

Community Conversations: Building a Healthier York Region Together

A new collaboration between the Newmarket African Caribbean Canadian Association (NACCA) and Addiction Services Central Ontario (ASCO) is opening the door to important discussions on mental health and addictions in York Region.

The initiative, called Community Conversations, is designed to bring Black residents together to share lived experiences, challenges, and ideas in order to shape a more inclusive and responsive future for care.

Running through August and September, the series welcomes Black youth, adults, caregivers, and elders to participate in both in-person and virtual sessions, as well as focused circles and anonymous feedback forms.

These conversations will take place at different local venues around York Region and aim to engage about 15-20 people per session, creating a comfortable and open space for dialogue.

The goal is to create a community-informed strategy that reflects the voices and needs of Black residents while supporting Ontario's broader Black Health Plan.

"This project is rooted in trust, collaboration, and action," says Jerisha Grant-Hall, Executive Director of NACCA. "We want to create a path toward Black mental health and addictions care that is culturally grounded, community-driven, and systemically responsive."

Founded in 2018, NACCA has become a cornerstone of community engagement in York Region. The Black-led, Black-focused, and Black-serving organization is known for advancing racial equity through programming in education, youth leadership, food security, cultural celebration, and mental health advocacy. Its strong presence extends beyond Newmarket, with many Aurora residents actively engaging in its programs.

This latest project continues NACCA's tradition of putting people first and amplifying voices that too often go unheard.

For ASCO, the collaboration underscores a shared mission.

"Equity in mental health and addictions care must be informed by those with lived experience," says Penny Marrett, ASCO's Executive Director. "Partnering with NACCA ensures Black communities are not only heard but actively leading the process of designing systems that will serve them today and in the future."

To ensure accountability, data from these conversations will be collected by LogicalOutcomes, a research consulting company, which will then provide a summary report to Addiction Services Central Ontario.

The findings will guide the service providers across York Region to provide equitable and culturally safe Mental Health & Addictions Programs to Black residents of York Region.

For towns like Aurora, Community Conversations represents more than just dialogue. It's a chance to strengthen inclusivity and ensure health services reflect the needs of all residents.

Those who wish to participate can visit naccacommunity.ca and click the "Black Community Consultation" tab to learn more and register.

By Brittany GreniLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter