



# Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers

## OCSWSSW Equity and Inclusion Data Initiative Discussion Paper

### Land Acknowledgement

The Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers is situated on the traditional land of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples. The College's office is in the "Dish With One Spoon Territory", a treaty between the Anishinaabe, Mississaugas and Haudenosaunee that bound them to share the area and protect the land in the spirit of community. We acknowledge the history of this meeting place and are grateful to have the opportunity to live and work on this land.

Today, the province of Ontario is home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. Each nation is unique in their world views, language and histories, and we continue to recognize and reflect upon the important work ahead. We ask you to join us in honouring this history and in moving forward in partnership and collaboration as we learn and unlearn together.

### Commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

The Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers is committed to advancing diversity, equity and authentic inclusion. Actively addressing and challenging discrimination is a responsibility we all have. At the College we commit to this ongoing work through examining and revising organizational processes, resources and materials through the lens of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging as well as developing additional resources and materials through this lens.

The College's ongoing mandate is to protect the public through the regulation of social work and social service work. We must always consider and reflect upon our role as regulator with respect to the important issues of diversity, equity and inclusion. We recognize there are limitations to our ability to fully address systemic barriers within our regulatory role and the professions of social work and social service work and are committed to engaging, partnering and collaborating with other organizations committed to and actioning changes. Together we can go beyond organizational limitations for better outcomes.

### Background

The Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (the College) is the regulatory body for social workers and social service workers in Ontario. The College currently regulates over 28,000 social workers and social service workers across the province. Our ongoing mandate is to protect the public from unqualified, incompetent and unfit practitioners.

The College recognizes that advancing diversity, equity and inclusion and addressing discrimination are important parts of its public protection mandate. To achieve these goals, we believe we must first better understand the current landscape, including possible barriers and diversity of representation. We want to ensure we are making decisions that are guided by lived experiences and authentic representation.

On September 9, 2022, College Council passed a motion to approve in principle an Equity and Inclusion Data Policy to collect demographic data from registrants on a voluntary basis. It is anticipated this initiative will be launched in the 2024 renewal season, which will begin in late November 2023. This initiative is part of actioning our commitments to diversity, equity and inclusion.



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In determining our approach to this initiative, we were guided by the constitutional and legal principles of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, the *Ontario Human Rights Code* (the “Code”), Ontario’s *Anti-Racism Act* and the Canadian Institute for Health Information. Additionally, we are committed to contributing to meeting the calls to action by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, especially the call to collect data so that progress towards Truth and Reconciliation can be effectively measured.

The Equity and Inclusion Questions will be taken from existing data sources (where such data sources exist), for example the Canadian Census and the Anti-Racism Data Standards as set out in the *Anti-Racism Act*. Although some of these data sources are not wholly inclusive, using existing questions will allow for the data collected by the College to be measured and compared to a degree with the broader Ontario public. We also recognize that there are different ways of knowing and gathering knowledge within many cultures.

We acknowledge that the data will not provide a complete or perfect picture of the demographics of all social workers and social service workers, since registrants can choose whether or not to answer the Equity and Inclusion Questions – it is simply a starting point. For additional information on how the data will be used, please see the below section entitled “How the data will be used.”

After the launch of this initiative, we will continue to engage with registrants and other stakeholders as part of our commitment to continual improvement.

## **Purpose**

The Equity and Inclusion Data initiative is based on the fundamental principle that only what is measured can be effectively understood and improved. The initiative was developed to help identify and monitor systemic racism and discrimination within the professions of social work and social service work.

Through the collection of this data we aim to:

- Provide insight into the degree to which the diversity of the Ontario public is reflected in College registration.
- Highlight any disparities and systemic barriers which will support evidence-based decision-making.
- Understand what the demographics of Ontario social workers and social service workers looks like in terms of self-identified dimensions of diversity.
- Identify and monitor systemic racism and discrimination for the purpose of advancing and promoting equity.

As we move forward with this initiative, we look forward to sharing more on how these goals will be achieved.

## **How the data will be used**

We acknowledge our influence and our responsibility towards the Ontario public and the professions of social workers and social service workers. We recognize there are limitations within our regulatory role to fully address systemic barriers and are committed to engaging, partnering and collaborating with other organizations dedicated to actioning changes for better outcomes.



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Initially, our intention is to use the data collected to:

- obtain a benchmark of the demographics of College registrants;
- provide insight into the degree to which the diversity of the Ontario public is reflected in College registration; and
- identify gaps and disparities between our registrants and the Ontario public.

Once we have this benchmark, we can then use the data collected to address systemic barriers and inform equity initiatives to better serve the Ontario public.

Within our role as a regulator, we can use the data collected to action initiatives such as:

- Developing practice supports and programs that will assist registrants in better serving communities. This could include resources such as cultural competency and cultural humility training.
- Expanding our government relations efforts to include recommendations that will promote equity at the educational level – for example, we could highlight the need for the government to consider offering additional scholarships and financial supports for individuals from communities that are underrepresented in the professions of social work and social service work.

By collecting, analyzing and reporting on the data we will have the opportunity to engage, partner and collaborate with other organizations who can advocate for changes that are beyond our organizational limitations. We are excited to:

- Partner with organizations, such as the Ontario Association of Social Workers and the Ontario Social Service Worker Association who have the capability to advocate for more diverse representation within the professions.
- Collaborate with employers to assist them in finding ways to identify strategies around better serving their communities, as well as addressing the disparities within their organizations.
- Collaborate with educators to assist them in finding ways to identify strategies to attract students from diverse backgrounds and lived experiences.

## **How the data will not be used**

We recognize that through this initiative we are inviting registrants to self-identify and share personal information. There is an inherent vulnerability that exists with disclosure and we are committed to the safety, protection and privacy of each person and the information shared with us. In addition to keeping the data in a secure system, we will never:

- Use or report the data in any way that could identify an individual registrant.
- Use the data for purposes with the intention to impact, harm or discriminate against a registrant. For example, the data will never be used in any complaints or discipline processes, or be checked against a registrant's safe practice registration requirement.
- Use or report the data to perpetuate stereotypes of specific groups.

## **Development and engagement**

Seeking multiple perspectives and embedding lived experiences into our process is important to us and to our goal of authentic inclusion. Part of our work to date has included seeking guidance, consultation and direction from a wide range of communities and organizations.



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The College worked with Uppala Chandrasekera, MSW, RSW, who was pivotal in the early development of this initiative. Uppala is the Director of Public Health at Toronto Public Health. She has developed and led the creation of equity and inclusion policies at other organizations such as the Toronto Police Services Board, Mount Sinai Hospital and the Mental Health Commission of Canada.

Additionally, we have consulted with key stakeholders including the following organizations:

- The Anti-Racism Directorate of Ontario
- The Ontario Human Rights Commission
- CAMH
- The 519
- The Alliance for Healthier Communities
- The Citizen Advisory Group

This list, while not exhaustive, provides examples of the types of key stakeholders we are engaging with in order to develop the initiative. We are continuing with further conversations in 2023, with a focus on Indigenous communities and organizations.

Feedback on this initiative from College registrants is very important to us and we will be inviting them to share their insights in the spring of 2023.

## **Authority and responsibility to collect data**

We believe it is our social responsibility to collect this data. As the provincial regulator of social workers and social service workers, we acknowledge that the College is privileged in our ability to be the only organization that is in the position to collect demographic data on Ontario social workers and social service workers. We are committed to collecting this data in a respectful, responsible and equitable way.

Under the Ontario *Human Rights Code*, the College is legally authorized and has a legal responsibility to collect this data. The Code allows for the collection and analysis of demographic data, as long as the data is collected for purposes consistent with the Code, such as to monitor discrimination, identify and remove systemic barriers, address historical disadvantage and promote equity. Under the Code, an organization that chooses not to collect data in situations where data collection is allowed may not be able to argue that it did not discriminate under the Code.

## **Method and procedures**

Once the initiative is launched, registrants will be invited to share sociodemographic data on a voluntary basis when they renew their registration each year.

- The Equity and Inclusion Questions will be completely voluntary; registrants who choose not to answer any of these questions will still be able to complete the renewal process.
- We will invite registrants to share only as much as is comfortable. They can choose to answer some, all or none of the questions and may opt out at any time by either choosing “prefer not to answer” for multiple choice questions or typing in “N/A” for open-ended questions.
- No program, service or benefit will be withheld if registrants do not answer the questions.
- Data will be stored in a secure system and access to the data will be limited to a small number of College staff.
- Data provided by each registrant will be kept confidential.



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- Data provided will not be associated with a registrant’s profile.
- Registrants can withdraw their consent and request that the College delete or stop using their information at any time.

Once collected, the College will analyze and report on the data.

- The data will be reported on only in the aggregate – registrants will not be able to be identified by the data they choose to submit.
- Data reporting will not perpetuate stereotypes of specific groups.

## References

In developing the Equity and Inclusion Data initiative, the College consulted a wide range of resources and references. A non-exhaustive list of the resources are listed below.

Anti-Racism Directorate of Ontario. (2021). “Data Standards for the Identification and Monitoring of Systemic Racism.” Retrieved from: <https://www.ontario.ca/document/data-standards-identification-and-monitoring-systemic-racism/introduction>

Ontario Human Rights Commission. (N.d.). “Racism and Racial Discrimination Data Collection Fact Sheet.” Retrieved from: <https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/racism-and-racial-discrimination-data-collection-fact-sheet>

Ontario Human Rights Commission. (2009). “Count Me In: Collecting Human Rights-Based Data.” Pg. 8-9. Retrieved from: [https://www3.ohrc.on.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/Count\\_me\\_in%21\\_Collecting\\_human\\_rights\\_base\\_d\\_data.pdf](https://www3.ohrc.on.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/Count_me_in%21_Collecting_human_rights_base_d_data.pdf)

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). “Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action.” Pg. 6. Retrieved from: [https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Calls\\_to\\_Action\\_English2.pdf](https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf)