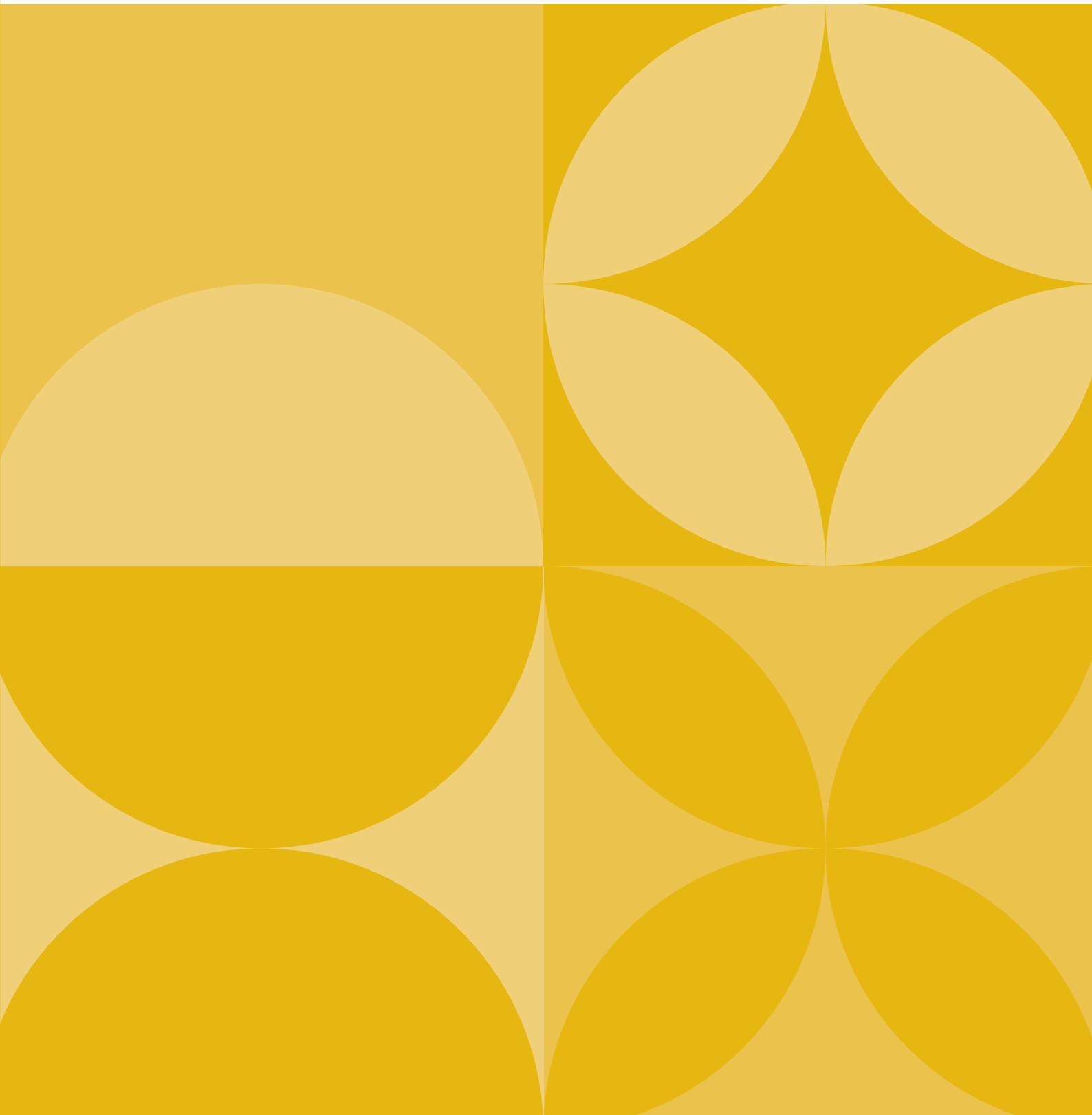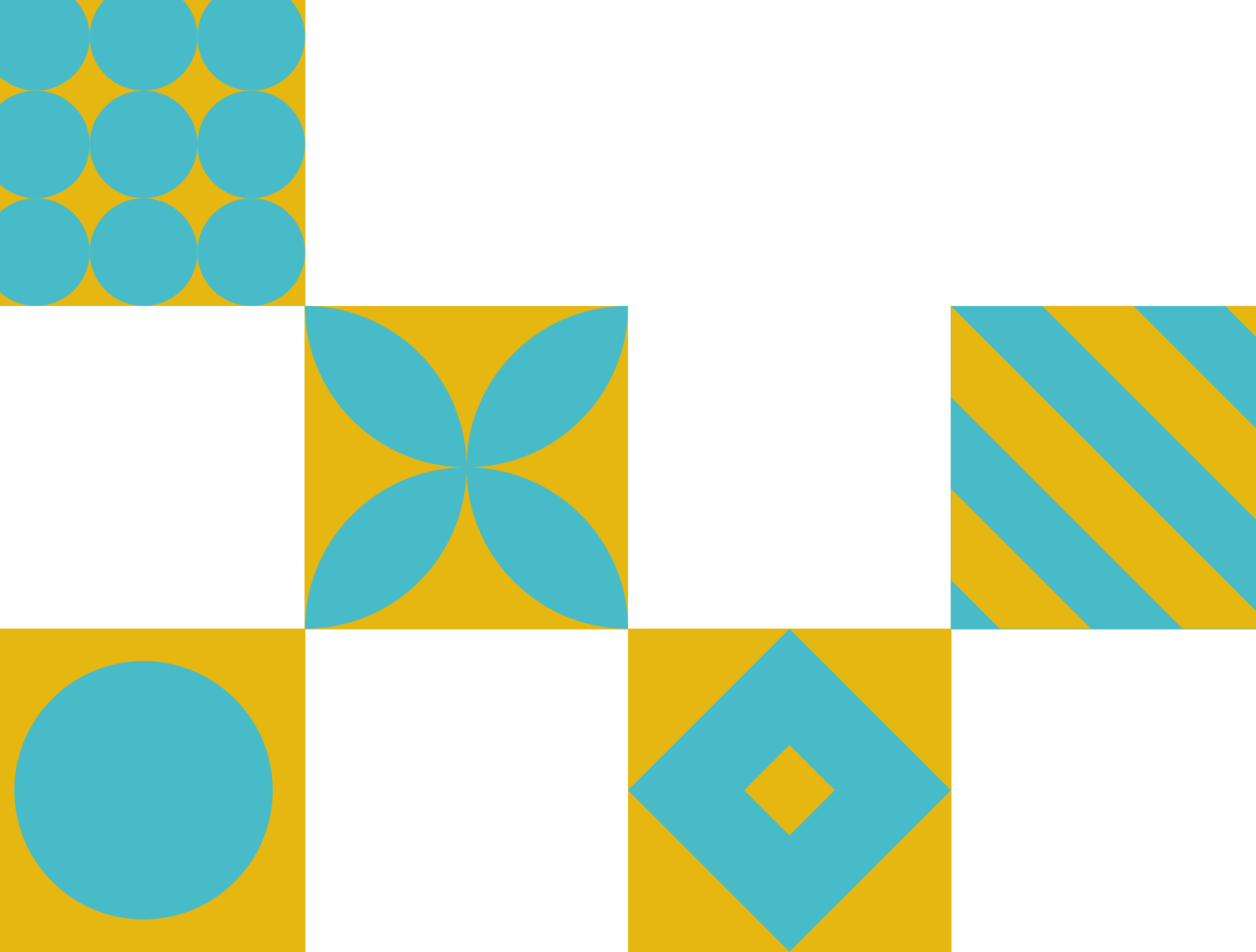**FECCA**

An Anti-Racism Framework: Experiences and Perspectives of Multicultural Australia

Report on the national community consultations

Acknowledgment of Country

FECCA pays its respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, past and present, and recognises the land we live and work upon was never ceded. FECCA acknowledges that our work on behalf of multicultural Australia has learnt from and been enriched by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations. We are committed to continuing to listen, learn and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the journey to a more inclusive and equitable society.

Contents

Acknowledgements

Key Terms and Definitions

The definitions provided below were drawn from documents from the Australian Human Rights Commission, and in particular the website: *Racism. It Stops with Me*).[1] These definitions are not exclusive. Additional references for those who would like to understand the concepts and discussions in Australia have been included at the end of this section.

Anti racism involves actively attempting to combat racist policies, practices, culture and ideas. Anti-racism is about more than being 'not racist'. It involves active decisions that seek to combat injustice and promote racial equity. It can be helpful to think of anti-racism as a skill set that we can all develop and use to promote a better, more equitable society.

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) is an acronym typically used to refer to people of non-English speaking background, and people born outside of Australia as well as people whose first language is not English. People may not identify with the acronym as it does not capture the complex nature of many Australians' cultural heritage.

First Nations. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the First Peoples and Traditional Custodians of the lands now collectively referred to as Australia. First Nations is an encompassing term that refers to the numerous Traditional Custodians of Country across Australia.

Institutional racism exists when racism is established as a normal behaviour within an organisation, institution, or society. It includes the policies and practices that inform the operations of organisations and institutions.

Internalised racism occurs when an individual believes and promotes racist attitudes, beliefs or ideologies directed at their race or cultural group.

Interpersonal racism is racism that occurs in interactions between individuals or groups of people, often in everyday settings. Interpersonal racism can come in the form of abuse, harassment, humiliation or exclusion. It can also be expressed through off-hand jokes or comments. Sometimes referred to as 'everyday racism'. Interpersonal racism is considered by some to be the way in which systemic racial inequity plays out between people. Interpersonal racism does not always target a specific person and may not even be intended to cause any offence or harm. However, a lack of intent does not reduce the negative impacts of racism.

Intersectionality is 'the multiple social forces, social identities, and ideological instruments through which power and disadvantage are expressed and legitimised.'[2] An intersectional framework acknowledges that multiple social categories, such as race, sexuality, class, gender, and disability, combine to create distinct experiences and identities that are lived and perceived in ways that cannot be reduced to any one category. Intersectionality recognises that there is no single way a person exists in the world, nor is there a single mechanism through which inequalities are produced at institutional and systemic levels. Rather, these intersections are themselves the result of systemic, structural, and institutionalised patterns of power and privilege.

Microaggressions. Microaggressions are the casual expressions that perpetuate racist stereotypes and ideas. An example of a microaggression might be commenting on how well a person of African heritage speaks English, or repeatedly mispronouncing someone's name, despite being corrected. Many microaggressions are not necessarily visible to everyone. People who directly experience racism (or other forms of discrimination) are typically much more aware of them. It's important to remember that "micro" in microaggression doesn't mean that these acts can't have a severe impact. Microaggressions have a cumulative effect and can cause considerable psychological distress.

Negatively racialised is a term used to refer to groups of people who have experienced the harms of racialisation — those groups have been racialised in a way that is negative in order to maintain the supremacy of whiteness. The use of the term 'negatively racialised' does not intend to undermine the agency and self-identification of these groups. In many contexts we see language that has been used to negatively racialise certain communities being reclaimed as a tool for collective and anti-racist organising (for example, the terms 'Black' and 'Blak' used by First Nations people to self-identify in Australia). See definition of 'racialisation'.

Race. The idea of race is a modern one and emerged in 16th-17th century Europe. It refers to the idea that humans can be organised into distinct biological 'races' with defined physical and social traits. Today, it is widely accepted that biological categories of race do not exist. However, that does not mean that race, as a concept, is no longer relevant. This is because ideas of race (and ideas that are racist) were foundational to the development of many of today's laws, cultures and societies, with certain racial identities perceived and positioned as superior to others.

Racialisation is the process by which groups of people come to be seen, treated and to understand themselves as belonging to a distinct racial group. Like race, racialisation has been used to legitimise European colonialism, including settler colonisation, the enslavement of peoples, and related laws and policies. It has been used to both create 'whiteness' and establish hierarchical differences between groups of people, where some communities are regarded as exploitable, able to be enslaved or even eliminated. The process of racialisation provides and protects economic, social and political benefits to white communities as those who have gained wealth, land, social and political power via the process of colonisation. As with race, racialisation is a social construct rather than an objective classification, and can be changed to suit different social and political aims over time. For example, in Australia, European colonisation required the dispossession of First Nations people from their lands, and led to false ideas of racial inferiority and inevitable demise of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to justify European territorial claims. These ideas were supported by so-called science that has since been disproved.

Racism is the process by which systems and policies, actions and attitudes create inequitable opportunities and outcomes for people based on race. Racism is more than just prejudice in thought or action. It occurs when this prejudice — whether individual or institutional — is accompanied by the power to discriminate against, oppress or limit the rights of others.

Systemic racism can be more difficult to identify than individual or interpersonal racism, because it is often so entrenched in our societies or institutions that it is perceived as 'normal'. Systemic racism refers to the way that the cultural norms, laws, ideologies, policies and practices of a particular society, organisation or institution result in unequitable treatment, opportunities and outcomes. However, systemic racism can also happen without specific laws, policies or practices keep it in place.13 In many cases, the legacy of those norms, laws, policies and practices continues to reinforce the inequalities they created, long after they have ended. That's why we need laws, policies and practices that are actively anti-racist to address ongoing injustices. Terms like systemic, institutional and structural racism are often used to refer to similar phenomena but can also be considered distinct.

Trauma informed approach. Trauma-informed practice is a strengths-based framework grounded in an understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma, that emphasises physical, psychological, and emotional safety for everyone, and that creates opportunities for survivors of trauma to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment. Becoming trauma-informed is about supporting people to feel safe in their interactions with others in their environments. Trauma-informed approaches utilise meaningful collaboration with people who have experienced trauma, to design organisations which accommodate the vulnerabilities of trauma survivors and minimise the risk of re-traumatisation. In regard to racial trauma, typically this would involve consultation with people who are the targets of racism and acting on their thoughts and ideas on how to address racism.

For some historical and conceptual analyses of racism in Australia, see:

- Bargallie, D and Fernando, N (eds) (2024). Critical racial and decolonial literacies. *Breaking the silence*. Bristol, Bristol University Press.
- Watego, C (2021a). *Another day in the colony*. St Lucia, University of Queensland Press.
- Watego, C., Singh, D. & Macoun, A. (2021). 'Partnership for justice in health: Scoping paper on race, racism and the Australian health system.' *Discussion paper*, The Lowitja Institute, https://www.lowitja.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Lowitja_PJH_170521_D10-1.pdf

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1   The definitions of 'culturally and linguistically diverse,' 'First Nations,' 'internalised racism,' and 'intersectionality' were drawn from the Australian Human Rights Commission (2022). *National anti-racism framework scoping report 2022*, Australian Human Rights Commission, https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/race-discrimination/publications/national-anti-racism-framework-scoping-report; Website: *Racism. It Stops with Me*. https://itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au/commit-to-learning/key-terms

2   Crenshaw, K (2017). On Intersectionality: *Essential writings*. New York, NT, The New Press.

Executive Summary

In 2023, the Australian Human Rights Commission commissioned the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) to conduct national consultations with multicultural communities to ensure that a diversity of voices within multicultural communities would be heard and centred in discussions about a national anti-racism framework. This report summarises the key findings from those consultations.

Between November 2023 and May 2024, FECCA engaged eighteen organisations across Australia, using an intersectional lens and intentionally prioritising groups that are most likely to experience racism together with other forms of discrimination. In total, 44 consultation sessions took place across all states and territories, covering over 860 participants. An online survey was also conducted, with 411 valid responses.

Despite the diversity of the groups, cultural backgrounds, and locations involved in the consultations, individuals and communities shared their lived experience with racism as happening in everyday life and in common places, in their interactions in schools, workplace, health services, law enforcement agents and public spaces.

The consultations have also painted a more nuanced picture of racism as more than 'skin colour' discrimination, showing how in the current systems of power, racism often operates with other forms of discrimination.

Racism, by definition, breaches the fundamental right of every human being to be treated with dignity and respect, regardless of *who we are or where we are*, and transforms this right into a privilege. The data from the consultations and survey make clear that in relation to race discrimination, the need for a sound human rights protection system in Australia cannot be underestimated.

The experiences shared by participants have reinforced findings from previous studies and brought to the forefront the solutions that those with lived experience of racism propose to build a society where racism is actively combated. Consistently, participants looked at rules, education, institutions, public discourse and public leadership as the drivers for an anti-racism framework. Drawing on their experiences and propositions, we present the following recommendations:

Recommendations

1 Government must lead the way to change, showing commitment to a whole-of-society, anti-racism agenda that brings public and private institutions to act and address racism. These collective efforts must involve public, respectful conversations about racism in Australia.

2 Schools, as a fundamental institution for the formation of new generations, must incorporate preventative and redress mechanisms to tackle racism. Students should be educated on what racism is, foregrounding due recognition of the history of First Nations people and their strengths. The curriculum should also acknowledge that diversity, including of migrants from all over the world, is a central and positive feature of Australia. Schools must have safe and simple mechanisms for students and staff to report racism, and be supported, with redress systems in place that are trauma-informed and allow victims to exercise choice throughout the process.

3 Combating racism against First Nations people should be at the forefront of an anti-racism framework, and signal to the whole society that racism, in any form or shape, will not be accepted in Australia.

4 Public and private institutions must have policies and procedures to address racism at the workplace. These policies and procedures should ensure that employees can access safe and simple mechanisms to report racism and to be supported, with redress systems in place that are trauma-informed and allow victims to exercise choice throughout the process.

5 In government institutions, healthcare and the police, anti-racism education for staff, including training for executive leaders, should be mandatory. This must go beyond cultural competency or unconscious bias training, to include cultural safety training with an intersectional lens, clear codes of conduct, and education on existing policies and procedures to report and address racism at the workplace.

6 Across all sectors, employers should review their recruitment and career development pathways to ensure that the diversity of multicultural Australia is reflected through genuine representation, career progression, and leadership roles.

7 Media, as a key player in shaping public discourse and public perception, should employ more professionals from culturally diverse backgrounds to lead news and help to shape anti-racist narratives in Australia.

8 A Federal Human Rights Act should be introduced to address the intersections of discrimination and to create national consistency around protection of human rights. This step would show the Australian Government's strong commitment to enshrine human rights protection across all institutions.

9 In all that relates to anti-racism initiatives, people with lived experience must be engaged and their views respected, with a trauma-informed approach that acknowledges their strength and voice.

10 The Australian Government should provide additional specific, long-term funding for a national anti-racism strategy, going beyond one-off projects to enable planning, monitoring and evaluation of actions, as well as improvements, in partnership with multicultural communities.

11 The Australian Government should develop better systems to collect data and monitor racism, as well as to evaluate anti-racism actions.

Introduction

"

Ultimately, a strong [national anti-racism] framework will be one that reflects a coordinated, shared vision to meaningfully tackle racism, promote racial equality, ensure access to rights, and foster a cohesive sense of belonging for all Australians."

(Australian Human Rights Commission) [3]

In March 2021, then Race Discrimination Commissioner, Chin Tan, called for a *National Anti-Racism Framework.* The concept paper supporting that call clearly articulated the link between racism and the Commission's broader approach to human rights: [4]

'The Commission's Free and Equal process identifies an approach to human rights more broadly that is proactive and preventative in focus. In relation to racism, a rights-based approach requires governments to:

- **Respect:** Governments do not discriminate through their own actions
- **Protect:** Governments put in place protective measures (such as laws, educative measures) to prevent others from breaching human rights, and provide effective remedies where breaches occur
- **Fulfil:** Governments take measures to ensure equal enjoyment of human rights and address inequality (especially structural or institutional discrimination).' [5]

3   Australian Human Rights Commission (2022). *National anti-racism framework scoping report 2022. Australian Human Rights Commission,* https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/race-discrimination/publications/national-anti-racism-framework-scoping-report

4   Australian Human Rights Commission (2021). *Concept paper for a national anti-racism framework.* Australian Human Rights Commission, March, https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/ahrc_cp_national_anti-racism_framework_2021_.pdf

5   Australian Human Rights Commission 2021, p.12.

In the context of race discrimination, the need for a sound human rights protection system[6] could not be more evident: racism, by definition, breaches the fundamental right of every human being to be treated with dignity and respect, regardless of *who we are or where we are, and transforms this right into a privilege.*

The Commission carried out national consultations on the discussion paper, which informed a thorough scoping report released in 2022.[7] As a continuation of that process, the Commission engaged the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) to conduct national consultations with multicultural communities to inform a national anti-racism framework. This new round of consultations drew on the findings from the scoping report, and focused on ensuring that a diversity of voices within multicultural communities would be heard and centred in discussions about a national anti-racism framework. Importantly, the consultations were designed with an intersectional lens from the beginning. This report summarises the key findings from those consultations.

Racism in Australia: Recent Trends

This report recognises that public conversations about racism continue to be highly divisive in Australia. However, as the experiences shared here indicate, it is time that Government and society work together to ensure that racism is acknowledged as a critical problem and addressed.

Australian society is one of the most diverse in the world in terms of cultures, ethnicities, and languages. However, the embracing of multiculturalism is, in historical terms, very recent. As we continue to learn how to translate societal support for multiculturalism into equitable and inclusive policies for all, it is important to recognise that embracing multiculturalism does not mitigate the issue of racism. In fact, it is possible to say that in highly culturally diverse societies, the need for Government and social actors to consciously adopt an anti-racism stance is higher than in more culturally homogenous societies.

FECCA recognises the roots of racism in Australia in the settler colonial foundations of our country, and the systemic discrimination against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as First Nations people of Australia.[8] As highlighted in the Commission's scoping report and recognised by many participants in our consultations and survey, the systemic discrimination against Australia's First Nations people must be given attention if we really want to practice anti-racism and achieve racial equality.[9]

In 2022, the Australian Reconciliation Barometer found that 60% of First Nations people had experienced at least one form of racial prejudice, compared to 52% in 2020 and 43% in 2018.[10] The *Closing the Gap* data equally indicates how challenging change it can be when it comes to dismantling systemic inequalities.[11] For the consultations, another critical factor was the public discussions around the 2023 Australian Indigenous Voice to Parliament referendum, and what the defeat meant in terms of public perception about racism in Australia.

In the *Mapping Social Cohesion* 2023 report, one in six (18 per cent) people reported having experienced discrimination in the last 12 months prior to the survey due to their 'skin colour, ethnic origin or religion.'[12] Whist that average is not much higher than what was recorded in 2021 and 2022 (16 per cent), a different picture emerges when the numbers are disaggregated. 28 per cent of people born overseas and 39 per cent of people from non-English speaking backgrounds indicate they had experienced discrimination due to the characteristics of race, religion, or skin colour. Moreover, migrants from non-European backgrounds were also more likely to have experienced discrimination than those of European backgrounds:

> "
> *41 per cent of Chinese Australian migrants who responded to the survey reported discrimination in the last 12 months, 50 per cent of Indian Australians, 36 per cent of migrants from southeast Asian backgrounds, 45 per cent of those from the Middle East and 46 per cent of migrants from African backgrounds."[13]*

13   O'Donnell 2023, p.82.

Equally telling is the fact that 62% of the Australian-born participants in the survey considered racism to be a "fairly or very big problem in Australia."

World events impact community relations and social cohesion in Australia.[14] Since the beginning of the Israel-Gaza war, 2023, there is indication of significant rise in Islamophobia and anti-Semitism.[15] The consultations for this report started to be planned before the conflict intensified, and did not specifically focus on Muslim or Jewish organisations. Unfortunately, no Jewish organisation applied to run a consultation session with their communities and, as such, there was no specific insights from Jewish communities. We also note that the Commission has been allocated separate funding by the Department of Home Affairs to consult with and support Jewish and Palestinian communities in Australia.

At a time when the Government's concern with social cohesion has grown, it is vital to remember that social cohesion depends on anti-racism and on combating negative racialisation of communities. Racism fractures the social fabric through ideologies of 'othering,' superiority/inferiority between groups, and exclusion. The marginalisation that individuals and communities experience due to racism is both a symptom and a source of social exclusion. In this regard, it is not surprising that the latest Scanlon-Monash Index of Social Cohesion declined to its lowest level on record.[16]

6   The reinvigorated public debate around the introduction of a human rights act in Australia offers the Australian Government a historical opportunity to demonstrate its full commitment to human rights. See Australian Human Rights Commission Australian Human Rights Commission (2023). *Revitalising Australia's commitment to human rights: Free & Equal Final Report 2023, Australian Human Rights Commission,* https://humanrights. gov.au/sites/default/files/2311_freeequal_finalreport_1_1.pdf

7   Australian Human Rights Commission 2022

8   The Commission uses First Nations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander interchangeably and acknowledges that community members may have other ways of identifying.

9   Australian Human Rights Commission 2022

10   Nelson, D (2022). *Australian Reconciliation barometer 2022*. Full research report, Prepared by Polity Research and Consulting for Reconciliation Australia. Reconciliation Australia, September, https://www. reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/2022-Australian-Reconciliation-Barometer-FULL-Report.pdf

11   Australian Productivity Commission (2024). *Closing the gap annual data compilation report.* Australian Government, July, https://www.pc.gov.au/ closing-the-gap-data/annual-data-report/closing-the-gap-annual-data-compilation-july2024.pdf

12   O'Donnell, J (2023). *Mapping social cohesion 2023.* The Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, Monash University, Australian Multicultural Foundation, The Australian National University, https:// scanloninstitute.org.au/sites/default/files/2023-11/2023%20 Mapping%20Social%20Cohesion%20Report.pdf

14   The Scanlon-Monash Index of Social Cohesion uses the following measures of social cohesion: sense of belonging, sense of worth, social inclusion and justice, political participation, and acceptance and rejection. See O'Donnell 2023, p.14.

15   Whiting, N (2024). 'Online hate analysts are calling for greater eSafety powers after study finds rise in anti-Semitism and Islamophobia,' *ABC News,* 4 August https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-08-04/research-esafety-rise-antisemitism-police-training/104172854

16   O'Donnell 2023, p.6.

The Community Consultation Process

For the delivery of the consultations, FECCA engaged eighteen organisations to consult with diverse multicultural communities across the country (for a detailed description of the consultation process, see **Attachment A**). A total of 44 consultations sessions were undertaken between November 2023 and May 2024, covering all states and territories, and including over 860 participants.

From the outset, FECCA acknowledged the challenges of holding safe conversations about racism with people and communities with lived experience of racism. As guidance for consultations, the following principles were adopted:

- *Trauma-informed*, recognising the need to ensure safe spaces for individuals to share and to exercise choice throughout the consultations, as well as the importance of validation of their experiences and acknowledgment of their strengths and views.
- *Strength-based*, centring the diverse knowledge of people with lived experience of racism in the definition, understanding and identification of recommendations to address racism.
- *Intersectional lens*, recognising overlapping forms and systems of discrimination that are associated with a range of individual and community characteristics, and which require a more nuanced understanding of how racism is experienced together with other forms of discrimination.
- *Community-led*, recognising the importance of trusting relationships and more direct connections to communities to conduct this type of work.

The consultations were designed to ensure a wide spectrum of participation across locations. Consistent with the Commission's scoping report, nine groups were identified as those that were more likely to face racism overlapping with other forms of discrimination. These groups included:

- Refugees and asylum seekers
- Women
- LGBTQIA+ multicultural groups
- Young people
- Older people
- People with disability
- People and communities of faith
- New and emerging communities
- Communities with prominent caste systems

In addition to the above groups, one consultation was conducted with members of multicultural community media, given the importance of media in reflecting present-day society and shaping public opinion. Parallel to the consultations, a short online survey was distributed.

Upon completion of the consultation process, participating organisations were provided with the opportunity to apply for a small grant to implement community-based activities of their choice, to support a greater understanding of racism as well as initiatives to address and prevent it. This step was built into the design of the consultations from the beginning, as a mechanism to avoid the one-sided extraction of information, and to offer communities a small opportunity for action.

Approach to Data Analysis

The variety and complexity of lived experiences with racism shared by the participants made the task of summarising them into a report quite challenging. Unlike quantitative data, qualitative data reveals nuances, contexts, personal and interpersonal aspects that are central to understand racism. Our analysis identified general thematic categories, whilst incorporating unique and specific insights to remain closer to the voices on the ground.

The consultation reports were prepared by the organisations that ran the consultations. Not all organisations provided full transcripts, but they all included quotes from participants in their reports. The quotes used here were drawn from those reports, and apart from minor punctuation changes, were not edited. This aimed to keep readers closer to the voices of the participants.

In addition to the consultations, 465 people replied to the survey, with 411 valid responses.[17] The analysis of the survey data was restricted to the valid responses. In addition to demographic characteristics, the survey proposed the following question:

> *What do you want to tell the Australian Government about racism in Australia, and how it can be addressed?*

All entries were reviewed, and the most common themes included:

- Systemic racism
- Education and training
- Participation and representation
- Justice and the legal system
- Racism against First Nations people

The analysis privileges an intersectional lens to racism, and institutional racism and systemic racism, as opposed to interpersonal racism. This aims to contribute to education about what racism is, going beyond the misconception of racism as a matter of individual beliefs, attitudes and behaviours that individuals 'have' or 'do not have.' An anti-racism framework must make visible and address the institutional norms and the broader systems that sustain racism beyond individual interactions.[18]

The writers of the report acknowledge that many other personal stories shared with generosity in consultations, deserved to be mentioned and might not have been included as examples. This is a limitation which hopefully will be compensated by bringing to the public not only cases of racism but the proposals those with lived experience have to inform Australia's anti-racism agenda.

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17   Some participants submitted some demographic data but they either provided incomplete answers that did not allow a proper understanding, or did not answer the survey question.

18   See Racism. *It stops with me* campaign website, https://itstopswithme. humanrights.gov.au/resourcehub/5-common-myths-and-misconceptions-about-racism-self-reflection-and-education-guide

Key Findings from Consultations

What is Racism?

> "
>
> *Racism is the process by which systems and policies, actions and attitudes create **inequitable opportunities and outcomes** for people based on race. Racism is more than just prejudice in thought or action. It occurs when this prejudice — whether individual or institutional — is accompanied by the power to **discriminate against, oppress** or **limit the rights** of others."*
>
> (Australian Human Rights Commission)[19]

Racism is more than individual attitudes, beliefs, or behaviours. Deeply rooted in the European colonisation of the Americas, racism has historically relied on the constructed idea of 'race' to justify hierarchisation of human beings and systems of oppression (see *Terms and Definitions*).[20] In Australia, the British settlement and colonisation were implemented through land dispossession, and a logic of elimination of First Nations people and substitution by settler-colonial structures and institutions. Settler colonialism also relied on whiteness, as an ideology and practice.[21] Whiteness positions Western-centric modes of being, thinking and organising societies, as well as those individuals who embody them, as a 'universal' norm, and relies on ideas of race to categorise as inferior all those who do not correspond to those specific norms.[22] The ways in which the colonial systems of domination were built upon racism matter to understand Australia's past and present, as their legacies continue to influence institutions today.[23]

Racism can manifest through various dimensions, including:

- **Interpersonal racism,** through interactions between individuals or groups of people.
- **Institutional racism,** through policies, practices and behaviours that are normalised in organisations and institutions.

Systemic racism, through the dominant norms (informal and formal) and practices that frame behaviour in society and lead to discriminatory treatment and opportunities between individuals and communities.

The experiences of participants in consultations have shown the difficulties of trying to isolate 'race discrimination' from other forms of discrimination. When asked about their experiences of racism, they often referred to racism in association with physical appearance, gender, language, country of birth, migration status, cultural practices, religion, and even food habits. Without naming 'intersectionality,' many of those experiences were classic examples of the multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination that shape racism in practice:

"You have been told that there are LGBTQ people in this land, and that makes us feel like we wanted to come to this country. When we arrived in this country, the expectation was not there. We're not the type of LGBTQ people that we need or want in this country. I guess it's because of the colour of our skin, the accents we speak, how we speak, and how we dress up and perform ourselves in the public area."
— Consultation with LGBTQIA+ communities

"I think it [racism] is when somebody is treated less than other people in terms of skin or culture or denomination. Some people get favours, yet you are less treated."
— Consultation with refugees and asylum seekers

"Racism is discrimination in language. When I arrived in Australia, I felt it was impossible to live because I didn't speak the language. To fit in, I had to lose my identity."
— Community member in Sydney

While examples of racism were based on behaviours such as microaggressions, derogatory remarks, bullying, and stereotypes, participants also discussed how these interpersonal manifestations were connected to broader systems:

"Sometimes when you are facing racism, there are two different aspects, like the macro and the micro."
— Consultation with people with disability

"We need to recognise institutional racism... There are so many prejudices to be faced; when we should be celebrating the fact that many people from multicultural backgrounds speak more than one language. But power doesn't shift because you want it to. We have a 200-year colonial history behind us that shapes why our institutions are like that."
— Consultation with multicultural media

"At times it is difficult to deal with racism like when it is more in the system itself, like when it comes against elder people accessing some service."
— Consultation with new and emerging communities

Some participants spoke specifically about racism as part of Australia's history and how its effects are still being seen today. Racism against First Nations people in Australia was identified both in their local areas and in the broader society:

"My ten-year-old daughter was sitting outside of Kmart and she noticed the lady that was checking the bags were letting non-Indigenous people go through and checking Indigenous people's bags. And she said to me, she commented to me, "Mum, I don't like that lady. What she's doing is wrong." And you know if a ten-year-old can see that that's wrong."
— Consultation with faith community

"First Nations people are treated even more poorly than migrants, especially in outback Australia. Derogatory remarks are made..."
— Consultation with migrants in NT

"Australia is the most racially comfortable country, racism is so much accepted here as a community. From the start you are saying the Aboriginal people but when you say Australian, you'd imagine a white person. Even the white Australians are racist against their own people which is the Indigenous people."
— Consultation with young people

A well-known characteristic of racism is that it homogenises those negatively racialised, denying them recognition in their individuality as human beings. People in consultations mentioned how terms such as 'African gangs' were harmful, projecting all 'young Black men' as a dangerous category. That language not only stigmatises people from different countries, cultures, languages and communities, but mistakenly named as 'Africans' many young people who were born in Australia, with African heritage.[24]

Women also spoke of how stereotypes have been imposed on them, compromising their voice and individuality:

"Interracial marriages (Filipino + Australian) are seen as made for the purpose of getting citizenship... The mail order bride stereotype"
— Consultation with new and emerging communities

"My mom is Caucasian Muslim and wears the (hijab) scarf and abaya. When we went to Centrelink, the people that work there thought that she was not from here...The counter worker asked if my mom wanted a translator and my mom told her that she is Caucasian Australian, and the behaviour of the worker changed."
— Consultation with young people

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19 Australian Human Rights Commission's webpage, https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/race-discrimination/what-racism

20 For a core reference, see Quijano, A (2000). 'Coloniality of power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America.' *Nepantla: Views from South* 1 (3): 533—80.

21 Wolfe, P (2006). 'Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native.' *Journal of Genocide Research* 8(4), 387—409. https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520601056240

22 For an analysis of whiteness in Australia and Indigenous representation, see Prof Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2004) 'Whiteness, epistemology and Indigenous representation' in Moreton-Robinson, A (ed) (2004). *Whitening race: essays in social and cultural criticism.* Canberra, Aboriginal Studies Press.

23 For an analysis and account of how the settler colonial structures continue to impact the daily lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, see Watego, C (2021). *Another day in the colony.* St Lucia, University of Queensland Press.

24 During the COVID 19 pandemic, Asian Australians also experienced high discrimination, being blamed for the pandemic. See Kamp, A., Sharples, R., Vergani, M., & Denson, N. (2023). 'Asian Australian's experiences and reporting of racism during the COVID-19 pandemic.' *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 45(3), 452—472.

How Racism is Experienced

While examples of racism were based on behaviours such as microaggressions, derogatory remarks, bullying, and stereotypes, participants also discussed how these interpersonal manifestations were connected to broader systems:

"I have difficulties going to the chemist because they always think I am stealing; this has stopped me from accessing essential medicine that I need as I do not feel like going there because of the way they make me feel when I am shopping."
— Consultation with young people

"Taking my children to the park one day and there were like 3 other mothers there, as we approached the swings and the slides, one of the mothers called out to her child that it was time to go home because the playground was no longer safe. Right there and then I turned to see at what she meant by that, then it dawned on me that she was referring to me and my children. It is very sad to witness such behaviour and attitude without understanding the cause and the effect of it."
— Consultation with refugees

"Parents in childcare choose white educators to talk to. Parents do not want to speak to educators other than white people."
— Consultation with new and emerging communities

"In a meeting, I asked a question but the client addressed my white colleague even though I was his boss."
— Consultation with member from new and emerging communities

"I have found that the racism often comes out as microaggressions or a sense of alienation or exclusion … very subtle and very hard to identify…"
— Consultation with LGBTQIA+ communities

The experiences shared through consultations reaffirmed the urgent need to address the normalisation of everyday racism and its acceptance as something that one has to learn to 'get on with'.[25]

25   For the analysis of the term 'everyday racism,' see Essed, P. (1991). Understanding everyday racism: An interdisciplinary theory. Sage Publications.

Systemic Racism

When people spoke about their experiences of racism, the most common places were schools, workplaces, health care services, and in interactions with the police. In all these settings, they have interacted with authorities who had the e power to determine whether they would get access to what they needed, be that education, care, employment and career opportunities, or justice. Here we give special emphasis on reproducing the quotes as the best way to directly convey the messages from consultation participants.

Racism in schools

"We are supposed to be safe in our schools. But if teachers discriminate, who do we go to?"
— Consultation with young people

"Because of my hijab, I was treated differently in school… the kids all stared at me. It made me feel uncomfortable. This was a massive shock to me."
— Consultation with refugees

Studies have shown how students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and multicultural backgrounds experience racism in Australian schools.[26] Data from consultations validated many of the findings from previous research. Young people and their parents spoke about both direct discrimination in the form of racial slurs, and indirect discrimination in the form of stereotyping and lower expectations from teachers:

"Teachers did not believe in my abilities despite showing them that I am capable."
— Consultation with young people

"In high school, my teacher told me that I should not do physics and chemistry because it did not make sense for someone like me to be in those classes."
— Consultation with young people

26   See Priest, N., Chong, S., Truong, M., Sharif, M. et al (2019). 'Findings from the 2017 Speak Out Against Racism (SOAR) student and staff surveys.' ANU Centre for Social Research & Methods (CSRM) Working Paper Series, No. 3, https://csrm.cass.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/docs/2019/8/CSRM-WP-SOAR_PUBLISH_1.pdf ; Ubuntu Project and Arashiro, Z (2021). Racism in schools: African Australian students speak up, Ubuntu Project. https://fliphtml5.com/nbxmp/ukwb

"A stereotype that a lot of those with darker skin tones tend to be intellectually lower than everyone else. So then, when you come into the school setting, teachers at times perpetrate that ideology within the classroom setting, and that makes people feel uncomfortable because you are always then trying to prove yourself to others when you must go that extra mile."
— Consultation with people with disability

"When I was studying at TAFE, I was the only Asian and the way I spoke wasn't as good as the others and the teachers asked me to withdraw from the course. I think it would have been best to provide me with the option to improve my English as opposed to asked to leave. I feel that happens a lot, [I'm] treated different."
— Consultation with young people

"It happens a lot in the field that I study in IT, Black people are not seen as intelligent enough to do it. A lot of the time when I'm in class, some people may feel Black people cannot contribute to certain things because they feel like you're not capable. I have seen this happen to other Black people and have personally experienced it."
— Consultation with young people

Students' and parents' experiences with complaints and redress mechanisms reinforced to them that schools, principals, and teachers were not equipped to address racism and to create safe and inclusive environments. Rather than receiving support from the schools, victims were at times punished for 'acting out.'

"So many of the girls who wear hijabs have had them pulled at school, when they let a teacher or other staff know about this, nothing is done, they are told 'there is nothing they can do about it' but I think these issues are not being taken seriously and that the teachers and others are not confident in addressing these issues."
— Consultation with refugees

"My nephew is 8 years old at school and they are playing, and some sort of disagreement happened, and they called him a [N-word]. My nephew got mad and started a fight. The school called home and told us to come get him because he was being violent. His punishment was to go home. This was unsatisfactory as they never addressed the issue which was the kids being racist to my nephew. I believe the school was too afraid to deal with the problem. The other kids got nothing because the new problem became my nephew being violent instead of their racism."
— Consultation with young people

Racism in workplaces

Racism in workplaces was commonly mentioned. Participants spoke about encountering racism in the process of applying for jobs. Many, for instance, cited the need to change names to an 'Anglo sounding name' to increase their chances of getting a job interview:

"A person's name can affect employment opportunities. I had 1 in 10 interview opportunities before I changed my name. I had 10/10 interview opportunities when I changed my last name after getting married to Anglo-Australian. I specifically named my kids English names, so they don't have to go through the same things I have been through."
— Consultation with women

In workplaces, racism took many forms, from microaggressions and bullying, to violation of workers' rights:

"I started working in aged care after I had completed training. There was a particular team leader who when she gave me tasks to do, would always ask 'do you think you can do this' or 'do you know how to do this.' If she had said this to every other worker I wouldn't have taken any notice, but it was clear she was just asking me this."
— Consultation with refugee women

"At work, a group of men were talking about the cost of things and one of them said $300,000 is enough to buy a [N-word]. It made me very uncomfortable. But they just laughed about it. I didn't say anything because I was just starting my job and didn't want this to affect my career."
— Consultation with young people

"At work, there are instances where supervisors don't grant annual leaves or sick leaves to Asians."
— Consultation with new and emerging communities

Participants also discussed how employees from minority backgrounds tend to face additional barriers to promotion and career advancement:

"There are people who don't get a position even if passing all requirements."
— Consultation with new and emerging communities

"Subjective assessments, even with objective recruitment criteria, continue to lock out diverse candidates from senior positions. This has an effect on who sits at the decision-making tables and perpetuates continued exclusion. With racism, one cannot become a leader"
— Consultation with new and emerging communities

The consultations also highlighted low representation of people from multicultural backgrounds at executive levels, including in the public service:[27]

"In work environments, individuals from migrant backgrounds often find themselves underrepresented in high-ranking positions, such as on boards. In the public service it is more difficult to get promotion as a non-white Australian."
— Consultation with new and emerging communities

Similar to experiences in schools, participants did not feel safe and protected to report racism. They had no trust in the effectiveness of racism reporting or redress mechanisms in their workplace and feared the negative consequences for those who complain.

A common feature of institutional racism is the dismissal of or minimisation of race discrimination complaints, questioning the victim's perception or the intentions of offenders. Some participants recounted how, when they tried to raise issues of racism, they were not taken seriously, and their complaints were invalidated or they were told to 'take a joke.' Some victims left their jobs, after feeling they had been branded as 'troublemakers' and were no longer safe in their workplace. In some instances, such acts of invalidation led to a sense of resignation with the system:

"You just feel you should ignore it and get on with life, focus on the future."
— Consultation with new and emerging community

"If you are reporting you can be made to feel that you are a troublemaker, you have to put it in writing it can be mentally extremely stressful. The process and paperwork can be complicated and confusing with no certain outcome."
— Consultation in Canberra, with various cohorts

"Sometimes the consequence of being silent about racism is better especially in the work environment as you can lose your job or make the workplace uncomfortable."
— Consultation with new and emerging communities.

Racism in healthcare services

Racism in healthcare services can appear in many forms but its ultimate consequences are felt in the disparities in access to health support and health outcomes for the most discriminated groups, including First Nations people, refugees, and people seeking asylum.[28]

Studies also show the racism negatively impacts the foundations for health and wellbeing, as well as the development of children and adolescents.[29]

During the consultations, participants spoke about discrimination across the whole spectrum of their experience with healthcare services, from access to the quality of care they received. Among other challenges navigating the healthcare system, they also cited racism from interpreters, and lack of cultural competence from health service providers:

"My two-year old was sick and we went to the Emergency Department, she had asthma and the nurse put a mask on her to get her oxygen, she was rough and put it on very tight, it was hurting her, my daughter was very stressed and nervous, she could not breath but the way the nurse was treating her was not helping her to calm down and it was making me angry. Afterwards, I thought about what had happened, I was concerned that the nurse was treating us like this because we are Muslim and are dressing differently and don't speak English, then I also think maybe she does not know much about us or maybe just a bad day and very busy in emergency and my daughter is struggling against what she needs to do. It is hard to know, but still, it makes me feel bad".
— Consultation with refugees

"There's a clear bias when accessing healthcare. The assumptions made based on my cultural background affect the quality of service I receive. There's a need for cultural competency training across sectors."
— Consultation with refugees

"A tall, very lean African boy is not considered likely to have an eating disorder, yet this happened but it took a very long time for diagnosis and therefore treatment, putting that person in danger."
— Consultation with young people

In consultations, health care workers spoke about facing everyday racism, such as when *"patients prefer to be attended by white nurses."* There was also a comment on discrimination in wages:

"I discovered that a group of African nurses including me were being paid less than others who were doing similar work. I took it to my manager who said she'll do something about it, but nothing changed. I then went to the union and got them to represent me at the hospital. Only then did our wages increase. Why did this happen only to African nurses?"
— Consultation with refugee women

In one case, the issue of racism across cultures was touched upon:

"When I arrived, and the interpreter was a Christian and made aggressive comments including 'you you Muslim people have no idea.' Before we left the hospital, we made a complaint to the nursing staff. This created a discussion about how racism can occur both within and across cultures. The group got distracted by this conversation and we did not go back to talking about what the complaint process was like."
— Consultation with refugees

Racism in interactions with the police

The difficulties in relationships with the police are not new. The consultations once again revealed the tensions between reporting to the police, and experiences of racism when interacting with the police.

"It happens a lot with the police. For example, when we are just walking, they start searching us, then realise that they have mistaken us for somebody else and they are not aware of how it is affecting us. As well as standing up for yourself, they always see it as aggressive behaviour, so they are always on edge even when you are trying to stand up."
— Consultation with young people

Mistrust of the police emerged as a theme in various consultations, particularly amongst younger cohorts. Participants reported that it was difficult to make formal complaints about incidents of racism they had experienced, and generally felt that their concerns were not taken seriously by police:

"I reported [a police officer]. An inspector rang me and questioned me on calling it as a racist event, questioned my report and went on saying how the officer was a gentle, good officer and that talking aggressively is part of the police officer's role. The outcome was that the report was closed and filed, and that the officer behaved ok. Investigator asked me to understand the police job and insisted in me considering to withdraw the complaint."
— Consultation with young people

Many participants cited a low level of trust in the police as an institution and felt unprotected against racism when relating to them:

"I won't go to the police. I don't feel they care. I feel the legal system is corrupt and I don't trust."
— Consultation with young people

27 Australian Public Service Commission (2024). *APS Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Employment Strategy and Action Plan.* Australian Government, April, https://www.apsc.gov.au/publication/aps-culturally-and-linguistically-diverse-employment-strategy-and-action-plan. See also Bargallie, D (2020). *Unmasking the racial contract.* Indigenous voices on racism in the Australian Public Service. Canberra, Aboriginal Studies Press.

28 Gatwiri, K., Rotumah, D., & Rix, E. (2021). 'Black Lives Matter in healthcare: racism and implications for health inequity among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia.' *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18(9), 4399; Willey, S., Desmyth, K., & Truong, M. (2022). 'Racism, healthcare access and health equity for people seeking asylum.' Nursing Inquiry 29 (1), e12440.

29 Priest, N., Lim, C. K., Doery, K., Lawrence, J. A., Zoumboulis, G., King et al (2024). 'Racism and health and wellbeing among children and youth-an updated systematic review and meta-analysis.' *medRxiv* 2024-07.

Media

Media institutions play a vital role in shaping public opinion. Diverse voices and experiences, when showcased in respectful and meaningful ways, can help to transform cultural stereotypes, and to encourage more inclusive attitudes and public spaces.

Media is a powerful tool to shape notions and images of what it means to be 'Australian' and to belong to the nation. This includes not only the stories that are told, but who tells them. However, in Australia's current media landscape, there is still under representation from professionals from multicultural backgrounds.[30] A 2022 study found that while 25 per cent of Australians have a non-European background, non-European presenters account for only 8.1 per cent of television appearances.[31]

Multicultural audiences who feel unrepresented or misrecognised in media are less likely to feel they are recognised as Australians, and that can also impact on their participation in social and political life.[32]

Rather than a unifier, media can actually function as a divider in society:

"The media supports racism. For example, when an African athlete does good, he is labelled as Australian but when he does bad, he is identified as African. There was someone who committed a crime, in the news they said middle aged Australian man, Caucasian etc. They said he has mental health issues that is why he did it. Whereas you see in another one, they say African man that has come to Australia did it and that he should get deported."
— Consultations with young people

"There is particularly racist coverage in the mainstream media of Asian and Muslim people."
— Consultations with community media

Community members also mentioned how racism is not discussed in Australia because mainstream media is silent on the issue. There were conversations about the need to move away from sensationalist and toxic reporting, which often portrays negative views of migrants and refugees, to more responsible journalism that creates a more welcoming and inclusive narrative:

"How often do you see a story about racism in the mainstream media, unless it's huge or becomes a scandal? The change has to happen from the mainstream. Mainstream media has a lot to answer for. It's about finding a more positive and aspirational way of living with each other and respecting each other and bringing people with you."
- Consultations with community media

Intersectionality Matters

Kimberley Crenshaw's original analysis of intersectionality cited the case of Black women who had experienced race and sex discrimination, but when faced with a legal system that did not allow claims based on intersecting forms of discrimination, they were often pushed to choose between either race or sex as the basis for their claims.[33] The consultations conducted for this report were rich in experiences that denoted similar difficulties in isolating 'race' from other sources for marginalisation and discrimination, such as gender, sexuality, religion, or migration status.

The report on the consultations with multicultural LGBTQIA+ groups provided rich examples on the complex ways in which race discrimination manifests for these groups, and its harmful impacts. Participants commented on racism from white LGBTQIA+ communities, and experiences of homophobia, transphobia, and queerphobia within multicultural communities. This intersection of race, culture, gender, sex and sexuality highlighted the ways in which services are only tailored to cater to discrete aspects of their identities - either their culture and race or their gender and sexuality. This creates challenges to navigate discrimination in their daily lives, and create difficulties in accessing culturally safe, affordable, and gender/sexuality safe services from healthcare to language support through interpreters:

"The obstacles and hardships during the service process that LGBTQ+ multicultural individuals have encountered could potentially result in trauma and ongoing trauma. For example, participants recounted instances of receiving poor treatment at Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) test centres, with one individual sharing an experience of being laughed at, leading to their decision to leave the facility. Participants also shared cases where multicultural LGBTQ+ clients were referred to services but found they couldn't afford them or couldn't access them due to eligibility issues (available for PR and citizen only)."
— Report on consultations with LGBTQIA+ communities

A consultation with interpreters who identify as LGBTQIA+ or work with LGBTQIA+ communities illustrated how difficult and complex it can be for LGBTQ+ people who do not speak fluent English to access safe services, and the ways in which professional guidelines are creating loopholes:

"The code of ethics for interpreters and translators allows them to withdraw from or refuse an assignment if they perceive a conflict of interest or if it contradicts their personal beliefs. However, some interpreters misuse this clause to justify refusing service to LGBTQ+ CALD individuals, failing in their duty to provide inclusive and non-discriminatory services to all community members"
— Report on consultations with interpreters who identify as LGBTQIA+ or work with LGBTQIA+ communities

LGBTQ+ people are being denied a service due to prejudice against their gender or sexuality, and this prejudice is being enabled by professional guidelines. While interpreters were able to provide culturally sensitive and tailored services, there is a glaring gap in their ability to also provide safe services for LGBTQ+ communities.

Consultations also indicated frustration over the simplification or 'tick the box' notion of diversity:

"One participant recounted providing feedback for the hiring process, emphasising the need for more POC [people of colour] in a clinical setting to provide service to clients from different cultural backgrounds. In response, the HR department indicated that they had hired a transgender individual, which, while valuable, did not address the specific concern raised by the participant. This response reflects a broader issue where diversity initiatives are reduced to a "box-ticking" exercise."
— Report on the consultation with LGBTQIA+ communities

The issue of racism and sex and gender-based discrimination appeared in many instances. From Muslim women wearing a hijab to the fetishisation and over-sexualisation of Asian women and queer Asians, lived experiences of discrimination were hardly reduceable to 'colour of skin:'

"Racism impacts women differently, in terms of stereotypes especially from particular backgrounds. For instance, women wearing hijab may be wrongly perceived as voiceless and subservient by some individuals. This misconception can lead to increased incidents of sexual harassment and racism directed towards these women."
— Report from consultation in Canberra with various cohorts

The experience below, shared in a consultation with people with disability, was perhaps the most powerful example of the complexity of racism and responses to it:

"When I was born, my mother took me to an optometry appointment and during the optometry appointment, there were two dummies and I was crying. So, the doctor offered to give me a dummy, but my mother said no. When my mum left the room and the doctor had me, he gave me the dummy without my mum's consent. My mum got home and she received a phone call and they said that the dummy that the doctor gave me was contaminated with a disease which left me hearing impaired. And I think, for her, being a first-generation African coming to Australia, the last thing you necessarily want to do is start chaos. So, I think she kind of just internalized that and I think that›s another form of racism that sometimes we don›t necessarily see or hear about."
— Consultation with people with disability

Racism in Multicultural Communities

"When we say racism, we look at white against Black but I see racism in Black against Black. We do perpetuate a lot of it though, passively or subconsciously, but it is racism and we need to address it"
— Consultation with new and emerging communities (African communities)

One of the most powerful consequences of systemic racism is that it embeds a logic of conflict amongst those who are marginalised by this system. For many individuals in multicultural communities in Australia, internalised racism and attempts to improve their position in the (white) dominant system, can often lead to discriminatory behaviours that feed into internal differences and reproduce racialised hierarchy.

30 Dezuanni, M., Notley. T., Di Martino, L. (2021). *Towards a national strategy for media literacy.* Research report. Australian Media Literacy Alliance, https://medialiteracy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/AMLA-Consultation-Workshop-Report_UPDATE-25-10-2021.pdf

31 Groutsis et al (2022) *Who gets to Tell Australian stories?* 2.0. Media Diversity Australia, the University of Sydney and UTS, https://www.mediadiversityaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Who-Gets-to-Tell-Australian-Stories_2.0_FINAL_pdf.pdf

32 Park, S., Griffiths, R., McGuinness, K., Nguyen, T. & Lee, J. (2023). *Sense of belonging among multilingual audiences in Australia.* Canberra, University of Canberra and Special Broadcasting Service.

33 Crenshaw, K (1989). 'Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine.' *Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.* University of Chicago Legal Forum v.1989, Issue 1, https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=uclf

Caste-based discrimination

In 2022, following a submission from caste-oppressed communities and academics in Australia, the Commission recognised caste-based discrimination as an intersectional form of discrimination. Caste refers to "strictly codified, socio-religious hierarchical system made up of classes and sub-classes that are ranked based on underlying ideas of purity and pollution" and which is historically associated with some South Asian communities. [34]

Giving continuity to that process, the consultations organised by FECCA included specific consultations on caste discrimination in Australia. They involved: one study led by members from caste-oppressed communities and academics, drawing upon interviews and focus groups, involving 146 participants; and two online consultations, and one face-to-face consultation in Sydney.

The first study identified caste-based discrimination as a significant problem in Australia that goes beyond interpersonal or inter-group interactions within the South Asian community and affects systems and institutions:

"Participants reported worst of caste identity-based discrimination in form of physical assault, being treated as untouchables (especially children), and socioeconomic boycott on business and persons. The results also pointed towards presence of overt and covert forms of prejudice and discrimination based on the caste identity in education, employment, marriage, intersectional discrimination based on gender and religion (and of course caste) and exclusionary practices that make caste as the central consideration of socio-cultural and socio-economic life in Australia within the Indian diaspora community. The impact of such pervasive discrimination was negative, and it significantly affected the well-being, mental, and psychological, of the caste oppressed persons."
— Report from consultations with caste-oppressed communities

One of the most powerful consequences of systemic racism is that it embeds a logic of conflict amongst those who are marginalised by this system. For many individuals in multicultural communities in Australia, internalised racism and attempts to improve their position in the (white) dominant system, can often lead to discriminatory behaviours that feed into internal differences and reproduce racialised hierarchy.

Similarly, the consultations in Sydney revealed that caste identity and hierarchy is 'entrenched within the Australian South Asian communities,' even though they might not be noticed by those outside of these communities. Caste consciousness is present in schools and workplace relationships; in how social networks are organised; in the way employment opportunities are offered; and, in the exclusion of Dalits from social events, amongst other forms of discrimination.

The transposition or 'transnationalisation' of rigid social systems through migration is not unique to the South Asian communities in Australia. It is common that communities will carry with them social norms and practices through migration, and these can at times be based on discrimination. It is critical that the Australian systems, institutions, and social practices send a clear signal that those forms of discrimination are not accepted. As suggested below, an anti-racism framework is an important mechanism through which Government and civil society can demonstrate anti-racism commitment and the principles we stand for.

Addressing Racism: An anti-racism Framework

"

Anti-racism involves actively attempting to combat racist policies, practices, culture, and ideas. Anti-racism is about more than being 'not racist.' It involves active decisions that seek to combat injustice and promote racial equity. It can be helpful to think of anti-racism as a skill set that we can all develop and use to promote a better, more equitable society."

(Australian Human Rights Commission)

Consultations aimed to capture how people with lived experience of racism would like to see racism being addressed. Interestingly, participants could clearly articulate that while racism was made visible in relationships — interpersonal, inter and intra-communities, or in relation to institutions, the proposed actions should be directed towards systemic change:

"It should happen from a constitutional change, policy making, making a few years' worth of action plan and then implementing it via multiple platforms and then evaluating the success. The issues should be openly talked about."
— Consultation with refugee women

The first step in that process would involve breaking the silence around racism:

"To address the issues of discrimination, bullying, harassment, and racism, first, we should admit that there is a problem, and it happens every single day in almost every situation."
— Consultation with refugee women

Whilst there was a variety of specific suggestions on what an anti-racism framework should include, participants repeatedly mentioned certain actions and areas for intervention, which allowed us to summarise them in the categories below.

Government leadership

Government commitment and action through enforcing laws, enacting policies, and holding media to account was identified as essential to create change. Government was also mentioned as having an important role in creating positive narratives about migrants in Australia, in recognition of their long-established contribution.

"I suppose on an individual level, we are the agents of change. So, we have to take agency for our actions and for our decisions and for our thinking. But on a systemic level, governments can do a lot to offer those ways of thinking and doing and behaving, and policies and frameworks can help us guide that."
— Consultation with faith communities

"Governments must implement and enforce anti-discrimination laws, promoting diversity in public offices, and investing in initiatives that address inequality are crucial steps. Community engagement plays a vital role in implementing government messaging and fostering inclusivity. The education system starting from early childhood education, should emphasise inclusivity, diversity, and cultural competence."
— Consultation in Canberra, with various cohorts

Some participants emphasised that policymakers and political leaders should better engage with multicultural communities in order for legislation to be effectively anti-racist:

"When making policy or laws — consult directly with the community. You never know if there's hidden bias. Don't assume the solution, have community inform the solution."
— Consultation with young people

This extended further to the need for better political representation of different ethnicities, cultures, and religions, to ensure that the diverse voices and perspectives of Australian society are truly represented.

Invest in anti-racism education and training

Education was identified as a key area for anti-racism actions. Starting early and teaching children and young people, with reforms in school curriculum to embed core components around First Nations people's history, multiculturalism and migration, as well as education on racism and anti-racism, were suggested. The issue of caste discrimination was also mentioned, with suggestions for curriculum review to include education on caste systems.

"A lot of time is spent on colonial period history in primary schools, on the first settlers, 'explorers' and bushrangers, which then becomes a critical part of national identity. It would be useful to include some modern history around the waves of migration, dismantling the white Australia policy, Australia's relationship with Asia and its participation in the Pacific Theatre during WWII. Even a discussion around pre-colonial trade and an acknowledgement that migration is not a modern invention in our national context could prevent ignorant statements like, "go back where you come from" or a general message of not belonging."
— Consultation with new and emerging communities

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34   Australian Human Rights Commission 2022, p.73.

"We need to build trust in the community via early education. Education needs to start before five years of age. Children need to be educated beyond Harmony and NAIDOC week. This needs to be an important part of the curriculum, in scale with the actual problem, and parents need to be aware that this is a serious part of the learning, because, often, racism start at home. The systematic change of the education system will inevitably overflow to adults, who have grown themselves in a racist environment."
— Consultation with refugee community

"Schools need to develop a stronger commitment to acceptance, tolerance, and culture. This would include training and support for management, teaching and other school staff as well as inclusion of this in the curriculum for the students."
— Consultation with refugee community

Beyond school, education was broadly understood as a path towards shared understanding and trust. Education about different cultures, traditions and practices was also raised as an important way to combat and prevent racism. Some participants also identified the value of cultural safety training, and anti-racism training, including at workplaces, and for public institutions such as law enforcement agents, health services and schools:

"Education is key. We need programs that actively educate people, dismantle stereotypes, and foster understanding. It's about creating spaces for open dialogue and promoting allyship."
— Consultation with LGBTQIA+ communities

"I suggest a police training day — share the views of locals with police." - Diversity training with police."
— Consultation with young people

"Providing LGBTQ+ training in various languages is crucial. It's also important to enhance training on cultural sensitivity and safety, along with educating individuals about racism, particularly focusing on the impact of racial microaggressions."
— Report from consultations with LGBTQIA+ communities.

Combating racism in workplaces

Actions that address racism in workplaces also appeared as priority. Currently, a common approach in Australia is to address racism in workplaces through unconscious bias training or diversity training. However, evidence suggests that anti-bias training is not effective in reducing discrimination against racialised groups in workplaces.[35] Instead an anti-racism agenda in workplaces should actively lead to policies and mechanisms that prevent race discrimination, and ensure safe mechanisms for redress when that occurs.

A common recommendation was around hiring practices, with more recruitment and design of career pathways for people from diverse backgrounds, including cultural and gender diversity. Organisational policies should address potential bias in selection processes, include culturally diverse people in recruitment processes, and promote an environment and career pathways that increase the participation of people from multicultural backgrounds, including LGBTQIA+ individuals and women in senior and management roles.

As mentioned above, employees tend to not report racism or be discredited when they do so. A major step of any anti-racism institutional change would be to ensure that employers have clear and safe pathways for reporting and redress:

"Many participants stressed the importance of not only establishing, but knowing and using, feedback and reporting mechanisms in their workplaces and the communities in which they reside."
— Report on consultation with new and emerging communities

Improve reporting and justice system

"African proverb: you can't be bitten by a snake and report it to a crocodile. This proverb is used as an example to explain how the community feels when they have to report incidents to a police officer who doesn't look like them. This also refers to reporting to someone who doesn't have your experience, who is usually the person who will make the final decision."
— Consultation with newly arrived migrants

The lack of trusted and effective reporting and redress mechanisms was identified across various consultations. Many participants considered complaint processes as complicated, potentially compromising their safety and security, and eventually leading to an unsatisfactory outcome.

The findings from these consultations align well with recent research based in Victoria, on the barriers to reporting racism. As the study documents, low levels of reporting were associated with sense of hopelessness (91 per cent), the view that reporting is too difficult (83 per cent), concerns about not being taken seriously (83 per cent), worries about negative consequences (76%) or not knowing where to report (75 per cent).[36] These findings indicate that whilst more public awareness is needed on how and where to report racist activities, this alone is insufficient to address low reporting levels.

Support with reporting and redress mechanisms requires a trauma-informed approach. As in many situations involving trauma, victims often name validation and empathy as critical for their psychological wellbeing. Equally important is to ensure that victims are well informed of the processes involved and are able to make choices. For many people, exposure to 'legal' disputes and visibility may not be the preferred option, and they should be respected and offered alternatives that can restore justice. Finally, as the study also identified, "services should be delivered by trusted organisations and qualified staff, ideally with lived experiences themselves, and in different community languages."[37]

Improve participation and representation

One of the most common mentioned areas of intervention for anti-racism action was the media. There were various comments on the power of the media and how it has mainly emphasised negative narratives around multicultural communities, especially migrants, asylum seekers and refugees.

There was a call for the media to play a more positive role, with narratives that show the success stories and social, economic and cultural contributions that multicultural communities, including newly arrived groups, bring to Australia.

Media was also identified as a key actor in combating racism and advancing an anti-racism discourse, with power to increase awareness of what anti-racism entails and to educate the public about how to act as well.

"Ending racism requires a collective effort from individuals, educational institutions, media, and government. The media has a responsibility to present accurate and unbiased information, avoiding the perpetuation of stereotypes or discriminatory narratives. Promoting diverse voices and perspectives in media content can help combat prejudice and promote a more inclusive society."
— Consultation with community media

"Is there media accountability for racist depictions of individuals and communities? Mechanisms are needed to hold politicians and media accountable for their roles in perpetuating racism, race baiting, and scapegoating communities. There needs to be a call for media guidelines to be set up to stop the spread of discriminative views, or news with biased characteristics. Journalists should be accountable and there should be clear repercussions, based on clear guidelines."
— Consultations with community media

Overall, community members proposed a shift in how racism is addressed in Australia. It was clear that actions to address racism and prevent it from happening should not be a burden on those who are most likely to experience it. In the process of building an anti-racism agenda, Government, media, and institutions which we encounter on our day-to-day life, such as the places we work, schools, healthcare providers, sport clubs, should play a central role. At the same time, actions should emphasise a collaborative response amongst multicultural communities.

35   Dobbin, F., & Kalev, A. (2018). 'Why doesn't diversity training work? The challenge for industry and academia.' *Anthropology Now* 10(2), 48-55.

36   Peucker, M., Vaughan, F., Doley, J., and Clark, T. (2024). *Understanding reporting barriers and support needs for those experiencing racism in Victoria*. Research report. Victoria University, https://content.vu.edu.au/sites/default/files/documents/2024-07/barriers-to-reporting-racism.pdf

37   *Ibid* p.6.

Key Findings from the Survey

The online survey was distributed between 13 November 2023 and 17 May 2024. It was designed to be simple and to provide an anonymous, complementary set of data to the consultations. Out of the 465 people who replied to the survey, 411 included valid entries. The level of engagement with the survey was higher than initially expected and added an important set of data that complemented and reinforced the findings from the consultations. The analysis below was restricted to the valid responses only.

Regarding the demographic profile of respondents (see **Attachment B** for further details), the survey included optional questions around age, gender, location, place of birth (Australia or overseas), and belonging to a faith or religious group. The analysis indicated that:

- 72 per cent of respondents were between 26-54 years old;
- 66 per cent identified as women, 29 per cent identified as men, with 5 per cent either identifying with other gender identities or opting for not identifying;
- Whilst the majority was born overseas (56 per cent), there was a significant participation of people born in Australia (42 per cent);
- All states and territories were covered, with larger participation of respondents from New South Wales (22 per cent) and Victoria (21 per cent), and the lowest ones from Northern Territory (2 per cent) and Tasmania (1 per cent);
- 51 per cent identified as belonging to a faith or religious group.

The only proposed question was qualitative and had two components:

> *What do you want to tell the Australian Government about racism in Australia, and how it can be addressed?*

Respondents varied in how they addressed the question, including a mix of experiences with recommendations in their answers. After identifying the most common themes (see Table 1 below), the responses were coded. As shown in Table 1, the majority of them dealt with racism in institutions, including schools, workplaces, sport clubs, and were classified under systemic racism.

Among these responses, a key point raised was the need for policies and procedures across institutional settings to combat and prevent racism. Many expected the Government to take leadership in anti-racism policy reforms, setting a crucial, high-level example to follow. A few responses acknowledged that only reform at the highest institutional levels would bring about changes at the social and community level, while others drew attention to the importance of other leaders, such as executive members of organisations, for leading change.

A considerable number of responses called for education to address and prevent racism, not only for individuals but also for service providers to enhance their cultural safety. Hospitals and other healthcare settings, for example, were identified as requiring widescale cultural and anti-racism training to reduce medical bias and discrimination. Others suggested that early education about racism, and building racial literacy across Australian society, would be a crucial anti-racism reform.

Various respondents mentioned the harmful and negative impacts of misrepresentation in public spheres, including by politicians and the media, which contributed to stereotyping and negative views of multicultural communities. A range of responses identified public and political discourse about migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers as particularly divisive, and some identified the use of anti-migrant rhetoric as a common political tool in Australian politics. Respondents also referred to the idea of strengthening and building a sense of community amongst different cultures in Australian society as a way to combat misrepresentation. Suggestions included celebrating and making differences visible in a positive and human-centred way. These suggestions were classified under participation and representation.

A number of responses spoke to themes of justice and the legal system, in relation to reporting and responding to racism. Many noted the limitations of avenues to report racist incidents and offenders, while others urged the establishment of anti-racism legislation to prevent incidents of racism.

The survey also recorded various comments recognising racism against First Nations people. They ranged from placing First Nations people's marginalisation as evidence of historical racism in Australia, to recognising that multicultural communities experience racism, but not 'as bad' as First Nations people. As with the consultations, the context of the Voice referendum may have contributed to a higher visibility of concerns around racism against First Nations.

Table 1. Main themes from survey

Systemic racism	161	39%
Education and training	79	19%
Participation and representation	69	17%
Justice and the legal system	57	14%
Racism against First Nations people	33	8%
Unclassified/various	11	3%
Racist commentary	1	0%
TOTAL	**411**	**100%**

When commenting on how to address racism, the expectation that the Government would lead anti-racist initiatives was the most common theme. Similarly to the consultations, there was high emphasis on education and training, including in schools and workplaces. As highlighted below, the concept of education referred to more than cultural competency. Respondents mentioned the need for education about racism and anti-racism, as well as an awareness of how to report incidents of racism and be an ally of those experiencing racism.

There were various comments around anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, which given the time of the survey, were likely to reflect the increasing concerns with the war on Gaza, its negative impacts on the Jewish and Muslim communities.

Table 2. Analysis by sub-themes:

Theme	Sub-theme	Incidence
Systemic racism	Racism in workplaces	14.6%
	Government leadership	11.2%
	Racism in other institutions	9.0%
	Attention to intersectionality	3.2%
	Racism in schools	1.2%
Education and training	Education about racism	9.0%
	Awareness raising initiatives	4.9%
	Anti-racism training	3.4%
	Cultural competency	2.0%
Participation and representation	Public discourse	5.4%
	Building community	4.1%
	Media representation	4.1%
	Political representation	3.2%
Justice system	Reporting racism	7.5%
	Policy	4.6%
	Human rights	1.7%
Racism against First Nations people	Addressing racism against First Nations people	8%
Unclassified/various	Other	3%
TOTAL		100%

Conclusion and Recommendations

Discussions on racism in Australia are often reduced to the individual level and fail to educate the public on what racism is, and how it permeates the institutions and rules that guide our everyday life.

As these consultations have shown, a narrow view of racism can be particularly damaging when it serves to invalidate victims' accounts, and to mistakenly frame racism as a matter of subjective perception or intentionality of the perpetrators.

The experiences shared by participants have reinforced findings from previous studies and brought to the forefront the solutions that those with lived experience of racism propose to build a society where racism is actively combated. Consistently, participants looked at rules, education, institutions, public discourse and public leadership as the drivers for an anti-racism framework. Drawing on their experiences and propositions, we present the following recommendations:

Recommendations

1 Government must lead the way to change, showing commitment to a whole-of-society, anti-racism agenda that brings public and private institutions to act and address racism. These collective efforts must involve public, respectful conversations about racism in Australia.

2 Schools, as a fundamental institution for the formation of new generations, must incorporate preventative and redress mechanisms to tackle racism. Students should be educated on what racism is, foregrounding due recognition of the history of First Nations people and their strengths. The curriculum should also acknowledge that diversity, including of migrants from all over the world, is a central and positive feature of Australia. Schools must have safe and simple mechanisms for students and staff to report racism, and be supported, with redress systems in place that are trauma-informed and allow victims to exercise choice throughout the process.

3 Combating racism against First Nations people should be at the forefront of an anti-racism framework, and signal to the whole society that racism, in any form or shape, will not be accepted in Australia.

4 Public and private institutions must have policies and procedures to address racism at the workplace. These policies and procedures should ensure that employees can access safe and simple mechanisms to report racism and to be supported, with redress systems in place that are trauma-informed and allow victims to exercise choice throughout the process.

5 In government institutions, healthcare and the police, anti-racism education for staff, including training for executive leaders, should be mandatory. This must go beyond cultural competency or unconscious bias training, to include cultural safety training with an intersectional lens, clear codes of conduct, and education on existing policies and procedures to report and address racism at the workplace.

6 Across all sectors, employers should review their recruitment and career development pathways to ensure that the diversity of multicultural Australia is reflected through genuine representation, career progression, and leadership roles.

7 Media, as a key player in shaping public discourse and public perception, should employ more professionals from culturally diverse backgrounds to lead news and help to shape anti-racist narratives in Australia.

8 A Federal Human Rights Act should be introduced to address the intersections of discrimination and to create national consistency around protection of human rights. This step would show the Australian Government's strong commitment to enshrine human rights protection across all institutions.

9 In all that relates to anti-racism initiatives, people with lived experience must be engaged and their views respected, with a trauma-informed approach that acknowledges their strength and voice.

10 The Australian Government should provide additional specific, long-term funding for a national anti-racism strategy, going beyond one-off projects to enable planning, monitoring and evaluation of actions, as well as improvements, in partnership with multicultural communities.

11 The Australian Government should develop better systems to collect data and monitor racism, as well as to evaluate anti-racism actions.

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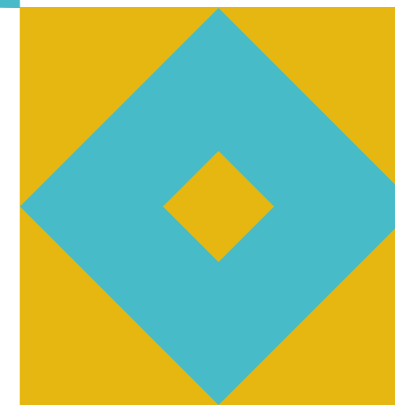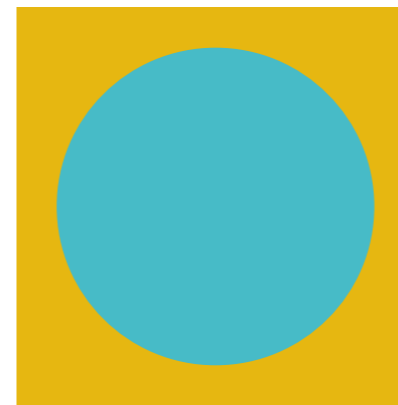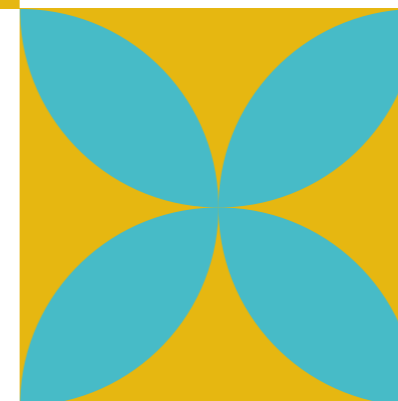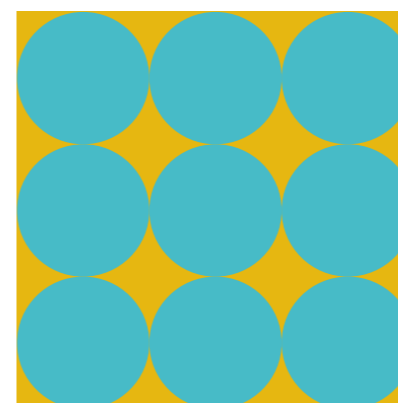
Attachment A: The Community Consultation Process

The consultation process was undertaken to ensure that the lived experiences, views, perspectives, insights, and expertise of multicultural communities, in all their diversity, are centered to support the development of the national anti-racism framework.

Principles

FECCA outlined the following guiding principles for the consultations:

- Trauma-informed, recognising the need to ensure safe spaces for individuals to share and to exercise choice throughout the consultations, as well as the importance of validation of their experiences and acknowledgment of their strengths and views.
- Strength-based, centring the diverse knowledge of people with lived experience of racism in the definition, understanding, and identification of recommendations to address racism.
- Intersectional lens, recognising overlapping forms and systems of discrimination that are associated with a range of individual and community characteristics, and which require a more nuanced understanding of how racism is experienced together with other forms of discrimination.
- Community-led, recognising the importance of trusting relationships and more direct connections to communities to conduct this type of work.

Group selection

The consultations were designed to ensure a wide spectrum of participation across locations. Consistent with the Commission's scoping report, nine groups were identified as those more likely to face overlapping forms of discrimination. These groups were as follows:

- refugees and asylum seekers
- women
- LGBTQIA+ multicultural groups
- young people
- older people
- people with disability
- people and communities of faith
- new and emerging communities
- communities with prominent caste systems

Consultation mode

Consultations consisted of group consultations, organised and hosted by community organisations and held either online or face-to-face.

In addition to the consultations, an online survey was distributed.

The consultation process

Preparation phase

In 2023, FECCA undertook an open, competitive small grant process to allow interested organisations to submit a proposal to run the consultations. This included conducting community engagement and recruiting participants from their communities, hosting the consultations, facilitating and delivering the consultation report upon completion. The call for proposals was distributed on FECCA's social media platforms and electronic direct mailing.

An evaluation panel, comprising of three representatives from FECCA, one representative from the Commission, and one representative from the Multicultural Communities Council of Illawarra (MMIC), assessed the proposals.

A total of 18 organisations were selected to run the community consultations, covering all states and territories and the nine intersectional considerations identified in the Commission's scoping report.

FECCA also partnered with Jeder Institute to provide training for the facilitators from the selected community organisations on how to conduct trauma-informed consultations. The training involved understanding trauma-informed care, recognising the impact of trauma, creating safe spaces for consultations, empathetic communication in consultations, incorporating trauma-informed practices, and implementing self-care strategies.

FECCA developed the materials to be used during consultations, and the evaluation panel and Jeder Institute reviewed them. These included:

- An explanatory note on the project
- A list of support services available for consultation participants; and
- A discussion guide outlining three key questions to drive the consultations: (i) defining racism, (ii) how to address racism, (iii) and steps to prevent racism.

Implementation of consultations

- Consultations were undertaken between November 2023 and May 2024. At least one staff member from FECCA was present at the majority of the consultations and was responsible for addressing any questions from community members that were related to the project. Community organisations provided the explanatory note, and were responsible for the consent forms, including for the use of anonymous quotes and photographs at the start of the consultation. Participants received a small payment for their participation and time. They also received the list of support services and once the survey was ready.

Post consultations

Once the consultations were complete, the community organisations prepared reports for FECCA on the consultation findings, with no identification of participants. Community organisations were also responsible for circulating the report amongst participants for feedback and incorporating any comments. Transcripts were not mandatory.

Table 1: List of consultations, including demographic groups and geographic reach

Organi-sation	No. of	Participant profile					Gender						State
		18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+	cis women	trans women	cis men	Non-binary	different term	prefer not to say	
1	43	15	17	6	3	1	15	4	11	8	4	1	NSW, Vic, QLD, SA
2	13	1	5	5	2		13						Vic
3	15												WA
4	13						3	2	6	2			NSW
5	31	13					13		18				Vic
6	13						10		3				NSW
7	32	2	8	7	5	5	19		13				NSW, WA, QLD
8	47	9	6	10	5		9		21				QLD
9	26						6		20				NSW
10	45						24		21				Tas
11	48	15		14		15	28		20				NT
12	213						121		28			64	Vic
13	50	3	2	2	7	2	17		8	1			ACT
14	21	21											SA
15	41	3	13	8	5	12	29		10	2			Vic
16	8	1	1	1	3		8						NSW, Vic
17	8	1		1	3	3							NSW
18	146						43		104				NSW, ACT, Vic, NSW, SA, WA

Online survey

Parallel to the consultations, a short online survey was developed, with only one question:

What do you want to tell the Australian Government about racism in Australia, and how it can be addressed?

The survey was widely circulated on FECCA's social media, amongst FECCA's members and partner organisations, and amongst the consultation participants. The survey also had optional questions to capture respondent demographics. 465 people replied, with 411 valid responses recorded.

Small grants

Upon completion of the consultation process, community organisations were provided with the opportunity to apply for a one-off, non-competitive, small grant of up to $5,000 to implement community-based activities of their choice, to support greater understanding of racism as well as initiatives to address and prevent it. Of the 18 participating organisations, 15 applied for the grant and received funding. Activities conducted ranged from communal events, workshops and developing in-language resources to educate and raise awareness about racism and reporting mechanisms. Organisations returned a brief report outlining the outcomes of their anti-racism initiatives.

Attachment B. Demographic Data from Survey

Age		
Under 18	1	0.2%
18-25	18	4.4%
26-34	75	18.2%
35-44	108	26.3%
45-54	111	27.0%
55-64	66	16.1%
65-74	18	4.4%
75-84	9	2.2%
Prefer not to say	5	1.2%
TOTAL	411	100.0%

Gender		
Woman	271	65.9%
Man	120	29.2%
Non-binary	2	0.5%
Agender	1	0.2%
Transgender Woman	1	0.2%
Prefer not to say	15	3.6%
Gender Fluid	1	0.2%
TOTAL	411	100.0%

Born In Australia?		
Yes	174	42.3%
No	232	56.4%
Prefer not to say	5	1.2%
TOTAL	411	100%

State		
NT	8	1.9%
NSW	89	21.7%
ACT	49	11.9%
VIC	86	20.9%
QLD	52	12.7%
SA	51	12.4%
WA	53	12.9%
TAS	12	2.9%
Invalid Response	4	1.0%
Prefer not to say	7	1.7%
TOTAL	411	100.0%

Do you belong to a faith or religious community?		
Yes	208	50.6%
No	166	40.4%
Unsure	7	1.7%
Prefer not to say	30	7.3%
TOTAL	411	100.00%

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