



Police-involved deaths on the rise across Canada

Publicly accessible living online database tracking police-involved deaths launched

Database website: <https://trackinginjustice.ca/>

Ottawa, Ontario – At least 704 people have been killed or died during police use of force encounters in Canada since 2000. This information, and much more, is newly available to the public in an accessible online database tracking police-involved deaths in Canada. The database, launched today, is part of a collaborative project by a team of researchers and front-line organisations that includes information on date, location, police service, level of force used, and when known, age, race, and gender of the victims. It is based on publicly available sources including government reports and reliable Canadian media sources.

Alexander McClelland, an Assistant Professor, Institute of Criminology and Criminal Justice, at Carleton University, who is leading the project, stated, “Due to ongoing systemic issues with a lack of access, transparency, and consistency in reporting data on police-involved deaths and killings across Canada, tracking this issue is an imperfect and challenging process. While our data is limited, our findings indicate a steep rise in deaths. Police killed 69 people 2022 setting a grim record with the highest number of known police use of force deaths in one year.”

Despite vital grassroots efforts to keep track of police violence, there has been no national government or civil society body tracking police-involved deaths in Canada. The database, which fills a critical gap in the information people in Canada can access, allows us to identify some troubling statistics:

- There has been a 66.5% increase in deaths associated with a police use of force when comparing 2011-2022 with the previous ten-year period. Some of this long-term trend may be due to increased access to information. But access to information alone does not explain the striking increase in the past 4 years.
- There are persistent racial disparities. Black and Indigenous people comprise around 8.7% of the population but account for 27.2% of police-involved shooting deaths.
- The RCMP, the OPP, and the Sûreté du Québec are implicated in a high number of deaths.

Joanne McIsaac, an advisor on the Tracking (In)Justice project has been calling for a national database of police-involved deaths since her brother was killed during an interaction with Durham Regional Police in 2013. McIsaac states, “In a context of increased calls for police accountability and concerns over the rising costs of policing, we need data to answer basic questions about police violence and help reinforce calls for accountability.”

Tanya L. Sharpe, a lead on the Tracking (In)Justice project and Founding Director of The Centre for Research & Innovation for Black Survivors of Homicide Victims (The CRIB) and Associate Professor at the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto, said “a historic and persistent lack of transparent data is one of the key factors that have prevented researchers, policymakers, advocates, and communities most impacted by police violence from effectively calling attention to police use of force and police-involved deaths.”

Within the overall increase in deaths there are persistent racial disparities. While a significant number of unknowns exist when it comes to identifying the race of the victim, Black and Indigenous peoples



are over-represented in the numbers of police use of force-involved deaths. Sharpe notes, “this data underscores the present-day realities of racial injustice and the disproportionate deaths experienced by racialized and marginalized peoples at the hands of police. Although, according to the 2016 census data, Black people make up only 3.8 percent of the total population, they are represented in 8.1 percent of police-involved deaths.”

Christa Big Canoe, Legal Director of Aboriginal Legal Services, and partner on the Tracking (In)Justice project, says, “these numbers, these deaths, must be situated in a context of systemic discrimination within the criminal justice system. While we have known anecdotally that Indigenous people are over-represented in police use of force-involved deaths in Canada, this data provides us a clear picture of ongoing colonial racial injustice. While 5.1 percent of people living in Canada are Indigenous, 16.2 percent of people killed in police involved deaths are Indigenous.”

A main contributor to the rise in police-involved deaths is a notable increase in the number of people shot by a firearm during interactions with police. Brenda McPhail, Canadian Civil Liberties Association, a partner on the Tracking (In)Justice project notes, “much of this increase has been driven by the number of people killed in connection with police shootings in Ontario, Alberta, Quebec, and British Columbia. Shooting-related deaths account for 73 percent of all police-involved use of force deaths since the year 2000 across Canada.”

Data available includes deaths that followed from any intentional police use of force, including shootings and instances where a person died after being subjected to other types of weapons (e.g., tasers, batons) or physical interventions (e.g., punches, kicks, physical holds). The project’s goal is to document all deaths that occur during police operations, as well as all deaths that occur in Canada’s jails, prisons, immigration detention, or forensic psychiatry centres. This is a living project, and we are working on expanding the information we have to help calls for greater transparency and accountability from those on the front lines of the criminal justice system.

Who we are: Tracking (In)Justice is a law enforcement and criminal justice data and transparency project. We are a collaborative partnership comprised of the Data and Justice Criminology Lab at the Institute of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Carleton University (ICCJ), the Center for Research & Innovation for Black Survivors of Homicide Victims (The CRIB) at the University of Toronto, the Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA), the Ethics and Technology Lab at Queen’s University, Aboriginal Legal Services, Empowerment Council, JusticeTrans, Maggie’s Toronto Sex Workers Action Project, and Women’s Health in Women’s Hands.

Our partnership has received funding from the Social Science and Humanities Council (SSHRC).

The Tracking (In)Justice website is designed by Loop: Design for Social Good <https://weareloop.com/>

More in-depth data & analysis: To help people understand what is possible with the online database, the project has released series of short primers on the general findings within the database, including on examining racial disparities, geographic location, the police force involved, the types of force used, as well as a backgrounder on policing in Canada. More details at the links below:

Police-involved Deaths are on the Rise, as are Racial Disparities in Canada:

A look at recent trends in police-involved deaths in Canada

<https://trackinginjustice.ca/analysis-increase-in-deaths-and-racial-disparities/>

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 23, 2023

Tracking (In)Justice: A Law Enforcement and Data Transparency Project



A Look at Police-Related Deaths by Jurisdiction and Type of Force Used:

A closer look at police-involved deaths by province and territory, and type of force used
<https://trackinginjustice.ca/analysis-jurisdiction-and-force>

Historical and Contemporary Context of Crime, Policing, Colonialism and Discrimination: *A broad review of the contemporary and historical context of policing, crime, discrimination, and colonialism in Canada*

<https://trackinginjustice.ca/analysis-crime-policing-colonialism-and-discrimination/>

Please send media requests to: Andy Crosby, andrewcrosby@cmail.carleton.ca

Project partners available for comment:

Alexander McClelland, Ph.D.

Principal Investigator, Tracking (In)Justice: A Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice Data and Transparency Project

Assistant Professor, Institute of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Faculty of Public Affairs, Carleton University

Faculty profile: <https://carleton.ca/criminology/people/mcclelland-alexander/>

Twitter: @alexmccllland

Tanya L. Sharpe, MSW, Ph.D.

Founding Director, The Centre for Research & Innovation for Black Survivors of Homicide Victims (The CRIB)

Associate Professor, Factor-Inwentash Chair in Social Work in the Global Community University of Toronto

Faculty profile: <https://socialwork.utoronto.ca/profiles/tanya-sharpe/>

The CRIB website: <https://www.the-crib.org/>

Twitter: @DrTSharpe @TheCRIBTweet

Christa Big Canoe, JD

Aboriginal Legal Services, Legal Director

Aboriginal Legal Services website: <https://www.aboriginallegal.ca/>

Twitter: @ChristaBigCanoe

Joanne Mclsaac

Tracking (In)Justice Advisor

Petition calling for national database: <https://www.change.org/p/minister-of-justice-create-a-national-database-for-police-involved-deaths-in-canada>

Twitter: @Macisaac00