


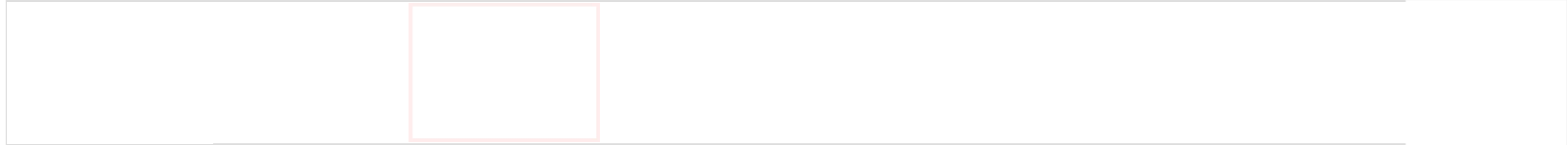
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Hate crimes in Ottawa have been increasing for years. Here are some reasons why

Ottawa police have published information regarding the type, location and targets of hate crimes between 2015 and 2022, painting a grim picture of how hate crimes occur in the capital city.

Marlo Glass

Published Nov 20, 2023 • Last updated 18 hours ago • 5 minute read

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An Ottawa Police Service cruiser sits near the National Holocaust Monument on Booth Street during the investigation of a hate-motivated incident in January 2020. PHOTO BY ERROL MCGIHON /POSTMEDIA

Hate crimes in Ottawa have indeed been more frequent since the Oct. 7 Hamas attack on Israel, but open-source data from the Ottawa Police Service show that hate crimes have actually soared in the national capital since 2015.

Police have published information regarding the type, location and targets of more than 1,300 documented hate crimes between 2015 and 2022, painting a grim picture of how they occur in Ottawa.

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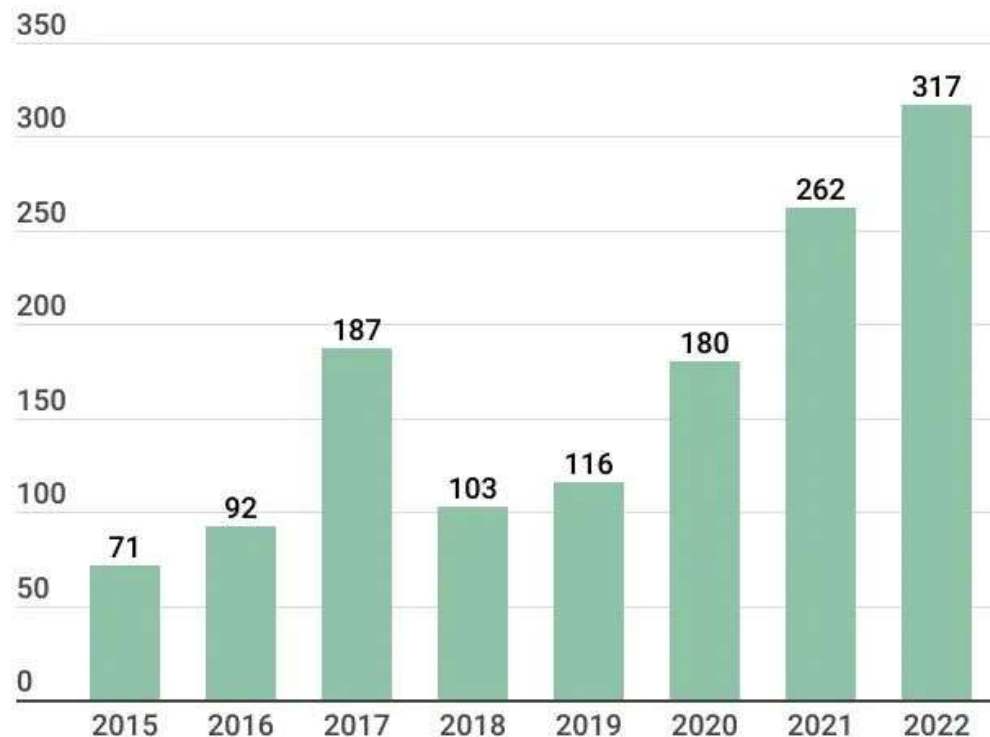
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Hate crimes committed per year



SOURCE: Ottawa Police Service Open Source Data

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Police define a hate crime as “a criminal violation motivated by hate, based on race, national or ethnic origin, language, colour, religion, sex, age, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation or gender identity or expression, or any other similar factor.”

Those crimes jumped considerably in 2021, to 262, and then again to 317 in 2022, and Ottawa police expect hate crimes to continue to rise in 2023.

This past summer, they said hate crimes had risen by 23.5 per cent compared to 2022. At that time, 158 incidents had been deemed criminal and 63 had been determined to be hate-motivated, but non-criminal. Those included 62 incidents of mischief to property, 25 threats uttered to a person, 19 level-one assaults, 15 incidents of criminal stalking or harassment and 16 incidents of mischief to cultural property. Jewish, Black and 2SLGBTQQIA+ communities were most commonly targeted.

There are several potential explanations for the rise in hate crimes in Ottawa.

1. Increased reporting

Dr. Boulou Ebanda de B'éri, a professor and research director at the University of Ottawa's department of communications, says hate crimes may be more likely to be reported than in years past, thanks in part to social media.

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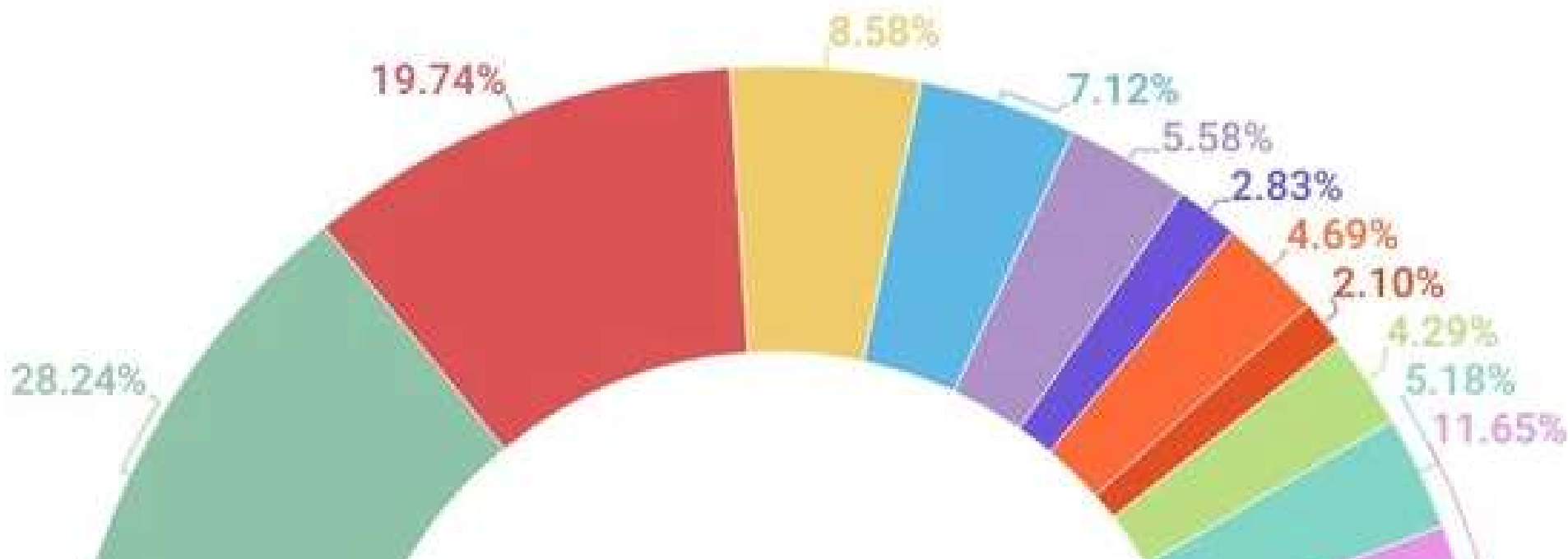
Communities can grow online and share their experiences, he said, and people also may feel more comfortable anonymously posting about hate crimes on social media, which could lead to police investigations.

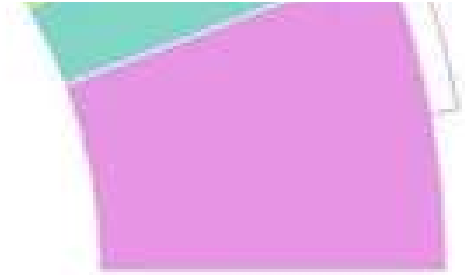
“We tend to forget social media can be a democratic space where many voiceless people can create their own community and speak out about what they're going through,” he said in an interview. “I think that's one of the reasons why we have the feeling it's growing. People have been less silenced, which is important, because of social media.”

Some hate crimes are spurred by global events, de B'éri said, pointing out the worldwide spike in anti-Asian hate crimes at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing Israel-Hamas war, which has triggered both antisemitic and Islamophobic hate crimes. But, he added, there are also hate crimes that “take place every day” and aren't connected to any single global event, like anti-Black hate crimes. Those are less likely to be reported, he said, meaning “we don't have a clear picture of what's going on.”

Most commonly targeted groups 2015-2022

- Jewish ● Black ● LGBTQIA+ ● Muslim ● Arab/West Asian
- South Asian ● East and Southeast Asian ● Other Religion
- Catholic ● Multiple Races/Ethnicities ● Other*





SOURCE: Ottawa Police Service Open Source Data



*Other includes a small percentage of hate crimes targeting other religions, children, white people, English speakers and more.

2. Antisemitism

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Nearly half of hate crimes in Ottawa target the Jewish or Black community.

Sarah Beutel, interim CEO of the Jewish Federation of Ottawa, says the “avalanche of hate” has “raised the level of anxiety” throughout the Jewish community, with institutions across the city beefing up security.

“In elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, workplaces, neighbourhoods, homes,” she said in an interview. “It’s everywhere. Incidents and languages targeting Jews are becoming normalized across Canada.”

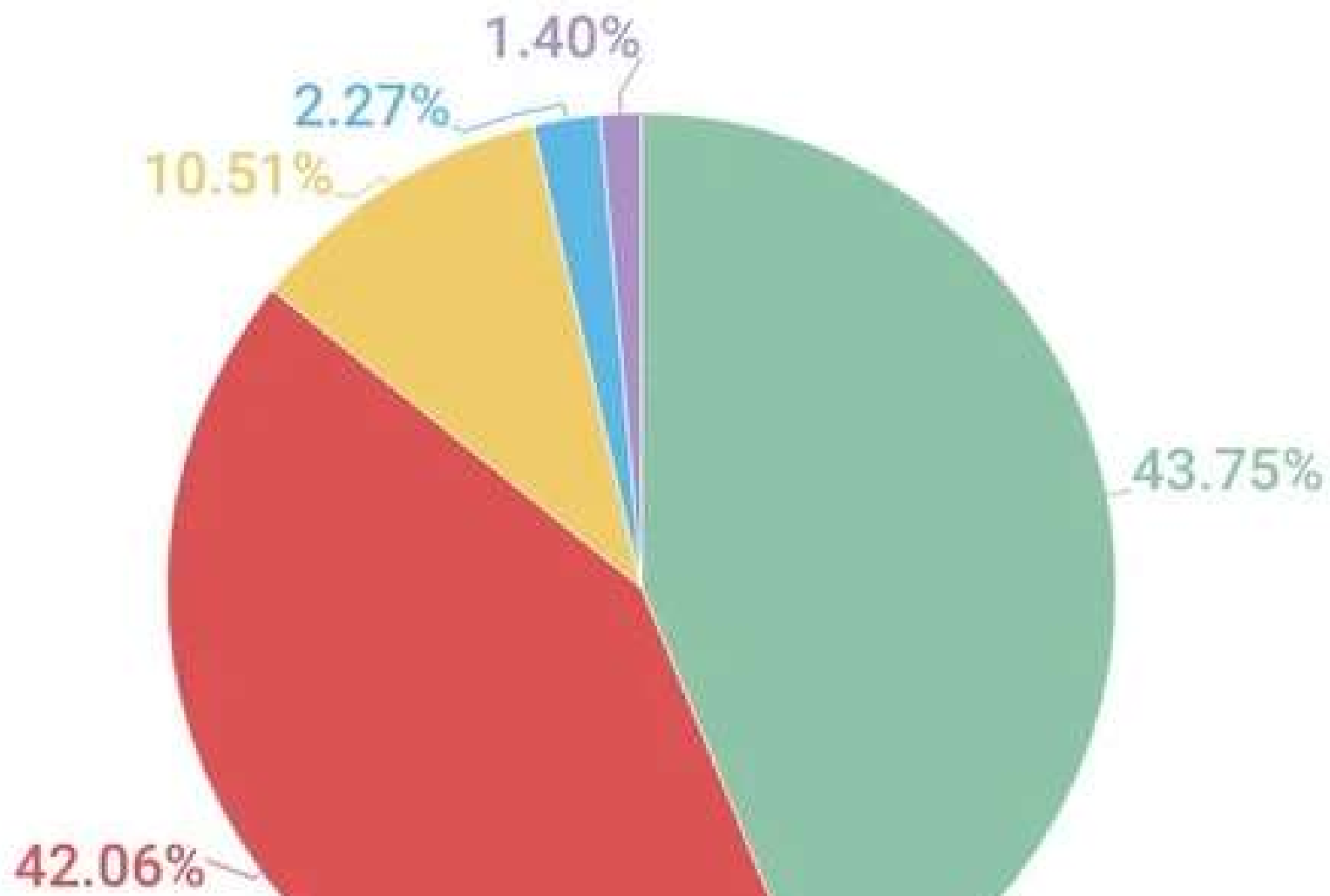
In early November, a 29-year-old man was charged with harassing and making threatening phone calls to a religious leader, the Ottawa Police Service said. Days later, in a separate case, a 33-year-old woman was arrested after gasoline and antisemitic messages “related to the ongoing conflict in Israel and Gaza” were found at General campus of The Ottawa Hospital. She faces several charges, including attempting to commit arson to endanger human life.

Beutel says antisemitism needs to be loudly condemned by public officials to show “it’s unacceptable in Canada.”

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Motivation behind hate crimes 2015-2022

● Race/Enthicity ● Religion ● Sexual Orientation ● Sex ● Other*





SOURCE: Ottawa Police Service Open Source Data

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*Other includes language, age, mental or physical disability, unknown motivation and more.

3. Population growth

Errol Mendes, professor of constitutional and international law at uOttawa and former commissioner of the Ontario Human Rights Commission, says the rise in hate crimes may be an unfortunate by-product of Ottawa's growing population.

"It's a big-city problem," and Ottawa is no longer a small city, Mendes said in an interview. Along with hate crimes spurred by global events, newcomer communities are interacting with "more established" communities, and "there will be antagonism between people who consider themselves the original population and newer communities."

Mendes says it's "absolutely essential" for leaders of different communities to work together to combat hate crimes. He pointed to a letter co-written by leaders of the university's Muslim Law Students' Association and Jewish Law Students' Association.

"Both our communities are grieving right now, and we're coming together to say we want to focus on what unites us. We also extend our thoughts to Christians, Druze and other minorities in the region who are suffering and grieving," the letter read. "We all recognize that these rising tensions and divisions are driving fear and anxiety. We are also aware that there are members of our communities that have family and loved ones that are being directly impacted by this war. With racism, antisemitism, and Islamophobia rising, we simply will not be bystanders in the face of hate."

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The letter urged the university's professors, lecturers and students to "show a commensurate level of sensitivity and tact" when discussing the Israel-Hamas war in academic contexts.

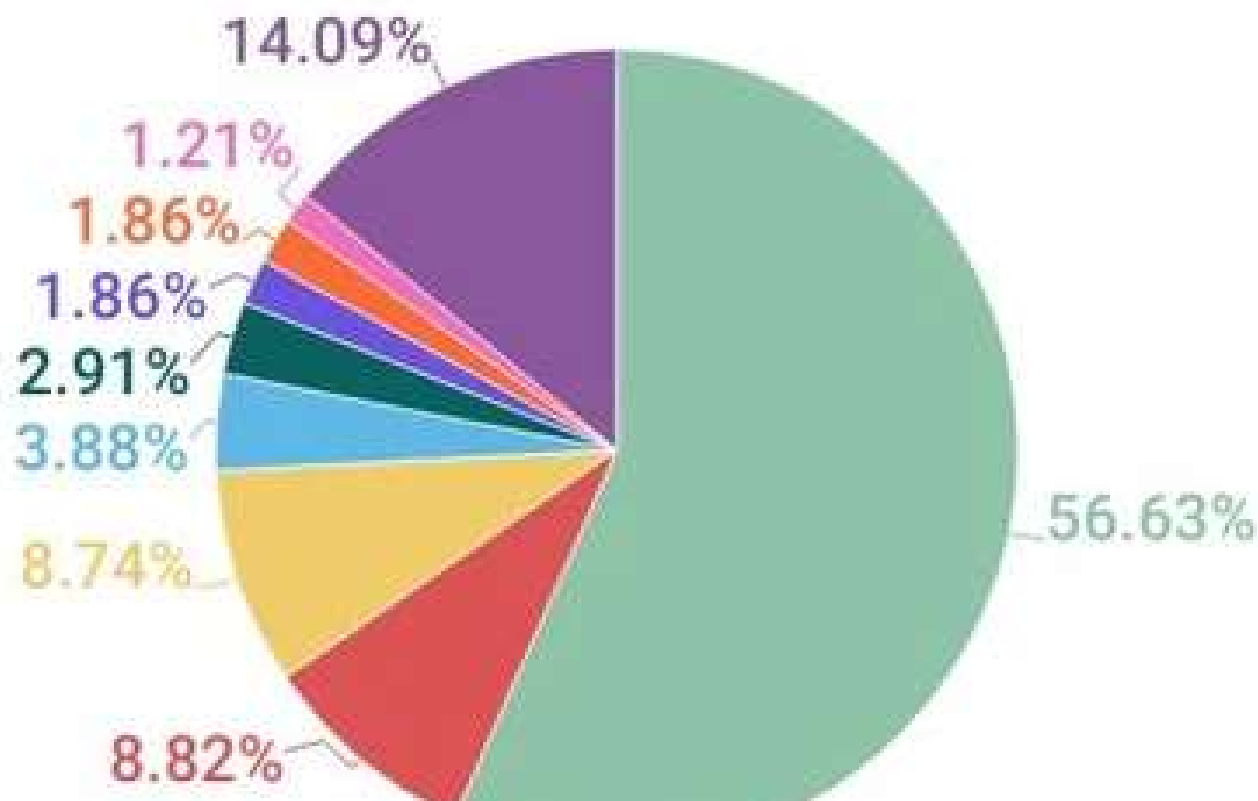
"The message essentially was there's more that unites us than divides us," Mendes said. "The letter was just amazing."

Leaders from Islamic and Jewish communities should continue to come together to condemn hate crimes, he said, as "this is only going to increase" as Ottawa becomes a more multicultural city.

"These are the types of lessons we should be learning now," he said.

Hate crimes by Criminal Code offence

- Mischief to property
- Assault
- Uttering threats
- Mischief to a cultural or religious property
- Assault with a weapon
- Harassing communications
- Stalking
- Public incitement of hatred
- Other



SOURCE: Ottawa Police Service Open Source Data



*Other includes a small number of instances of bomb threats promoting terrorism, assaulting a peace officer and arson, among others.

4. Backlash to progress

Dr. Barbara Perry, director of the centre of hate, bias and extremism at Ontario Tech University in Oshawa, said the rise in hate crimes could partially be explained by “backlash violence.”

High-profile protests in 2020 acknowledged the racism faced by Black and Indigenous communities, particularly from police. Now some might feel like certain groups “have stepped outside their allowable boundaries,” Perry said, “and now they’re putting them back where they belong.”

Perry anticipates hate crimes against the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community will continue to increase, spurred in part by policies in New Brunswick and Saskatchewan that forbid students under 16 from changing their pronouns without a parent’s permission. “They’re playing into very dangerous, very negative narratives,” she said.

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Hate crime numbers are still likely “dramatically under-reported,” Perry said, with only about 20 per cent of incidents coming to police attention. Usually, those hate crimes are “the more serious ones” that are hard to ignore, like public vandalism. She pointed to Statistics Canada’s General Social Survey, which focuses on safety and social trends. For 2019, respondents reported 225,000 hate-motivated incidents across Canada. Just under 50,000 were reported to police, with less than 2,000 being recorded as hate crimes, she said.

“I think there’s a lot of work to be done in terms of public reporting, and police reporting what comes to them,” Perry said. “There’s still a huge gap there.”

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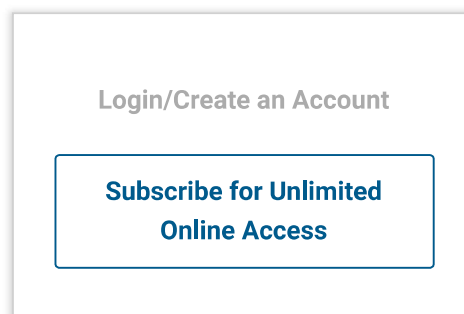


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