



National Anti-Racism Strategy

National Anti-Racism Secretariat
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Executive summary

Women's Health West (WHW) commends the Australian Government on the development of a National Anti-Racism Strategy that will work to eradicate racism and strengthen social cohesion through a commitment to a diverse and inclusive community. This submission outlines WHW's recommendations on how the strategy can be strengthened to ensure that people's - particularly women and girl's - rights to liberty and freedom from racial discrimination, violence and prejudice are protected and upheld.

WHW makes the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1: The National Anti-Racism Strategy must be endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) so that all states and territories are working to eliminate racial discrimination.

Recommendation 2: The Race Discrimination Commissioner remains a stand alone position that is adequately resourced to ensure the effective implementation of the National Anti-Racism Strategy.

Recommendation 3: A national anti-racism education campaign must inform the community of what racism is and the far reaching affect on its victims and our community as a whole. The campaign should be underpinned by a Community of Responsibility Model and enhance bystander action.

Recommendation 4: Federal government should support constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This includes the removal of sections 25 and 51(xxvi) in the Constitution that allow for discrimination on the grounds of race; as well as provisions to enable legislation that benefits Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Recommendation 5: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and culturally and linguistically diverse communities are directly consulted on how best to acknowledge their national contribution.

Recommendation 6: Review media self-regulation and establish protocols that promote positive representations of cultural and religious diversity and work towards the elimination of race-based discrimination.

Recommendation 7: Racism in employment, education, housing and service access must be prioritised as areas for action. Strategies must be informed by an in-depth investigation of race-based discrimination that is occurring in these areas.

Recommendation 8: The national strategy should be informed by the VicHealth Framework, *Building on our strengths*, and work across all tiers of government to redress the key determinants of racism.

Recommendation 9: The strategy should be operationalised in a range of settings to encourage engagement across communities. This approach builds communities that are underpinned by respect and understanding of difference, as well what we have in common, thereby preventing race-based discrimination.

Recommendation 10: Schools are an important setting for involving young people in the elimination of race-based discrimination and this work should be guided by a whole-of-school approach that is gender sensitive.

Recommendation 11: Strengthen criminal and civic processes of reporting race-based discrimination to improve access to victims. This will include investigating an appropriate method of third-party reporting to be implemented through the national anti-racism strategy

Recommendation 12: Gender-specific programs that build the capacity of communities to take action on race-based discrimination must be included in the national anti-racism strategy.

Recommendation 13: Bystander strategies and resources must be cognisant of the gendered differences in motivations, barriers and enablers for men and women taking action against race-based discrimination.

Introduction

WHW is the women's health service for the western metropolitan region of Melbourne. Our services include research, health promotion, community development, training and advocacy around women's health, safety and wellbeing. Since 1994, WHW has hosted the region's largest family violence crisis support and prevention program. These two main arms of the service place WHW in a unique position to incorporate women's experiences directly into our research, health promotion and project work, enabling us to clarify the connections between structural oppression and individual experience.

As a feminist organisation we focus on redressing the gender and structural inequalities that limit the lives of women and girls. WHW's work is underpinned by a social model of health, recognising the important influence of, and aiming to improve, the social, economic and political factors that determine the health, safety and wellbeing of women and their children in our region. By incorporating a gendered approach to health promotion work that focuses on women, interventions to reduce inequality and improve health outcomes will be more effective and equitable.

Informed by our vision of equity and justice for women in the west, WHW's work is guided by the following five strategic goals:

- Delivering and advocating for accessible and culturally appropriate services and resources for women across the region
- Improving conditions in which women live, work and play in the western region of Melbourne
- Putting women's health, safety and wellbeing on the political agenda to improve the status of women
- Recognising that good health, safety and wellbeing begins in our workplace
- Working in partnership with others to achieve our goals.

The western region of Melbourne is one of the most diverse in Victoria. It has long been a settlement area for migrant and refugee communities, with its residents speaking more than a hundred languages. In the west, English language proficiency is lower for women than men in all major language groups (WHW, 2009a).

Response to the National Anti-Racism Strategy

Racism is a social injustice and human rights violation; it also impacts significantly on people's health and wellbeing. Research has consistently found that racism affects men and women's sense of safety, identity, self-confidence and self-worth, and their experiences of healthcare and treatment (WHW, 2009b; Mansouri et al, 2009).

Racism has been identified as the root cause of the extreme health disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Larson et al, 2007). The continuing and pervasive marginalisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the loss of land and traditional culture, the breakdown of community kinship systems and entrenched poverty and

racism are all factors underlying the poor health status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Larson et al, 2007). Racial discrimination also significantly impacts on the settlement, health, and wellbeing of migrant and refugee communities.

As a regional women's health service, our submission is specifically interested in ensuring the national anti-racism strategy is responsive to and works to redress racial discrimination experienced by women and girls.

Objective 1: Create awareness of racism and how it affects individuals and the broader community

1. What can we learn from how Australia has dealt with racism in the past? What achievements should we build on? What mistakes should we learn from?

WHW is of the strong opinion that a crucial step in redressing Australia's racist history was the apology to the stolen generations by then Prime Minister Rudd. In acknowledging the injustices in government policies and practices, an important step was made towards meaningful reconciliation for past wrongs. While the apology was delivered by the prime minister, the bipartisan support and public acknowledgment of the pain and suffering caused to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their culture was most important. Indeed, if the national anti-racism strategy is to be successful, a long term effort that has bipartisan support is required.

Recommendation 1: The National Anti-Racism Strategy must be endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) so that all states and territories are working to eliminate racial discrimination.

Racism has the potential to undermine our national identity. The establishment of Disability and Race Discrimination Commissioners in the Australian Human Rights Commission separates these roles for the first time since 1997, and is an important and progressive development. This position must remain a stand alone position that is appropriately resourced if it is to be effective in tackling racism and promoting greater understanding between people of different cultures and backgrounds.

Recommendation 2: The Race Discrimination Commissioner remains a stand alone position that is adequately resourced to ensure the effective implementation of the National Anti-Racism Strategy.

2. What information would be useful to include in a campaign to prevent and reduce racism?

The first step to creating a society where racism is not tolerated and where bystanders are equipped to stand up to it requires understanding of what racism is and its far reaching affects on victims (Nelson et al, 2010: 12). A public campaign should raise awareness of the negative affects racism has on our community as a whole and stimulate ideas about the importance of action against racism. This understanding would go a long way to creating empathy for

communities and individuals who are subject to racism. A national campaign should also engage the Community of Responsibility Model, which is founded on the premise that everyone in the community has a role to play in eradicating racism. VicHealth suggests this is a preliminary requirement to encourage bystander action against racism (Nelson et al, 2010: 38). A national anti-racism campaign must also be cognisant of barriers to action against racism that include fear of reprisal from others and/or rejection by our peers.

Recommendation 3: A national anti-racism campaign must improve community understanding of what racism is and its far reaching affect on victims and our community as a whole. The campaign should be underpinned by a Community of Responsibility Model and enhance bystander action.

3. How could we better acknowledge the contributions to Australia of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and culturally and linguistically diverse communities?

In January 2012, the expert panel on constitutional recognition of Indigenous Australians delivered the *Recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in the Constitution* report. Tasked with the role of advising the Federal Government on options for Indigenous constitutional recognition, the expert panel proposed a Bill that would recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as Australia's people and acknowledge the need to secure the advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The constitution as it stands does not acknowledge the contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and by omission enables racial discrimination. WHW strongly supports the removal of those sections of the constitution that permit the commonwealth parliament to make laws that discriminate on the basis of 'race'. We also strongly support the constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as it is an important step in the reconciliation process and in eliminating race-based discrimination. These changes would also work to advance the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and ensure greater protection for their culture, languages and heritage.

Recommendation 4: Federal government support should constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This includes the removal of sections 25 and 51(xxvi) in the Constitution that allow for discrimination on the grounds of race; as well as provisions to enable legislation that benefits Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Moreover, in acknowledging the contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and culturally and linguistically diverse communities, WHW recommends that this question is best answered by communities themselves. This will best ensure that national recognition is culturally appropriate and meaningful, as what is meaningful is in itself culturally determined.

Recommendation 5: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and culturally and linguistically diverse communities are directly consulted on how best to acknowledge their national contribution.

Objective 2: Identify, promote and build on good practice initiatives to prevent and reduce racism

4. What are the priority areas in which we should be addressing racism (for example: employment, education, sport, the media, cyber-racism?)

WHW strongly supports the media being utilised to redress racism. As such, the national anti-racism strategy must work with media to promote positive representations of cultural and religious diversity. Key strategies linked to achieving this aim include:

- Review efficacy of media self-regulation as it relates to ethical media reporting of ethnic and cultural diversity and difference.
- Ensure that all commercial media has protocols aimed at ensuring effective and respectful communication with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and culturally and linguistically diverse communities. This would include minimal standards relating to the representation of cultural diversity.
- Establish high level professional forums for journalists, entertainment peak bodies, and other media stakeholders to promote the diverse nature of our community and that work to reduce race-based discrimination.

Recommendation 6: Review media self-regulation and establish protocols that promote positive representations of cultural and religious diversity and work towards the elimination of race-based discrimination.

WHW supports employment, education, housing and service access being priority areas to redress racism. During workshops that formed part of WHW's action research project (described later in the submission) participants were asked to describe the experiences of women they work with in the context of race-based discrimination (WHW 2010). Employment, education, housing and service access were all identified as settings where women from the western region of Melbourne experience structural discrimination.

Participants reported prospective employees regularly making judgments about an applicant's capacity to do a job on the basis of their name, accent, skin colour or whether they were wearing a hijab. Staff reported that culturally and linguistically diverse women were also concerned that their overseas experience and qualifications were not valued by prospective employers. This results in highly qualified women working in low skilled jobs or not working at all. Community women believed that this is not the case for white women from other western countries (WHW 2011a).

In the area of education, participants reported that racially-driven conduct was often dealt with inappropriately or ignored. For example young refugee women who participated in WHW's *Lead On Again* program discussed their experiences of discrimination at school. Students reported that teachers would counsel them to lower their expectations rather than encouraging them and providing resources required to achieve their ambitions (WHW 2006b: 4). Similar experiences were mirrored by participants in a human rights project being undertaken by WHW, *Our Community Our Rights (OCOR)*. For example:

There is discrimination in the education system. It happened to my daughter when she was in year 12. She chose not to do specialised subjects but the school decided to put her into business, even though it was not her choice. They then explained that because she came from another country, her English was not good. (OCOR participant)

Race-based discrimination can have a significant impact on newly-arrived young people. As such, the national anti-racism strategy must prioritise education as a setting for action and advocate for appropriately resourced support systems for disadvantaged students.

In addition, WHW recommends that housing and service access be identified as priority areas for action on race-based discrimination.

WHW's experience suggests that housing inequity is directly connected to race-based discrimination. Many participants in workshops that form part of WHW's action research project (described later in the submission) stated that rooming houses for overseas students were overpriced and often unsafe. Links can be drawn between student visas, limitations around work hours, earning capacity and housing insecurity. Participants reported race-based discrimination in the private rental sector where landlords and real estates agents discriminate against particular cultural groups (WHW, 2011a). This race-based discrimination leads to housing insecurity and also creates barriers for tenants from migrant and refugee backgrounds asserting their rental rights.

Racism has been found to prevent people from accessing essential services (Fenton, 2001; Francis & Cornfoot, 2007; McMichael, 2008). Our clients and community members have reported concerns to WHW about service providers discriminating on the basis of racist stereotypes. For example:

If your skin is black, a worker will assume you can't speak English (WHW, 2011b).

If you're African and a worker visiting an agency, people often assume you're a client (WHW, 2011b).

I have come across a private real estate agent who was very supportive when our client's rent was in arrears yet was not at all helpful in the same situation with a refugee women. (WHW, 2011b)

Recommendation 7: Racism in employment, education, housing and service access must be prioritised as areas for action. Strategies must be informed by an in-depth investigation of race-based discrimination that is occurring in these areas.

5. What measures should governments at all levels take to address racism?

WHW is a strong advocate of the VicHealth framework 'Building on our Strengths', which works to reduce race-based discrimination and support diversity in Victoria. The framework outlines a multi-level approach to eliminating racism and identifies key factors that contribute to race-based discrimination at of the individual, organisational, community and societal levels (VicHealth 2009).

Evidence shows that in order to achieve change, a national anti-racism strategy and all three tiers of government must respond to these contributing factors at every level.

Recommendation 8: The national strategy should be informed by the VicHealth Framework, *Building on our strengths*, and work across all tiers of government to redress the key determinants of racism.

6. What role can business, the arts, sporting organisations, community groups, service organisations and the media play in addressing racism?

Increasing active participation by culturally and linguistically diverse communities in all areas of community and public life will strengthen contact between all Australians. Evidence suggests that breaking down barriers and increasing understanding between people is one of the most effective methods of reducing racism. For example, the 'contact hypothesis' indicates that racism is reduced with increased contact between communities. A broad analysis of 203 studies from 25 countries found that in 94 per cent of the studies, increased contact resulted in reduced racial discrimination (Pettigrew & Troop 2000). WHW's experience with our anti-racism action research project also supports the contact hypothesis. When we asked our staff who are dedicated to working with disadvantaged women how can we work to reduce racism in Melbourne's west, most responses indicated the need for meaningful engagement between communities, and between individuals (WHW 2011a).

Recommendation 9: The strategy should be operationalised in a range of settings to encourage engagement across communities. This approach builds communities that are underpinned by respect and understanding of difference, as well what we have in common, thereby preventing race-based discrimination.

7. How can we involve young people in addressing racism?

A key strategy for involving young people in redressing racism is engagement at school. WHW has had great success in our work with young people using a whole-of-school approach. Informed by international evidence, this approach can be conceptualised as three interlinking factors that prompt us to think of schools as more than classrooms and lessons, but as settings where we can build schools to be supportive environments for health; now and in the future. These factors are:

1. Curriculum, teaching and learning
2. Community links, partnerships and services
3. School organisation, ethos and environment (WHW, 2012: 9).

WHW's *Girls Talk - Guys Talk* program is an example of how to successfully involve young people in redressing racism and discrimination within a whole-of-school approach. Racism has been identified as a key concern by students and staff in some schools. WHW has worked to redress this form of discrimination in partnership with the school and young people by developing a school culture that values diversity. This has been achieved through the following key strategies:

- Providing training where all staff are invited to explore their own attitudes to cultural diversity.
- Providing professional development to teachers to ensure they are skilled and confident to deliver the anti-racism programs to students.
- Incorporating anti-racism modules into the school curriculum that also incorporate gender differences. These modules require students to examine their own behaviour and promote respectful relationships among all students.
- Involve the student working group in the development of an anti-racism strategy that is tailored for the specific context.
- Enhance or develop race-based discrimination and harassment policies and procedures so that schools deal with racism in a consistent and effective manner.
- Implement processes where staff, students and parents can participate in the development and review of anti-racism policies.

WHW strongly recommends that anti-racism strategies that engage young people must incorporate and encourage bystander action. This includes redressing barriers to action such as students' fear that if they intervene when race-based bullying occurs, the bully could turn on them (Nelson et al, 2010:15).

Recommendation 10: Schools are an important setting for involving young people in the elimination of race-based discrimination and this work should be guided by a whole-of-school approach that is gender sensitive.

- 8. Can you give examples of strategies that you have seen used or been part of that have been successful in preventing or reducing racism? Why were they effective?**

WHW has led projects with diverse communities for many years and subsequently developed an intimate understanding of the needs and challenges faced by women from diverse communities, including race-based discrimination and inequity. Examples of this work include:

- The *Financial Literacy Program* with Sudanese, Somali, Chin, Karen, Vietnamese and soon Congolese women in the west, strengthening women's understanding of and capacity to understand financial systems in Australia and exercise their social and economic rights.

- *Family and Reproductive Rights Education Program* that works to ensure culturally appropriate programs and services to women affected by female genital mutilation (FGM) with the ultimate goal of eliminating FGM.
- *Lead On Again* has been established for culturally and linguistically diverse young women. The program aims firstly to provide training to increase participants' leadership skills, knowledge and capacity, and secondly to promote and support future participation by these young women in community and leadership activities (WHW 2006a:5).
- *Our Community, Our Rights* (OCOR) is designed to build recently arrived women's understanding, skills and confidence in the areas of human rights, civic participation and advocacy, working with three communities over three years to simultaneously develop women's advocacy skills and civic engagement activities, then to support women to plan and implement their own human rights-based advocacy project (WHW 2011b).

WHW has also embarked on an action research anti-racism project that aims to explore:

- Safe ways to define and discuss racism
- Forms and settings of institutional racism that exist and how racism affects women living and working in the western region of Melbourne
- Strategies that can assist us to eradicate racism (WHW, 2010a).

The project is underpinned by the VicHealth anti-racism framework (VicHealth 2009) and is designed to encourage participants to think about commonly held racist views and strategies to challenge them. Preliminary findings from this project support the work of others in the field (Nelson et al, 2010, Pettigrew & Troop 2000), highlighting the need to establish safe ways to explore and remove the determinants of racism, such as fear and misunderstanding, in a bid to create communities where diversity is valued.

Objective 3: Empower communities and individuals to take action to prevent and reduce racism and seek redress when it occurs

11. What strategies or approaches can be used to help individuals and communities who experience racism to speak up or take action? If you have experienced racism, what would have helped you to speak up or take action?

Reporting racism and therefore making perpetrators accountable for their actions will serve to reduce its incidence (VicHealth 2009). VicHealth found that formal reporting of racism is rare, as the procedures are complicated, time consuming, personally taxing, and they offer limited prospects for satisfaction (Nelson et al, 2010: 38). In 2006, the Western Suburbs Legal Service conducted the *Racial and Religious Discrimination, Vilification and Harassment Project*. This project investigated and analysed the incidence of racial discrimination, harassment and vilification towards members of the community and the success of laws aimed

to address such incidence. A review of the Acts aimed at reducing racial, religious discrimination, vilification and harassment and relevant case law suggested that 'there is a misunderstanding in the community about the content and scope of the Acts, and the exact conduct they prohibit' (Smith and Yandell, 2006: 57). Together with the fact that, by its nature, racism is likely to undermine the power of those affected, this poses barriers to reporting. Supportive mechanisms are therefore required. One such mechanism is to allow third party reporting that enables services and community members, with consent, to report incidents of racism on behalf of those affected.

Recommendation 11: Strengthen criminal and civil processes of reporting race-based discrimination to improve access to victims. This will include investigating an appropriate method of third-party reporting to be implemented through the national anti-racism strategy.

WHW recognises that ending race-based discrimination is a shared responsibility of all levels of government and community. In addition, we are of the view that communities and individuals who are affected by race-based discrimination must be equipped to advocate against it.

This needs to be supported by capacity building strategies for communities. *OCOR*, seeks to strengthen refugee women's understanding of their rights and build skills and confidence around ways to undertake advocacy (WHW 2011b). One of the key issues identified in the consultation period was race-based discrimination experienced by women and their families. This included race-based discrimination when applying and interviewing for jobs, interactions with managers, accessing education, and in navigating everyday life. For example:

During work one evening the power had gone out. I suggested to my manager that someone should go out to check the fuse box and offered to go myself. My manager said that if I were to go out there and something were to happen to me, no one would be able to find me because they wouldn't be able to see me [because my skin is black]. (OCOR participant)

OCOR commences with a series of six full day training sessions. The first two sessions of the program focus on race-based discrimination, with activities centred on enabling women to identify such instances, and how they might engage with a series of advocacy strategies to take action. Preliminary evaluation indicates that women who have participated in *OCOR* feel more skilled and confident to take appropriate action against race-based discrimination (WHW 2011b).

Recommendation 12: Gender-specific programs that build the capacity of communities to take action on race-based discrimination must be included in the national anti-racism strategy.

12. What strategies or approaches can be used to help bystanders address racism where and when it occurs?

Within their *'Review of bystander approaches in support of preventing race-based discrimination'*, VicHealth argues that supporting bystanders to act when they witness racism is a strategy that is under-utilised. VicHealth insists that because regulatory bodies such as the police, supervisors, teachers and human rights agencies cannot always regulate community relations, ordinary people have a responsibility for addressing everyday racism (Nelson et al, 2010: 35).

WHW supports a strategy that is underpinned by VicHealth's work on bystander approaches. This strategy should begin by developing resources and projects that raise awareness within the general community, communicating what racism is, its gravity and impacts, and the importance of action. This should occur in multiple settings. Beyond this, resources and programs are required that address motivators and barriers to action (Nelson et al, 2010).

These motivators and barriers will differ for men and women. According to VicHealth men are more likely to act in a bystander situation when there is danger, while women will act more often when it is safe. The research also suggests men's response is a self-affirming act while women's response is an expression of their values (Nelson: 2010:16).

The VicHealth review describes the gendered nature of how, and why, men and women are likely to respond when confronted with a racist act. WHW strongly recommends that these gendered differences inform the development of bystander programs and resources. Strategies must not reinforce gender roles that contribute to women's inequity such as the message that 'real men take action' (Nelson: 2010:39).

Recommendation 13: Bystander strategies and resources must be cognisant of the gendered differences in motivations, barriers and enablers for men and women taking action against race-based discrimination.

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