over the past five years, partners have hosted nearly 50 events and welcomed community members to the Black Mental Health Week Community Expo, featuring speakers, entertainment, and access to more than 30 mental health and wellness service providers.

Through the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath, the Coalition continued to adapt, connect, and serve despite funding and operational pressures. That resilience reflects the dedication of members, partners, volunteers, and staff who kept showing up for community when support was needed most.

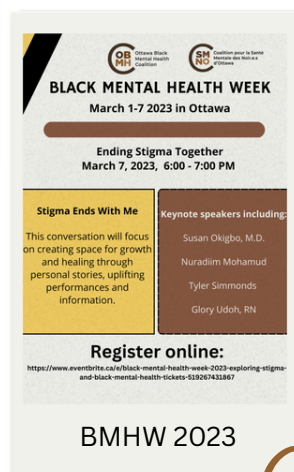


BMHW 2021

Five Years of Black Mental Health Week



BMHW 2022



BMHW 2023



BMHW 2024



BMHW 2025



Honouring the People Behind the Work: OBMHC Working Group Awards Five years in review

The work of OBMHC has always been powered by people. Our members and partners give their time, energy, skills, and relationships to strengthen the Coalition's reach and impact. The Working Group Awards were created to honour just a few of the people and organizations whose generosity, expertise, and commitment have helped move this work forward through challenges, uncertainty, and change.

[Working Group Recognition Award Winners \(2024\)](#)

- Advocacy and Systems Change: Amoy Jacques, Co-CREATH Lab, U of Ottawa
- Mental Health Awareness: Myriam Georges-Estigène, Thoughtful Therapist
- Mental Health Supports: Cecile Kasongo, Britannia Woods Community House
- Community Collaborator Award: Canadian Women of Colour Leadership Network and The Royal Ottawa – training provided to 25 Black peer workers

[Working Group Recognition Award Winners \(2025\)](#)

- Advocacy and Systems Change: Roselin Dixon, Ottawa Rape Crisis Centre
- Community of Practice Award: Nora Elmi, Nora Elmi Counselling and Wellness
- Mental Health Awareness: Nagad Hersi, Somerset West CHC
- Mental Health Supports: Shukri Hussein/Bille Abdalla, Somali Centre for Family Services
- Community Collaborator Award: TheBrotherhood Coalition – He Leads Series for men.

To all of our award recipients: thank you. Your leadership, compassion, and persistence remind us why this work matters. We look forward to celebrating the 2026 Working Group Award winners at the Sankofa Leadership Summit on October 28.

Deepening Our Impact: Black Mental Health Week and Community Capacity

By 2025, OBMHC had become an important gathering space in Ottawa's mental health landscape—one that brings grassroots voices, service providers, public institutions, and community leaders into conversation with one another.

The 2025 Black Mental Health Week theme, For Community, By Community, reflected what has always been at the heart of the Coalition: healing must be community-led, culturally grounded, and connected to the realities of people's lives.

Each year, the OBMHC Community Expo offers a visible and welcoming place where residents can meet service providers, hear from speakers, learn about resources, and experience the power of being together in care and conversation.

- Multi-sector panel discussions with public health and community leaders including past speakers Gregory Fergus, Celina Caesar-Chavannes, Jude Mary Cénat, PhD. (V-TRaC Lab), Yodit Girmay (Mehari Centre), Joanne Robinson (Flo's Seniors) Reuben Nashali (Active Newcomer Youth-SPCO) and more than 40 community advocates and people with lived experience.
- Integration of arts, movement, and meditation as healing modalities including dance performances by Kahmaria Pingue and Suzan Richards, vocal performances by Heavenly Voices Choir, spoken word performances by Jamal the Poet, and Featured Artist in 2026, singer-songwriter N'nerjie.



OBMHC Highlight Initiatives: Capacity Building

Ongoing to present

Since 2021, the Coalition has also invested in strengthening the people and organizations who serve our communities every day. Capacity-building initiatives have included:

- 120 hours of group clinical supervision for counsellors on the ACB portal on Counselling Connect
- 34 hours of Community of Practice workshops and training for Black and allied clinicians support more than 80 professionals in the region
- Best practices and training for member organizations who support specific groups including LGBTQ residents (2021), newcomers (2022-2025), women (2025), and people recovering from addiction (2026)
- Information sessions to support organizations from sector leaders including Black Legal Action Centre (2022), Liben Gebremichael – TAIBU Health Center (2023), Gina Leslie – Sustainability and Fundraising Specialist (2023).

In 2024, OBMHC's Executive Board approved \$9,000 for a Capacity Building Pilot that connected member organizations with contracted specialists in grant-writing, communications, and print advertising. Members welcomed the pilot, which helped address some of the real pressure points faced by grassroots organizations working with limited resources and big community responsibilities.

Looking Ahead With Courage: 2026 and Beyond

In 2026, OBMHC reached a milestone that belongs to all of us:

- 5th Anniversary of Black Mental Health Week (BMHW) – celebrating five years of convening partners, sharing expertise, and empowering Black communities across Ottawa.
- Official Proclamation of Black Mental Health Week in Ottawa (2026) – the City formally recognized the week, signaling the Coalition's growing policy and civic impact.

The 2026 theme, *Substance Use and Suicide: Breaking the Silence*, invited our communities into honest and compassionate conversations about issues that are too often hidden by stigma, grief, fear, or isolation.

- Black Mental Health Week launched on March 2, 2026, marking its fifth anniversary and bringing together OBMHC members, partners, providers, and residents to celebrate strengths, share expertise, and uplift Black communities across Ottawa.
- The theme created space to talk about substance use health and suicide with care, cultural humility, and a strong focus on connection, support, and community awareness.
- OBMHC also introduced Quieter Connections, offering one-on-one peer or system navigation support, and featured an N'nerjie, an Ottawa-based artist whose work connected mental health, culture, and healing.

Beyond events and programs, OBMHC continues to contribute to systems innovation through regional tables and partnerships, including its work with the [Ottawa Guiding Council on Mental Health and Addictions](#). This work has helped inform culturally responsive approaches to mental health and substance-use crisis response in Ottawa's priority neighbourhoods. In 2024, OBMHC representatives also participated in the [Coroner's Inquest into the death of Abdirahman Abdi](#) and continue to support the implementation of the Inquest's 57 recommendations.



OBMHC Message of Gratitude

Gratitude for ongoing work

Thanks to the success of the Capacity Building Pilot, the City of Ottawa provided OBMHC with an additional one-time investment of \$80,000 to expand supports for eligible member organizations. In 2026, members can access dedicated help with grant-writing, communications, website updates, and printed promotional materials through OBMHC contractors. This summer, the Organizational Needs Assessment will help shape future capacity-building supports. In November, in partnership with Ottawa Black Coalition, members will also have access to three lunch and learn workshops designed around sustainability, governance, and fundraising.

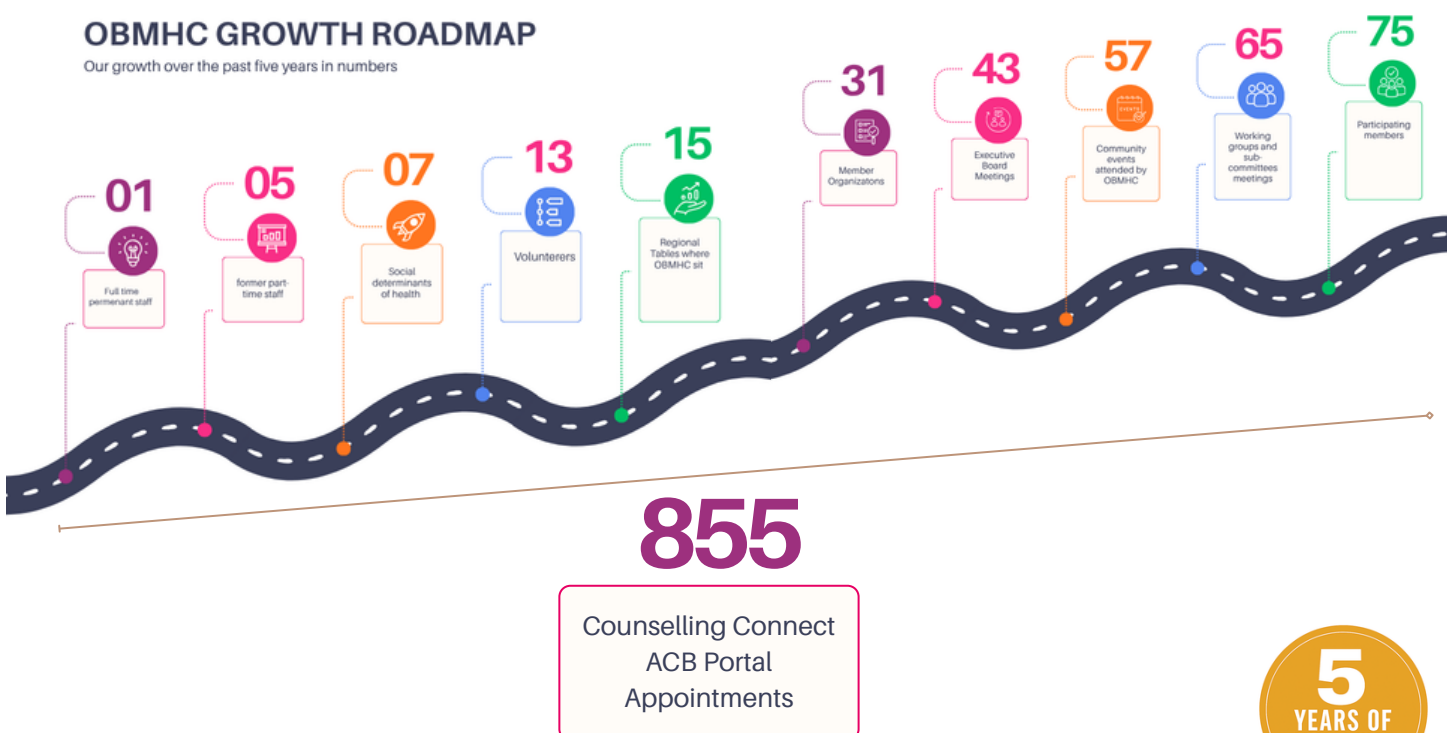
To mark our 5th year milestone, we will be hosting a leadership summit bringing together OBMHC members and community partners on **October 28, 2026** for a focused space to reflect, reconnect, and collectively shape the next chapter of our work. The **Sankofa Leadership Summit** will provide an opportunity to reflect on our shared journey, reaffirm priorities, and identify pathways for meaningful impact over the next five years. Calendar invitations will be sent to the representatives from both the Ottawa Black Mental Health Coalition and collaborating partners at the Ottawa Black Coalition.

A Message of Gratitude

From 2021 to 2026, the Ottawa Black Mental Health Coalition has grown from a collective response to systemic gaps into a trusted community voice for culturally grounded mental health care, collective healing, and systems change. That growth has been possible because of the people who believe in this work: community members who share their stories, partners who bring resources and relationships, volunteers who give their time, clinicians who deepen their practice, and leaders who continue to advocate for change. Together, we are reshaping how mental health is understood, discussed, and supported within Ottawa and within our communities.

OBMHC GROWTH ROADMAP

Our growth over the past five years in numbers



Acknowledging OBMHC Executive Board Leadership

Thank you for your leadership

With deep gratitude, we acknowledge the past and present members of the Ottawa Black Mental Health Coalition Executive Board. Their leadership has helped shape and sustain the Coalition's vision over the past five years. Through strategic guidance, professional expertise, and steadfast advocacy, Executive Board members have strengthened OBMHC's role as a trusted voice for African, Caribbean, and Black mental health in Ottawa. Their commitment has supported community-led solutions, advanced systems change, and kept the voices, experiences, and wellness needs of Black communities at the center of the Coalition's work.

*Papa-Ladjiké Diouf
Bo Turpin
Jude Mary Cénat
Shannon Black
Mildred Ababio
Jacklyn St. Laurent*

*Mohamed Sofa
Mugisho Mulimbwa
Olivier Engoute
Hector Addison
Sophia Jacob
Amoy Jacques*

*Saint-Phard Desir
Ruby Edet
Hodan Aden
Suzanne Obiorah
Buuma Maisha
Kadra Good*

Special acknowledgement for our amazing administrative backbone and host organization Somerset West Community Health Centre. Thank you for 5 years of unwavering support and commitment to improving the mental health and wellbeing of Black residents in Ottawa.



Acknowledging OBMHC Members and Community Partners

Thank you for 5 years of collaboration

In the true spirit of ubuntu, the Coalition is because you are – this work is the culmination of your dedication, efforts and advocacy. We are stronger together, and growing stronger every year.

ACB Wellness Resource Centre
African Canadian Association of
Ottawa
Amethyst Centre Ottawa
Black Health Alliance
Britannia Woods Community
House
Canadian Women of Colour
Leadership Network
Canadians of African Descent
Health Organization
CAPSA
Catholic Centre for Immigrants
Co-CREATH Lab - University of
Ottawa
Community Development
Framework
Centre Le Cap

Flo's Seniors
Jaku Konbit
Jewish Family Services
Le Conseil Économique et
Social d'Ottawa Carleton
Le Regroupement
Ethnoculturel des Parents
Francophones de l'Ontario
Mehari Centre
Muslim Family Services of
Ottawa
Mythra Counselling
Ottawa Local Immigration
Partnership
Ottawa Public Health
Ottawa Rape Crisis Centre

Parent Resource Centre
Parents for Diversity
PLEO
Queens Connected
Restore Medical Clinics
SALUS Ottawa
Social Planning Council of Ottawa
Somali Centre for Family Services
The Brotherhood Coalition
The Royal
Upstream Ottawa
V-TRaC Lab – University of Ottawa
United for All Coalition
South East Ottawa CHC
Ottawa Guiding Council for Mental
Health and Addictions
CCI Ottawa

GROWING STRONGER TOGETHER



For upcoming community activities and events taking place between August 2026-October 2026, click [here](#) or visit the Coalition's blog.

Wellness Day Event - hosted by Restore Medical Clinics	Aug 15, 2026	Ottawa Cancer Foundation 1500 Alta Vista Dr.
Dapo Agoro Fun Day -hosted by the Dapo Agoro Foundation for Peace	Aug 15, 2026	190 Glen Park Dr, Gloucester, ON K1B 5A3
WOW Festival - hosted by CAPSA	Sep 11, 2026	The Royal 1145 Carling Ave
Aging Well Ottawa Fair - hosted by Ottawa Public Health	Oct 7, 2026	Ron Kolbus Lakeside Centre, 102 Greenview Avenue
Sankofa Leadership Summit -hosted by OBMHC	Oct 28, 2026	1805 Gaspe Ave. Vanier
Us Now Conference - hosted by Queens Connected	Oct 17, 2026	<u>Bayview Yards</u> 7 Bayview Station Rd, Ottawa ON K1Y 2C5



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Catherine Yorgoro
Grants and Writing
Support



Ro Nwosu
Administrative Support



Mahmoud Ibrahim
Website Management



Fatima Baasher
Social Media Engagement

The Coalition sincerely thanks current and past contractors who have supported the advancement of several initiatives. Thank you for your hard work and dedication!

Thank you for 5 years of collaboration and community impact!