



COVID-19 and Racism

P2P Conference

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ActionDignity

Our **vision** is a just and equitable society for all

Our **mission** is to facilitate the collective voice of Calgary's ethno-cultural communities toward full civic participation and integration through collaborative action


Our **values**:

- Respect for diversity
- Active citizenship and democratic participation
- Equity and social justice
- Collaboration




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COVID-19 & its Impact on Cargill Workers



**We are not all in
the same boat.**



**We are all in the
same storm.**

The Pandemic is Highlighting Inequities in our Society, Economy & Culture

Essential Workers



- * Disproportionately racialized
- * Earn minimum or low wage
- * Lack of access to basic health and safety in workplace
- Pathway to permanent residency and citizenship

*CPPA: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives



- Produce 70% of Beef in Canada, along with JBS
- April 20, 2020: largest outbreak in Canada & forced to shut down
- 945 cases among Cargill workers, another 600 in the community
- Worker concerns about virus were ignored
- Cargill Plant deemed as *essential*: Alberta Government



Diverse communities in Calgary facing discrimination over Cargill's COVID-19 cases



By [Jill Croteau](#) • Global News

Posted April 29, 2020 5:00 pm · Updated April 29, 2020 5:01 pm



WATCH: With concerns growing about COVID-19 outbreaks at Alberta meatpacking plants, so too is a troubling sentiment of racism. As Jill Croteau reports, community groups supporting members of a diverse community say their connection to Cargill is making them a target for discrimination – Apr 29, 2020



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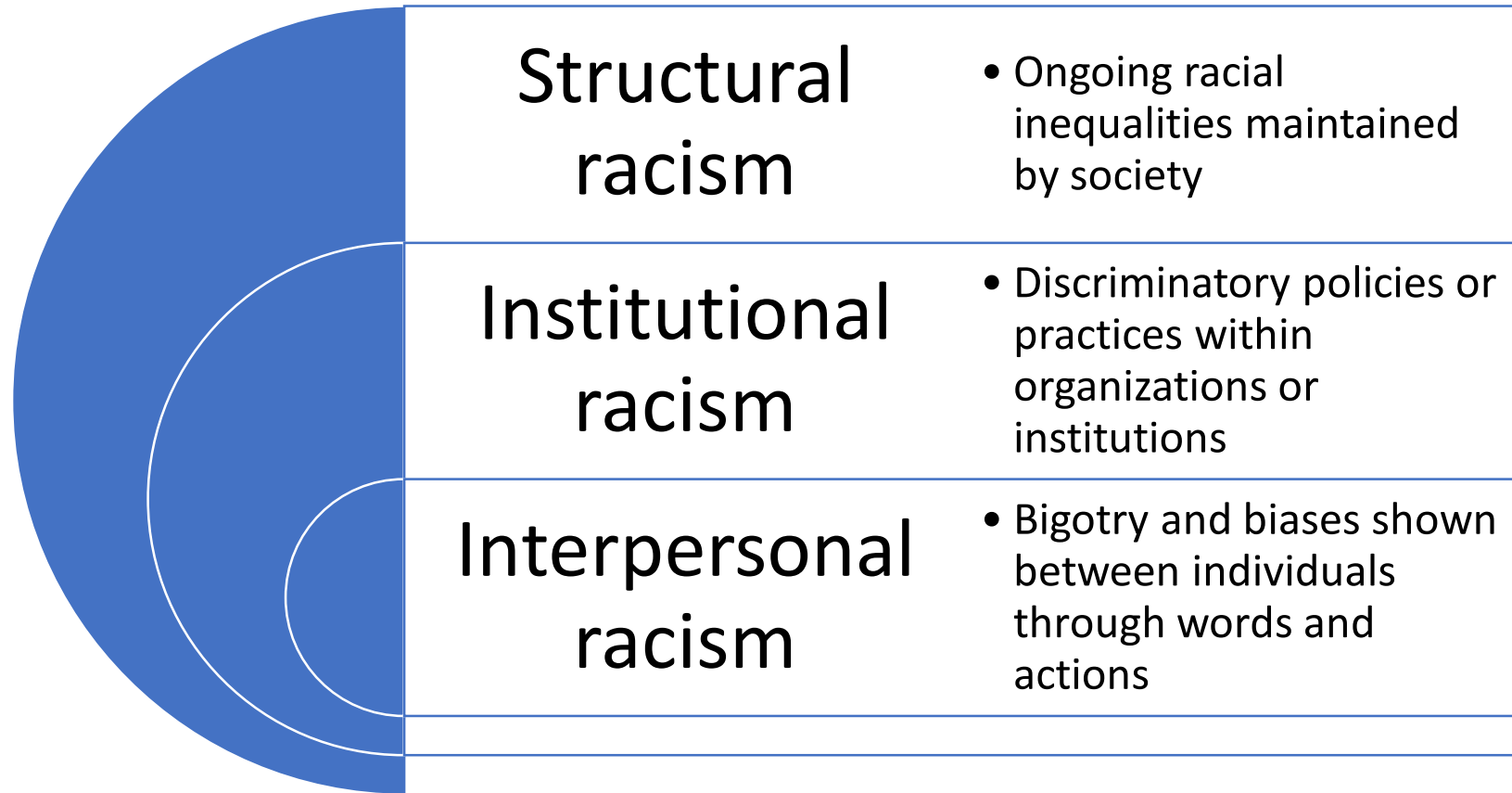
Racism & Discrimination



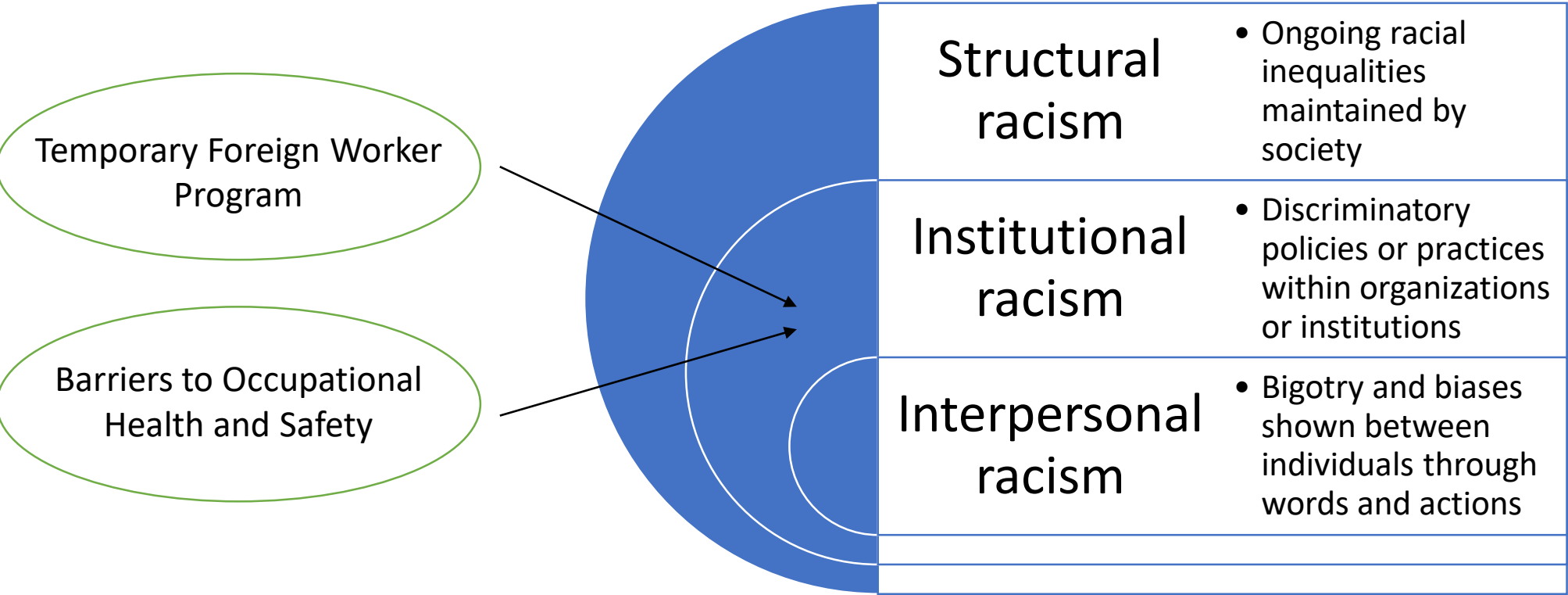
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What Racism looks like



What Racism looks like





Examples of Systemic Discrimination

**Temporary
Foreign Worker
Program**

**Difficulty
accessing
“safety
voice”**

**Barriers to
accessing
Occupational
Health and
Safety**

**Internal
responsibility
system**

Temporary Foreign Workers

Temporary foreign workers face specific disadvantages in relation to safety at work for the following three reasons:

1. Workers depend on employers for authorization to remain in Canada,
2. Workers are sometimes dependent on their employer for a referral for Canadian Permanent Residence, and
3. Should they become sick or injured, they fear losing their job, their work authorization, and being sent home.

Barriers to Occupational Health and Safety

- Occupational health and safety (OHS) system driven by something called the “internal responsibility system”
- It is a complaint-driven system where workers have to assert their rights to safety
- This system ignores the power differentials between an employer and employee which might be impacted by variables including race, immigration status, gender, length of time in Canada, age and language ability

How Systemic Discrimination Shows Up

'Death is so real': Alberta immigrant group says meat workers afraid after Cargill plant closure

BG By **Bill Graveland** The Canadian Press
Sat., April 25, 2020 | 2 min. read



Cargill:

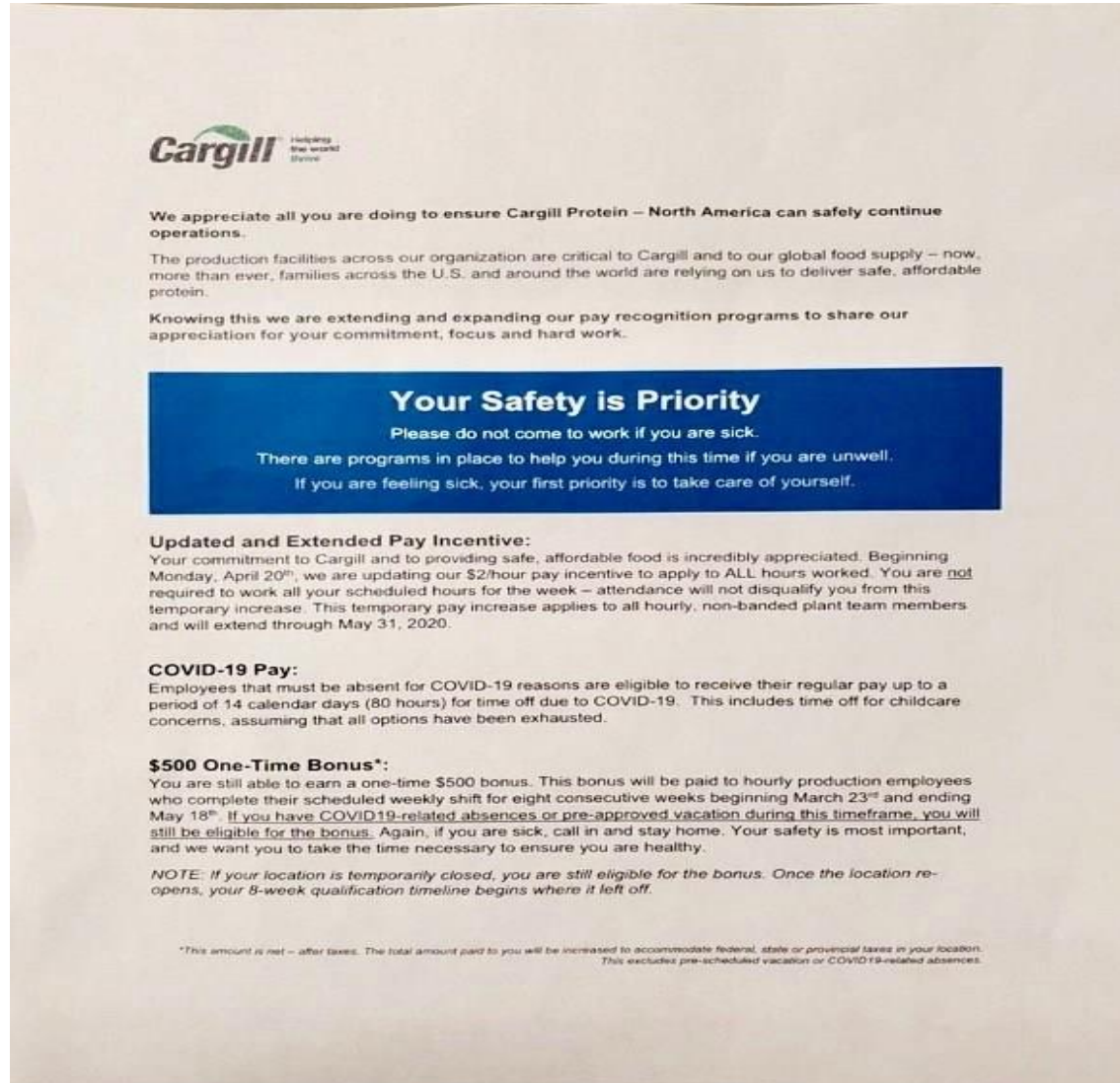
- Many workers are TFWs
- 85% of 600 surveyed afraid to return to work
- *CBC May 3, 2020*
- Fear reprisal from company, continued to go to work despite being sick



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How Systemic Discrimination Shows Up



Cargill:

- Mixed messages from the employer about what to do about COVID-19



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How Systemic Discrimination Shows Up

Cargill Meat Processing Plant

Employer failed to proactively protect worker safety and waited until it was too late



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Calgary

Benito Quesada, union shop steward, identified as 3rd death linked to Cargill COVID-19 outbreak



More than 1,500 cases have been tied to the slaughterhouse near High River

[Sarah Rieger](#) · CBC News · Posted: May 12, 2020 3:33 PM MT | Last Updated: May 12



From left to right: Benito Quesada, 51; Hiep Bui, 67; and Armando Sallegue, 71, have all died of COVID-19, with their deaths linked to an outbreak at the Cargill slaughterhouse near High River, Alta. Quesada and Bui were workers at the plant, and Sallegue was the father of a worker. (UFCW 401, Action Dignity, Arwyn Sallegue)



14-day
Closure



Workplace
Structures: Barriers



Bus pick-up and
drop off

Actions Taken

What has ActionDignity done
to address this?



Sprawlcast: Racial Dispar

How did we respond?

- ActionDignity was one of first responders that participated in the social support group along with Alberta Health Services
- Hosted online forums in different languages to connect workers to benefits and support, as well as information about Occupational Health and Safety
- We have helped amplify worker voices through local and national media
- Helped shift the conversation away from victim blaming toward a bigger conversation around systems and policy issues
- Named the issue of racism against the workers and their families
- Helped ensure culturally accessible support services for workers and families



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Recommendations

For workers'
empowerment

For workplaces

Recommendations for communities & allies

- Focus on the structural and systemic barriers to worker safety & rights- be an advocate for more equitable policies
- Understand it may be difficult for employees to voice concerns about safety – hear them when they do
- Be PROACTIVE about safety & policy issues
- Include workers' representation in decision making processes in the workplace.



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Recommendations for communities & allies

- Have clear and concise information about safety available in multiple languages, make it widely accessible
- Listen to workers' stories, issues, needs, ideas, action
- Raise awareness of & provide information about rights, policies
- Be an ally and support workers through advocacy

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References and further reading

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Alberta Workers Health Centre. (2017). New Alberta workers: Improving workplace health and safety for Temporary Foreign Workers and other new to Alberta workers. http://workershealthcentre.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/NewAlbertaWorkers_report_brief.pdf



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