



BLACK LEGAL  
ACTION CENTRE

# EMPOWERMENT TIPS

for Black LGBTQ+ Newcomers in Canada

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## Housing and Shelter

# Introduction

This tip sheet was developed as part of the **Black LGBTQ+ Newcomer Leadership and Capacity-Building Project**, a four-week workshop series that brought together community members to share lived experiences, name systemic barriers, and design practical solutions for safer, more inclusive services in Ontario. The project was made possible through the support of the **Black Legal Action Centre (BLAC)**, whose dedication to fighting anti-Black racism and advancing racial justice has ensured that the voices of Black LGBTQ+ newcomers are centred and amplified.

This guide helps Black LGBTQ+ newcomers learn their rights and take action against discrimination. It covers:



Each section has advice on **“Know Your Rights,” “Your Responsibilities,” “Steps You Can Take,” “Support Services to Contact,”** and example **“Language You Can Use”** to speak up.



# Disclaimer

The information provided in this tip sheet is intended to help you understand your rights and offer guidance in common situations. It is not legal advice and should not be relied upon as a substitute for professional legal or medical counsel.

If you need specific advice or support, please contact a lawyer, healthcare provider, or relevant professional. Every situation is unique, and the steps you take may depend on the details of your case.

This tip sheet is designed to empower you with knowledge and is meant to be a tool to assist you in navigating difficult situations. Always seek personalized support when needed.

# Understanding Your Rights and Laws

- **Know your rights:** Take time to learn about protections under the **Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms** and the **Ontario Human Rights Code** (e.g., protections against discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity/expression).
- **Stay informed about laws:** Be aware of federal, provincial, and municipal laws. For example:
  - **Federal laws:** immigration requirements, criminal code.
  - **Provincial laws:** employment standards, tenancy laws, health coverage rules.
  - **Municipal by-laws:** noise, smoking, recycling, pet ownership.
- **Understand your immigration process:** Refugee claimants and newcomers are responsible for following Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) rules, attending appointments, and submitting truthful information.
- **Respect community rules and norms:** In community spaces, this includes respecting others' safety and dignity, not harassing others, and following posted guidelines.
- **Seek reliable information:** Do not rely solely on word-of-mouth or social media. Always confirm rules and rights with trusted organizations (e.g., The 519, settlement agencies, legal clinics).
- **Ask questions:** If you don't understand your rights or responsibilities, it's your duty to ask for clarification from a service provider, lawyer, or official agency.



# Housing and Shelter

Finding safe and respectful housing is your right. These tips help you protect yourself and respond to discrimination in rental and shelter settings.

# Know Your Rights

Under Ontario law, everyone has the right to equal treatment in housing without discrimination on grounds like race, colour, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression. This means landlords and shelter staff cannot refuse you housing, evict you or treat you unfairly because you are Black and/or LGBTQ+. For example, a rule requiring a high credit score can be illegal if it shuts out newcomers – landlords cannot refuse to rent to someone just because they have no Canadian credit history. Harassing or threatening tenants is also illegal. Ontario law specifically says a landlord (or anyone working for them) must not harass, threaten or invade your privacy. Tenants have the right to live free from harassment by their landlord or by other tenants; the landlord (or shelter) must stop such harassment if it happen.

## Find out more:

- Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) – Guides on housing rights and protections against discrimination.
  - [ohrc.on.ca/en](http://ohrc.on.ca/en)
- Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation (CERA) – Tenant rights, discrimination support, and advocacy.
  - [housingrightscanada.com](http://housingrightscanada.com)
- Steps to Justice (CLEO) – Clear legal information about tenant/landlord issues.
  - [stepstojustice.ca/legal-topic/housing-law](http://stepstojustice.ca/legal-topic/housing-law)



# Your Responsibilities

- **Respect community living rules:** Follow quiet hours, guest policies, and cleanliness standards in shared spaces.
  - **Maintain your space:** Keep your room or apartment clean and safe. Report issues promptly.
  - **Pay on time:** Make rent and utility payments by the due date. Ask for help early if you struggle.
  - **Respect neighbours:** Avoid harassment, discrimination, or disruptive noise.
  - **Know lease agreements:** Read and understand your lease or shelter agreement before signing.
  - **Report problems:** Let staff or landlords know about pests, repairs, or safety issues quickly.
  - **Protect property:** Avoid damaging your unit or common areas. Report accidents honestly.
  - **Follow safety rules:** Participate in fire drills, follow evacuation procedures, and keep exits clear.
  - **Guests and visitors:** Take responsibility for any guests allowed into your unit or shelter.
  - **Respect diversity:** Treat fellow residents and staff with dignity regardless of race, gender, or background.
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# Steps You Can Take

**Document everything.** Write down dates, times, locations, what was said or done, and witnesses for any unfair treatment. Keep copies of texts or emails and photos of damages or notices. This record will help if you make a complaint

**Speak up (if safe).** If you feel safe, calmly point out the problem. For example: “I feel I’m being treated differently because I’m LGBTQ+. That is discrimination under the Human Rights Code, and I need it to stop.” Sometimes reminding a landlord or staff of your rights makes them change. If face-to-face is not safe, skip to other steps.

**Report to higher-ups.** If it continues, complain to a supervisor or manager. Send a clear email or letter describing what happened and citing policies or rights. For shelters, ask for the shelter’s complaint process or speak to a coordinator. For landlords, write to the property manager or owner. Always keep a copy of your complaint

**Call the police if in danger.** If a landlord or shelter encounter becomes physically threatening or violent, call 9-1-1. The police can protect you, remove trespassers, or help if you fear for your safety. (We understand police interactions can feel risky for Black LGBTQ+ people – only call them if you believe you’re in danger.)

**Get outside help.** You don’t have to fight this alone. Legal clinics and agencies can advise you. In Ontario, you can apply to the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario (HRTO) for housing discrimination. You don’t need a lawyer, but the Human Rights Legal Support Centre (HRLSC) can give free advice or representation. Call HRLSC at 1-866-625-5179. Remember there is usually a 1-year time limit from the last incident to file. Also, if a landlord evicts you or harasses you, the Landlord and Tenant Board (LTB) can enforce tenant rights under the Residential Tenancies Act. You usually must apply to the LTB within 1 year of the incident. Tenant clinics or community legal services can help you decide if you should go to the LTB, the HRTO, or both.

**File a human rights complaint for shelters.** Remember, shelters are covered by human rights law too. If staff or other residents are discriminating against you and internal complaints don’t work, you can apply to the HRTO for discrimination in services. This could result in orders to change shelter practices and possibly compensation.



# Support Services to Contact

## **Canadian Centre for Housing Rights (CCHR)**

Offers free info on tenant rights and housing discrimination. Phone: 1-800-263-1139.

## **Human Rights Legal Support Centre (HRLSC)**

Free legal advice for Ontario human rights cases. They can help with filing an HRTO claim. Phone: 1-866-625-5179 (TTY: 1-866-612-8627).

## **Legal Aid Ontario – Housing Clinics**

Call Legal Aid at 1-800-668-8258 (TTY: 711) and ask for a referral to a housing/tenant clinic or tenant hotline (e.g., Toronto Tenant Hotline 416-921-9494). They give free legal help to low-income tenants.

## **Municipal Shelter/Social Services**

Check with your city. In Toronto, call 311 for shelter oversight or to reach a shelter supervisor. Toronto has City Shelter Standards and a City Human Rights Office (416-392-8383) for complaints. Other cities have similar offices or helplines – look on your city's website.

## **Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention (Black CAP) – Refugee Program**

In Toronto, Black CAP helps African, Caribbean and Black LGBTQ+ newcomers (including those with HIV) find housing and navigate shelters. Phone: 416-977-9955 ext. 250. Email: [info@black-cap.com](mailto:info@black-cap.com).

## **211 Helpline**

Dial 2-1-1 anywhere in Canada for free referrals (including housing help, tenant support, emergency shelter, and legal clinics). Available 24/7 in many languages.

# Language You Can Use

Using clear, calm language helps show you know your rights. Here are some examples:

**To a landlord:** “Under the Ontario Human Rights Code, you cannot refuse to rent to me or threaten me because I’m Black or LGBTQ+. I deserve equal treatment. I want to resolve this professionally, or I’ll file a formal complaint.”

**At a shelter – harassment by staff or others:** “I have the right to be in this shelter without harassment. Your comments are not okay. I need to speak to a supervisor about this.” (If refused, add: “What is the complaint process? I will be following up.”)

**If asked unfair questions:** If a landlord asks about your sexuality or background, you can say: “That question isn’t relevant to renting the place. I can answer questions about my income and references, but decisions can’t be based on sexual orientation or race.”

**Requesting safe placement:** “For my safety, I need to be placed in accommodation that matches my gender identity. Forcing me elsewhere would be discriminatory. I appreciate your help with this request.”

**At a shelter – on pronouns:** “My name is [Name] and my pronouns are [she/her or he/him or they/them]. It’s important you respect that. Ontario’s human rights law protects people from being misgendered in services.”

By using phrases like these, you show you know your rights and are ready to act. This often makes landlords or staff correct their behaviour immediately.



# Conclusion

These aren't just sections of a tip sheet – they are tools you can carry with you in daily life as you navigate Canada as a Black LGBTQ+ newcomer. You now have concrete examples of how to handle discrimination in housing, healthcare, work, immigration, and public spaces. You have names of laws that protect you (like the Ontario Human Rights Code, Canada Health Act, Occupational Health and Safety Act, etc.) and agencies that can support you (from the Human Rights Legal Support Centre to Black Legal Action Centre to community programs).

Armed with this knowledge, we hope you feel **more confident and empowered** to assert your rights and seek help when needed. Discrimination and bias can be deeply hurtful, but they thrive in silence and ignorance. By knowing how to respond and who to call, you break that silence and challenge the ignorance, not just for yourself, but for others who will come after you.

Keep this tip sheet handy; maybe save it on your phone or in your email. You might not need all of it now, but situations can arise unexpectedly. When they do, take a deep breath, recall these tips, and remember: **you have every right to be here, to be yourself, and to be treated with dignity**. Canada's laws are, in theory, on your side, and there are many people in the community on your side too. You are not alone in facing these battles.

Stay strong, and never hesitate to **stand up for yourself** and also to **reach out for help**. As a Black LGBTQ+ newcomer, you are part of multiple communities; the immigrant community, the Black community, the LGBTQ+ community; and there are allies in all of them ready to fight alongside you. Your existence and success here matter; your rights matter. Welcome to Canada, and may you thrive as your authentic self!

*Prepared with contributions from current Canadian laws, community resources, and human rights guidelines to ensure accuracy as of 2025.*

## Contact Information

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**The 519** is a Toronto-based 2SLGBTQ+ community centre dedicated to advocacy, service provision, and creating inclusive spaces for queer and trans communities, newcomers, and marginalized groups.

**Phone** 416-392-6874

**Website** [The519.org](http://The519.org)

**Email** [Info@The519.org](mailto:Info@The519.org)

**Address** 519 Church St,  
Toronto, ON M4Y 2C9



**The Black Legal Action Centre (BLAC)** is a non-profit community legal clinic in Ontario that provides free legal services to address anti-Black racism and advance the rights and dignity of Black communities.

**Phone** 416-597-5831

**Website** [blacklegalactioncentre.ca](http://blacklegalactioncentre.ca)

**Email** [info@blac.clcj.ca](mailto:info@blac.clcj.ca)

**Address** 180 Dundas St W unit 1509,  
Toronto, ON M5G 1Z8

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