



# **"We are all in this together": Lived experiences of racism Consultation report**

**NOVEMBER 2021**

---

PREPARED BY BATOOL MOUSSA, POLICY OFFICER



## Acknowledgements

The findings of this report were derived from community consultation sessions that were facilitated by the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV), in partnership with the Victorian Government Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

ECCV would like to thank and acknowledge the 19 participants who took time to contribute to the Anti-Racism Strategy Consultation sessions held on 20 and 21 October 2021. We would also like to thank and acknowledge Monique Hameed for facilitating both sessions.

The observations and analysis of discussions presented in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

### **Suggested citation**

Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) (2021). "We are all in this together": Lived experiences of racism consultation report. Melbourne, Australia.

© ECCV 2021

Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria Inc.  
Suite 101, 398 Sydney Road  
Coburg VIC 3058

T: 03 9354 9555

F: 03 9350 2694

E: [eccv@eccv.org.au](mailto:eccv@eccv.org.au)



ECCV acknowledges the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Owners of the Country where we work. We pay respect to their Elders past and present, acknowledge their continuing connection to land, sea and community, and extend this respect to Traditional Owners throughout Victoria.

## Table of Contents

About ECCV .....	2
Executive Summary.....	3
Summary of Recommendations .....	4
Consultation method .....	6
How were the sessions conducted? .....	6
How were the sessions analysed? .....	7
Limitations .....	7
Findings .....	9
1 “We’re really tired and frustrated” .....	9
2 Centring First Nations sovereignty .....	11
3 Addressing structural racism .....	13
4 An intersectional approach.....	15
5 Re-packaging how racism is talked about.....	17
6 The role of education .....	19
7 Accountability and responsibility.....	20
8 Representation and leadership.....	22
9 Reporting, measurement and long-term sustainability .....	24
Other Recommendations.....	26
A conceptual framework is needed .....	26
Engaging other communities .....	27
Appendix .....	28
Appendix A. Demographic survey.....	28

## About ECCV

Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) is a member-based peak body in Victoria for migrant and refugee communities and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. ECCV works closely with more than 220 member organisations run for and by migrant and refugee communities, including ethnic associations, multicultural service providers, and ethnic communities' councils across rural and regional Victoria.

Since 1974 ECCV has been advocating for human rights, freedom, respect, equality and dignity for migrant and refugee communities, and for the building of a socially cohesive and inclusive Victorian community. ECCV has a strong history in advocating for the rights of migrant and refugee communities, informing industry practice and influencing Federal, State and Local governments on a range of issues, including culturally responsive approaches, anti-racism action, equitable access to services and socially just policy.

## Executive Summary

The Victorian Government is developing a state-wide Anti-Racism Strategy to prevent and address racism in Victoria. This report was developed in partnership with the State Government to reflect consultations with community members who have lived experience of racism.

ECCV conducted two community consultations with people who identified as having lived experiences of racism on 20 and 21 October. Nine themes were identified to summarise the views and perspectives of participants:

1. “We’re really tired and frustrated”
2. Centring First Nations sovereignty
3. Addressing structural racism
4. An intersectional approach
5. Re-packaging how racism is talked about
6. The role of education
7. Accountability and responsibility
8. Representation and leadership
9. Reporting, measurement and long-term sustainability

Fourteen recommendations were drafted to reflect participant suggestions about how the Anti-Racism Strategy should be designed, resourced and implemented. An additional two recommendations are provided by ECCV to address limitations in the reach and scope of the consultation method. ECCV has sought, to the fullest extent possible, to centre the views and perspectives of participants in this report. We have referenced full quotations from the sessions in this report and encourage the Victorian Government to take heed of the stories shared with us.

It was clear from the consultation sessions that racism continues to have an ongoing and very real impact on people in our communities. The Victorian Anti-Racism Strategy must centre lived experiences of racism and pay particular attention to how it can address structural forms of racism. Racism is a pressing human rights concern and must be treated as such.

In particular, racism has long-term impacts on mental and physical health that are currently not acknowledged in law and public policy. Participants suggested that a trauma-informed framework would effectively address these impacts, which are compounded by racial exclusion and intersecting forms of marginalisation. Participants also emphasised the centrality of First Nations sovereignty to anti-racism initiatives. To effectively address racism and progress a shared future, we must first address the injustices of our colonial history, which was founded on racial oppression and the dispossession of First Nations people.

A recurring theme from the consultations is that racism does not occur in a vacuum. Rather, racism is driven by systems that are based on injustice, exploitation and inequality. The

causes of inequality are complex and are often intertwined with race, but racial discrimination is not the only actionable injustice. The Victorian Government must resource the Strategy so that it is sustainable in the long-term, and include complementary preventative measures, such as education, improving the capacity of multicultural organisations, and investing in a communications campaign to encourage open dialogue about racism. To make a valuable impact, the Strategy must be positioned in a policy context that is concerned with creating a more equitable society.

## Summary of Recommendations

**Recommendation 1.** That the Strategy is informed by trauma-informed principles and a person-centred framework that acknowledges the difficulties associated with seeking support and redress for racial trauma.

**Recommendation 2.** That the Strategy resources multicultural and ethno-specific organisations to address the impacts of racism in a culturally safe and trauma-informed way and build an evidence-base about the long-term harms it inflicts on mental and physical health.

**Recommendation 3.** That the Strategy names and recognises Australia's colonial history and the ongoing structural inequities experienced by First Nations people, including social and political marginalisation, racism and paternalism.

**Recommendation 4.** That the Strategy provides a framework for non-Indigenous people to support First Nations peoples and work in partnership with the First Nations' Assembly of Victoria and the Yoo-rrook Justice Commission. To effectively address racism, the Strategy must engage with community-led recommendations about appropriate steps to redress the systemic injustices experienced by First Nations people.

**Recommendation 5.** That the Strategy clearly defines and distinguishes between different forms of racism, including structural and institutional racism, and make clear linkages about how they contribute to social exclusion, marginalisation and other barriers to full participation in society.

**Recommendation 6.** That the Strategy promotes measures that address systemic forms of racism, including:

- Strengthening the capacity of multicultural communities and organisations to build cohesion and resilience, as a counterpoint to racism
- Require public bodies and authorities to make decisions with reference to racial equity considerations
- Require institutions such as schools and health services to take responsibility for structural measures in addressing racism

**Recommendation 7.** That the Strategy incorporates an intersectional approach to address the multiple forms of discrimination that make people feel devalued and subordinated, and which impede full and equal participation in society.

**Recommendation 8.** That the Strategy implements a communications strategy to build the skills and knowledge necessary to openly discuss and address structural racism, particularly in public and private institutions.

**Recommendation 9.** That the Victorian Government resources and supports complementary best-practice anti-racism education programs that are delivered throughout the Victorian education system, from early childhood to secondary school.

**Recommendation 10.** That the Victorian Government creates an independent statutory Race Commissioner to openly investigate issues of racism and enforce accountability and responsibility.

**Recommendation 11.** That the Victorian Government draft legislation similar to the *Gender Equality Act 2020 (Vic)* that requires the Victorian public sector, local councils and universities to take positive actions towards achieving greater racial equity in their policies, programs and services.

**Recommendation 12.** That the design and implementation of the Strategy is informed by co-design initiatives with multicultural communities and led by representative members of our diverse communities.

**Recommendation 13.** That the Strategy is resourced and funded on an ongoing, multi-year basis to effectively address racism and achieve lasting outcomes.

**Recommendation 14.** That a monitoring, reporting evaluation framework is developed alongside the Strategy to provide mechanisms for the ongoing review of actions and priorities, and to adapt those priorities to changing community needs.

## Other recommendations

**Recommendation 15.** That the Strategy resources and is informed by the development of a conceptual framework that can help us better understand and address the long-term and structural impacts of racism.

*“The way forward is for everybody to support each other. We need to come together to make sure that this is unacceptable.”*

**Recommendation 16.** That the Strategy commits to ongoing co-design by engaging with communities that face a range of language, cultural and material barriers to participation.

## Consultation method

### How were the sessions conducted?

#### Purpose and format

People with lived experience of racism were invited to register to attend two consultation sessions hosted by ECCV on 20 and 21 October 2021. A call out was sent via ECCV's member eBulletin and social media channels. The sessions were held on Zoom and ran for an hour and a half each. In total, 19 people attended the sessions.

Five questions were drafted to elicit rich and authentic information about lived experiences of racism, who should be responsible for addressing racism, and how the Strategy can effectively reduce racism. They were adapted from questions that were provided by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing as part of an information and briefing package.

1. Why are you interested in being a part of this discussion?
2. How would you define racism? What have been some of the impacts of racism for you and/or your community?
3. What do you feel is needed to address racism? What needs to be included in the Strategy so it addresses racism effectively?
4. Who do you think should be responsible? What should the strategy say about the role of government, public sector agencies, and community-based organisations in addressing racism?
5. What would you like to see the strategy achieve a year from now? What about in the longer term?

Participants were also invited to complete a short voluntary survey to help inform the consultations and this report. The survey consisted of demographic questions about gender, age, residential status, country of origin and year of arrival in Australia. Participants were invited to respond in writing to question 3, as above. To encourage a diversity of views, the survey was left open to registrants who attended the session and those who did not. A total of 15 people completed the survey, which was distributed via email through the Survey Monkey platform. An overview of demographics is provided in **Appendix A**. Responses to the open-ended question are included in the analysis.

#### Creating a safe space

ECCV acknowledges that racism can have serious and ongoing consequences for people who experience it. Racism can take various forms and occur in different contexts, including between individuals, at the workplace, and more broadly in how a society operates. For

example, racism can be embedded in institutions, such as healthcare, the justice system, and education.

Unfortunately, we know that racism is prevalent in our community. Racism can be a difficult topic to discuss in a public forum as it harms people who experience it in different ways. ECCV sought to ensure that the sessions were a culturally safe space for participants to express themselves and share their views. To do this, we:

- Engaged a professional facilitator from a migrant background, who developed a group agreement to help structure and guide the discussion
- Set up a registration page for both online sessions, and manually admitted registrants
- Assured participants of their confidentiality and asked for their permission to record the sessions
- Gave participants the option to review a draft of this report for accuracy and retract any statements they may have made
- Gave participants the opportunity to provide written responses to the consultation questions
- Asked people who attended the sessions as observers and who did not self-identify as having lived experiences of racism to kindly leave, and indicated that there would be other opportunities for relevant organisations and stakeholders to participate
- Debriefed participants at the end of each session and provided details about the support services they can contact

### How were the sessions analysed?

One ECCV staff member transcribed the recorded sessions. A full transcript allowed us to review both discussions in detail and to derive themes that summarise the views and perspectives of participants. The participants were also given the opportunity to review a draft of this report to ensure that the analysis reflected the intended meaning of their contributions.

Following both sessions, two ECCV staff members and the facilitator debriefed and discussed the format, emergent themes and limitations of the consultation method. This helped establish a level of agreement and consistency in the interpretation of the discussions. The format and structure of the second session was informed by the first.

### Limitations

It is important to note the consultation sessions conducted by ECCV do not represent (nor were they intended to) the experiences of everyone with lived experiences of racism. Many people who experience racism may not have the time or the means to attend sessions such as these. In the COVID-19 context, the sessions had to be hosted online and this can both enable and limit their reach and accessibility for different people. It is likely that language

barriers, limited or no access to the internet, and low socio-economic status precluded the participation of people from a diverse range of backgrounds. To address these limitations, ECCV has included a summary of additional recommendations in the section titled ***Other Recommendations*** at the conclusion of the report.

Other limitations relate to time and resources. In our final debrief, the facilitator expressed that she felt a bit rushed by the time limit in both sessions, and that this may have affected the quality of the discussions. The briefing and group agreement at the beginning and end of each session took some time away from the discussion, which had to be limited to 60 minutes. However, we felt that these segments were necessary to build the trust and rapport needed to discuss a sensitive issue in greater depth.

## Findings

### 1 “We’re really tired and frustrated”

Feelings of personal frustration, exhaustion and weariness about racism in Australia were expressed in both consultation sessions. Many participants related experiences of racism in their personal lives and in the workplace. Personal accounts of racism were often emotionally charged and conveyed a sense of fatigue about the lack of acknowledgment of the “very real” impacts of racism in everyday life. One participant described these frustrations as stemming from everyday unconscious biases, assumptions, and racial stereotypes, or ‘microaggressions’, that she experienced at work and over the course of her life:

*I’m probably speaking from a place of exhaustion and fatigue. There are a lot of well-meaning people and a lot of people who are wanting to actually change this. But as someone who has been in a white workforce for over 25 years, and who is the mother of young boys of colour, I’m really tired. I’m really tired of being patronised and feeling as though the micro-aggressions that I experience everyday don’t mean anything.*

The daily but often overlooked realities of racism were a common point of discussion. These experiences were described as painful, ongoing and as having a negative toll on mental health. Racism was often experienced in forms that were not necessarily overt or intentional, but through inactions and prejudicial assumptions about intelligence, competency and English language proficiency that, for example, hindered career prospects, such as not being promoted or not being taken seriously at work. These experiences varied between participants, and highlighted the different ways that people feel excluded and marginalised by racism.

*“Racism affects us in a real way. As I am listening to people, I can hear my heart racing. It is a real thing, and it impacts us.”*

Personal stories and experiences of racism were often described through the language of trauma. For many, racism brought about distressing and at times chronic physical and emotional effects. Participants reflected on how repeated exposure to racial prejudice, and over a long period of time, contributed to and compounded feelings of stress, exhaustion and fatigue. For example, one participant noted that racism can “affect people on very different levels” by triggering the body’s “fight-flight-freeze” stress response, while others felt that the mental health impacts of racism had built up over time:

*Racism is a way of de-humanising people. You can’t re-humanise them through statistics, or action plans. We can only re-humanise them by understanding the pain that people go through. And the cumulative effects of how that impacts people... it is not just about what you said, but the 600 times before that I’ve experienced this that brings everything flooding back. (Session 1)*

*I have to do much more than everyone else to just move myself and to just to exist. I have to fight to exist... I'm doing it for the next generation, I'm doing it for people myself. But not everybody has that capacity to fight everyday. I think that takes a toll on your mental health. (Session 2)*

*"I'm really tired and fatigued... about being tolerated about who I am. I don't want to be tolerated. I don't want to live a life that is just about being tolerated."*

These accounts highlighted the importance of addressing the health impacts of racism, particularly in the context of Australia's unjust colonial history and the rise of right-wing extremism in Victoria. Inadequate responses and countermeasures can lead to long-term impacts that are compounded by people's experiences of racial trauma. To address these issues, it was suggested that racism should be addressed in a trauma-informed way.

*Racism needs to be addressed in a trauma informed framework. Most of the anti-racism strategies is targeted at a specific group of people leaving out the rest of the society [who are] also experiencing racism in different ways. Systemic re-traumatisation needs to be addressed, people from minority groups feel minimised in the system because workers are not trained to be trauma informed when dealing with already traumatised people.*

#### **Recommendation 1.**

That the Strategy is informed by trauma-informed principles and a person-centred framework that acknowledges the difficulties associated with seeking support and redress for racial trauma.

#### **Recommendation 2.**

That the Strategy resources multicultural and ethno-specific organisations to address the impacts of racism in a culturally safe and trauma-informed way and build an evidence-base about the long-term harms it inflicts on mental and physical health.

## 2 Centring First Nations sovereignty

Participants stressed the importance of recognising Australia's colonial history and the ongoing impacts of dispossession on First Nations people. Racism in Australia was described as having deep historical and institutional roots that remain largely unaddressed. Participants agreed that our society cannot begin to talk about or progress a shared future without first addressing our past, which was founded on racial oppression:

*"This relates directly to the dispossession of First Nations people. That has to be named and exposed. We need to look for a different paradigm, and that has to be about sharing power."*

*Australia's self-perception as welcoming and 'multicultural' is bizarre. Until we as Australians deal with invasion, we can't deal with racism. (Session 1)*

*[The Strategy] needs to start with a recognition [of] the experience of [systemic] racism experienced by First Nations peoples, and a commitment to reconciliation. (Survey)*

Centring First Nations people in the Strategy was seen as key to addressing systemic forms of racism, and to "getting to a level of honesty about what this Strategy can do". It was suggested that the Strategy leverage existing community-led efforts to recognise First Nations people, such as the treaty process, the Yoo-rrook Justice Commission, and the work of the First People's Assembly of Victoria. Recognising and supporting First Nations peoples' capacity to effect social and political change was described as a collective responsibility:

*As new migrants, as people of colour, we have a responsibility to support a treaty. Unless we start seeing recognition in areas where there are systems, and we start addressing the systemic impacts, then it is almost about fear of addressing the truth. We can't name the fact we inherently have this huge past of dispossession.*

The 'how' of implementing the Strategy was of particular importance to participants. As a government-led initiative, the Strategy involves change that is "going on within the system". There was an overwhelming desire for greater "equity in resources, power and policies for marginalised (othered) people". This requires cultural change and a fundamental shift in how power is distributed in society.

Participants felt there is a risk that the Strategy will not be effective, as it may not address the "imbalance[s] in power" that are consolidated through colonisation and continue to drive racism. They expressed concern that the Strategy may not adequately challenge or disrupt how power is exercised and, ultimately, how decisions are made:

*A cultural change from the paradigm of fear, division and othering. A review of the paradigm of conquest, violence and 'civilising' others, taking their property and lands... to one of 'one community', to 'no othering', to united, collaborative, and building a better community together. Redressing impacts of dispossessions, making reparations, restoring a healthy community.*

Nevertheless, the Strategy was welcomed as one “baby step” forward in advancing greater racial equity. Participants noted that attempting to shift the balance of power will be met with significant resistance. The dominant cultural group has a vested interest in protecting access to power, and “they will come kicking and screaming” when that is challenged. Much like other initiatives that seek to bring about broader cultural change, the Strategy must involve slow-moving but focused community-led solutions:

*The most far-reaching approach has been reconciliation ... even though it is still struggling and has been around for over 25 years. But that is the length of time that these kinds of frameworks have to work with.*

**Recommendation 3.**

That the Strategy names and recognises Australia’s colonial history and the ongoing structural inequities experienced by First Nations people, including social and political marginalisation, racism and paternalism.

**Recommendation 4.**

That the Strategy provides a framework for non-Indigenous people to support First Nations peoples and work in partnership with the First Nations’ Assembly of Victoria and the Yoorrook Justice Commission. To effectively address racism, the Strategy must engage with community-led recommendations about appropriate steps to redress the systemic injustices experienced by First Nations people.

### 3 Addressing structural racism

The majority of participants felt that anti-racism measures to date had a disproportionate focus on interpersonal racism, which arises from prejudiced attitudes. Participants agreed that the “structural nature” of racism and the complex ways that it impacts people is much more difficult to recognise, and for that reason it had not yet been adequately addressed, or even “talked about as much”:

*I have seen waves of racism in this country. I think the institutional racism in this country has always been there. I don't think it has been addressed yet. We are only just starting to tackle it and that's partly to the policy of the state government in relation to self-determination. I don't think they have done anything, or much about racism that impacts on people who have migrated here.*

For example, structural forms of racism can be enforced through institutions that have seemingly neutral recruitment policies. This creates labour market and employment barriers for people who are otherwise highly qualified:

*[Institutional racism] could be things like qualifications not being recognised, for example, for migrants, and not having the right experiences for jobs. On some level it needs to address the workforce, and awareness among leaders in the public and private sector to address those sorts of issues, recruitment issues. We need to look at what institutional racism means in the context of how it continues to discriminate against us. (Session 2)*

*“[O]ne of the key things is communications. There has got to be awareness, education ... as well as broader community education.”*

*Companies have statements... but they are just statements. There is no follow-up as to how they are put into practice. There is no measurement. When we apply for a job, we see beautiful advertisements about how inclusive the workplace is. But we still see a lot of racism happening in the workplace. So who is going to be responsible for that? (Session 1)*

These structural impacts were felt in the COVID-19 context. Participants drew on recent examples, including the public housing shutdown in July 2020, increasing anti-Chinese sentiment, the India travel ban, and the blame shifted onto migrant communities for the spread of the virus. The racial overtones of policy responses to COVID-19, and the structural factors that implicated people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, further marginalised the people and communities affected, and made some participants feel “not Australian enough”:

*Constantly, blaming the migrant community for the spread of the virus. Again, without contextualising it in situations where people of colour are usually doing a number of jobs just to make ends meet. They are frontline workers. And they are living in cramped spaces compared to a lot of others. There are obvious reasons why*

*there would be a greater spread within those communities, but that was constantly ignored, and we were blamed... they bore the brunt of that racism.*

Participants felt that it is important that the Strategy clearly define the structural elements of racism, as this would ensure that the Strategy is effective in addressing structural racism. There was a range of opinions about what racism looks like in Australia, and how definitions of racism can be incorporated into the Strategy. For example, some participants felt that racism was not only confined to racial discrimination from the dominant cultural group, but also within and between different cultures:

*We also talk about racism as being ... that it's from white people to the rest of society. It's not. It's between cultures as well. And we don't necessarily openly acknowledge that... that it's not just the historical white colonial society.*

There was agreement that the systems and power structures that drive racism must first be addressed, as this is what is needed to enact meaningful change and move towards formal accountability:

*Racism is a system of political construction. Racism is a power structure... It has power to affect your employment, who gets jailed.... I mean look at First Nation incarceration. That is the type of racism that we are talking about. Racism we are talking about the power structure and we need to always go back to that definition, otherwise the strategy is going to be shallow and will not effect any change, and we will go around in circles.*

#### **Recommendation 5.**

That the Strategy clearly defines and distinguishes between different forms of racism, including structural and institutional racism, and make clear linkages about how they contribute to social exclusion, marginalisation and other barriers to full participation in society.

#### **Recommendation 6.**

That the Strategy promotes measures that address systemic forms of racism, including:

- Strengthening the capacity of multicultural communities and organisations to build cohesion and resilience, as a counterpoint to racism
- Require public bodies and authorities to make decisions with reference to racial equity considerations
- Require institutions such as schools and health services to take responsibility for structural measures in addressing racism

## 4 An intersectional approach

The participants had a strong belief in the value of intersectionality in conceptualising and addressing racism. Intersectionality considers how a person's individual characteristics, such as their gender or race, intersect with one another or overlap. This affects how that person encounters the world, as they are subject to discrimination on basis of different characteristics, and often, a combination of them:

*We need to see racism through an intersectional lens. I define intersectionality as someone belongs to more than one marginalised group. This means that they have a higher "degree of difficulty". Like a hospital, we need to help first and foremost the people who are in the most need. This might be prioritising support for a female First Nations person who has a disability over a middle class Asian Australian. We need to help those who are less privileged than ourselves.*

Intersectional experiences of racism are complex and require a nuanced response. This is because people can be disproportionately affected and disadvantaged by two or more forms of discrimination interacting, such as race and having a disability:

*My son has a disability and is a person of colour. The more diverse groups he belongs to, the more difficult his life will be, so to speak. The impression that I get is that even when we talk about these things we talk about them in isolation. We don't combine them. I've done a lot of reviewing when people put together this big anti-racism thing and these are the big issues... but they don't talk about the intersectionality. It's very complex. A lot of these things are written or set out in a way that is very superficial I think. A lot of them are also not human-centred... If you don't understand these concepts... if you talk to white people about it, they won't understand and it won't make sense to them, and it will all be left in the lurch.*

Anti-blackness was identified as a specific type of racial prejudice that disproportionately affects people at an interpersonal and structural level. For example, a number of participants reflected on the harms of an implicit 'racial hierarchy', in which specific ethnic groups are situated 'at the bottom' and as a result face "racism in different levels and contexts". People from African, South Asian and East Asian descent felt that others often made degrading assumptions about them based on their appearance and colour of their skin:

*For someone of my colour, it's not just about experiences, it's what you are born into. Even showing your face, you experience that. There is a hierarchy... you have to prove yourself one million times... I think Africans are at the bottom of that hierarchy. It is about exacting power over people based on their colour... it is assumed that you are not smart, that you are a slave.*

These racial hierarchies are internalised at an early age and can block access to equal opportunity. One participant expressed anger and despair that their Australian-born children were "still being considered as migrants" and that their young child had imputed, at age 6, that she was inferior because of the colour of her skin. They recalled a question that

their daughter had asked: “mum where is a nice place that we can live where we don’t face discrimination?”

Discrimination associated with the intersections of gender and race were commonly experienced by female participants. One participant felt that she had to constantly prove herself to move around in professional circles and to gain leadership positions:

*Another one is the double-glazed glass ceiling that women of colour face, that I face constantly. I have to prove myself much more than an Anglo-Saxon woman. An Anglo-Saxon woman always gets more opportunities than I do. And is preferred for leadership positions and others that come up. And I have to prove that I can offer much, much more than that. And even if I do I’m still not considered that constant pressure is racism as well. Being excluded, marginalised slowly and it is everyday. Some people step out and others are resilient and step on.*

#### **Recommendation 7.**

That the Strategy incorporates an intersectional approach to address the multiple forms of discrimination that make people feel devalued and subordinated, and which impede full and equal participation in society.

## 5 Re-packaging how racism is talked about

Participants agreed that discussion of racism is neutralised and sanitised in Australia. Racism is often talked about through the lens of ‘harmony’ and multicultural unity, rather than explicitly naming it and talking about “what it does to human beings”. As a result, racism is often regarded as a non-issue by leaders, and this made it ‘invisible’ and difficult to talk about:

*There is this invisibility of the issue that makes it very difficult to talk about. I struggled a lot in my first couple of years in Australia as a new migrant and as an international student. I couldn't put to words what I was feeling and going through.*

*Moving to Australia was a completely different ballgame. Everything was very polite... very you know underhanded... there was a lot of blow up when things become apparent and obvious, but there is not a lot of understanding that there is an undercurrent. (Session 1)*

*“There is also... large sections of our society that don't believe that racism is a problem. That is a concern.”*

Participants felt that this type of neutralising language ignored the lived realities of a deeply ingrained and ongoing “undercurrent” of racism. Without explicitly acknowledging that racism exists, it will continue to run unchecked and policy responses to it will remain superficial:

*We are inherently racist. Until we can actually reconcile with our First Nations people, then everything else becomes about window dressing and multicultural lunches. It's very much that Howard era of neutralising diversity for some sort of assimilation.*

The language of ‘harmony’ inevitably leads to inaction as it discourages people from talking about racism openly. Concerns about racism are often kept out of the political mainstream, and where it does arise, it is talked about in platitudes, or diminished as ‘divisive’ or ‘unproductive’:

*Politicians, our public leaders too easily use racism to do things. And they also deny it when things come up. Morrison for example, says that we are the most multicultural country in the world. And he knows better than that. What exactly does that mean? Our public leaders need to be more aware of the impact that they have on our communities.*

As one participant described it, inaction is related to the exercise of power. Ignoring the issue keeps people in their place, and reinforces existing hierarchies about who has a voice in society:

*I wanted to talk about inaction and the erasure of people as a power differential as well. I think a lot of times we talk about the action that people take. But sometimes it's the inaction that people take that contributes to racism. I think part of it is that*

*sometimes people have to unlearn what racism is when they define it, because they define it very narrowly to avoid having that discussion.*

Language was identified as an important part of ending “racism and [creating] a more inclusive society”. There was a desire in both sessions to change the conversation by openly discussing racism, acknowledging its ongoing harms, and its hierarchical elements:

*An acknowledgement that it is real by our political leaders. Open discussion. Communications campaign. Strategies about how to address it in a variety of contexts including schools, services, corporations.*

### **Recommendation 8.**

That the Strategy implements a communications strategy to build the skills and knowledge necessary to openly discuss and address structural racism, particularly in public and private institutions.

## 6 The role of education

Education was identified as a key preventative measure for addressing racism in our society. Schools can be a place where young people experience misunderstanding, alienation and racism. They are a critical setting in which young people learn about themselves and the world. This includes first experiences of racism, which can carry long-term impacts in life. As one participant put it:

*And my kids have to work extra harder even in class. For me, racism is deeper, mentally. The way that affects you. Our kids are born here, and they are taught that everyone is the same. Not everybody is the same. They don't have that ... kind of discernment of finding out when things are really wrong. Our kids are not equipped for that because they are born in this environment. For me it is about how to change this.*

To help build connections and open up opportunities for young people, schools must be experienced as safe and inclusive. Following on from the previous theme, participants felt that education about racism must move away from the “shadow of bullying” and become an issue that is openly discussed by students and teachers in its own right:

*[We need] education to enhance understanding of different ethnicity in Australia. Put "understanding cultures" into primary and secondary's curriculum. Make the issue of racism more visible in education, not just under the shadow of bullying. Teach kids what are the dimension of racism, and how to handle.*

A better understanding and awareness of cultural diversity among young people can “start to address” the problem of racism and “help re-write their norms”. Anti-racism education can also help develop greater empathy among young people, improve their understanding of Australia’s racial history, and allow them to see themselves as being part of a rich and racially diverse community:

*Unless we start educating little kids as early as possible, but also ... it's about educating about First Nations people and their experience of racism for them to understand it at that level and then see it in themselves ... for them to understand what role they play, and what context does it sit in for themselves growing up in that society. And understanding that if we are all different... but what kind of analogies do we have, what makes us a community. But we don't talk about that issue. Kids don't get to talk about it. They need to first acknowledge themselves...*

### **Recommendation 9.**

That the Victorian Government resources and supports complementary best-practice anti-racism education programs that are delivered throughout the Victorian education system, from early childhood to secondary school.

## 7 Accountability and responsibility

Participants also expressed fatigue and exhaustion about there being no adequate avenues for redress, and little substance in how racism is currently addressed. This was attributed to the lack of appropriate representation at higher levels of decision-making. This translated to a lack of formal accountability and responsibility, and little commitment to addressing racism as a cultural norm:

*But there is no consequence for... having an attitude or behaviour or speech that is racist. We talk about... the system and structure and how that translates into opportunities into the way we talk, think and behave. But if you really want to change that, there needs to be a way of calling it out. The people who can call it out, who can influence legislation are not on the call.*

Many felt that we all had a collective duty to address racism, and a mutual responsibility to define a shared agenda for change where no such agenda exists in the mainstream. Part of this is also about understanding “your own prejudice and unconscious bias”:

*[W]e’re all responsible. There is no one accountable body. The more we leave it in other people’s hands, the worse it is going to get. The law won’t actually solve this problem for us. It will be about changing culture sharing power and creating a world where that is possible. People will not give up power easily, or ever. They want to take more power. There are all of these underlying, subconscious programming that are ongoing. We need to think about our responsibilities – call out one person out at a time. (Session 1)*

*“It is also about looking for possible solutions. This is a long road ahead. What we are trying to achieve in terms of the end goal is ... certainly the first step.”*

*The strategy needs to address the strengthening of our communities... With strong communities who are proud of their heritage and culture, who display it without fear ... the more that we get to show that there is nothing wrong with us, and it’s an opportunity for others to participate with it. (Session 2)*

Some participants felt that the responsibility of calling out racism often fell on them. This was described as painful and unsustainable, as it places the burden on the individual and risks victimising them further. Others felt that while it was necessary that individuals call out racism, it can be difficult for some to feel confident or empowered enough to do so.

*There are different levels of responsibility – there is individual responsibility as well. If you experience racism first-hand, how do you respond? Do you keep quiet? Sometimes it is about a lack of education about different cultures. Individual responsibility is quite important. It is about being brave enough to say things on the spur of the moment.*

Assuming responsibility for racism at the individual level also prevents more meaningful cultural and systems change from occurring:

*It can't just be something that one individual has to address or one organisation. They can't respond to the big need, as it is. I think everybody should be responsible and everybody has to have some... I don't know if it's a guideline, a requirement in the funding ... just a collective duty of care that we all have to respond to this.*

Racism is a pervasive “society-wide issue” that requires a “layered systems response”. Accountability mechanisms must sit at different levels of government, legislation and policy. Examples of possible solutions include a response similar to the Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM), which layers accountability and responsibility at every level of government, and strengthening media laws to better monitor and address how different communities are targeted by racism. This includes, for example, reporting that pushes harmful narratives about crime and race:

*“Strategies need to go beyond a 20-page document that all organisations have in place now... diversity and inclusion strategies, and a tick-box. I hope we go beyond that.”*

*[O]ne of the biggest issues is from the media, and the laws around the media. The comment around the African gangs ... the difference between how Andrew Bolt talked about the Archdiocese... and say how he treated Adam Goodes, for example. We can see that there was a different standard being held to. And I think that really needs to be nailed down.*

#### **Recommendation 10.**

That the Victorian Government creates an independent statutory Race Commissioner to openly investigate issues of racism and enforce accountability and responsibility.

#### **Recommendation 11.**

That the Victorian Government drafts legislation similar to the *Gender Equality Act 2020* (Vic) that requires the Victorian public sector, local councils and universities to take positive actions towards achieving greater racial equity in their policies, programs and services.

## 8 Representation and leadership

It was acknowledged that the Strategy will operate within a policy context in which people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds remain under-represented in governance, leadership and other “positions of power”. Participants felt that appointing the “right people to do the work” would go a long way in advancing greater racial equity. In particular, it would assist with addressing issues such as the underreporting of experiences of racism, which is tied to a mistrust and fear of authorities:

*I think that representation and also in terms of access and equity... leadership is a big thing here. A lot of people... they do not report because they are not sure who to report to. There is an inherent fear and mistrust of authorities. The lack of confidence in getting redress. A lot of people get re-traumatised... I think that trust needs to be established, and reconnection. So it is going to work on many different levels. Definitely the leadership, not just about calling it out ... we need the right people to do the work. We need that support from them.*

*“Unless you bring [mainstream] decision-makers, no change is going to happen. Government policies sometimes translate to policies in the corporate sector, but not always.”*

The lack of lived experience and personal understanding by those in leadership positions inevitably translates to a lack of substance in how anti-racism initiatives are implemented. Participants emphasised the need for greater cultural diversity and representation at higher levels of leadership to ensure that decisions are made in the best interests of our diverse Victorian communities:

*... A lot of people talked about senior leadership. If you have people who are diverse and who are caring ... if you have got senior leadership that cares about people, then a lot of these problems will be adequately addressed. But if your power structures are based on getting people to act and deal with things in a certain way, then your power structures will stay in place. And that is something that needs to be taken into account.*

Racism is a complex issue, and without adequate representation or a broader push to improve equity in power and decision-making, the Strategy would fall short on committing to real action on racial equity:

*[I]f you want to have leadership that can tackle something so complex ... you really need to be able to have the right leadership in place. In the last 48 hrs, I've seen people clashing... who are arguing with each other because they're not understanding that there is a spectrum to this. There is a complexity here that needs to be shared as you are going through this strategy. If it is too superficial, it will end up being clunky and people will think they are being excluded.*

There was also fear that without adequate representation by leaders who have lived experience of racism, the Strategy would be politicised and used to garner support during the upcoming election cycle. This would dilute the impact of the process and lead to no meaningful action:

*I just hope that this process is not political. And that it's driven towards an election cycle and then somebody else comes in, even if the same people come in with different leadership. If the vision is not driven by the right motives, it is not going to achieve the purpose. Also if it is being driven by people who don't have that lived experience... even though there is a taskforce and there is consultations... if the ultimate decision-maker has never experienced anything like that, it's going to be a difficult thing to see being implemented in a meaningful way. I appreciate the fact that there is a taskforce and that there are consultations, but I just hope that it's a process that doesn't die... and that we don't see any implementation but a lot of talk and show some intent, but then it just gets buried as soon as there is no requirement to follow through. Which has happened with a lot of things in the past.*

Participants also expressed discontent about racism being exclusively addressed within the confines of “diversity and inclusion” policy. To move beyond tokenism and towards greater racial equity, the Strategy must prioritise the transformation of institutions and deeply internalised norms about what organisational leadership should look like:

*And if the government wants to do something again, my biggest fear is that it will be led by a whole stack of very well-intended white women, whose only place in terms of a job is in the area of diversity and inclusion because that is the only place that men will allow them to go... (Session 1)*

*It's hard to talk about hard facts – we need to have some kind of workplace or leadership audit. It is not just about hiring young people, but they also need to make the shots. To sit in the decision-making powers as well. Have that diversity of experience, and that world available to those people. Data is going to be one way to do it. (Session 2)*

### **Recommendation 12.**

That the design and implementation of the Strategy is informed by co-design initiatives with multicultural communities and led by representative members of our diverse communities.

## 9 Reporting, measurement and long-term sustainability

Participants placed significant emphasis on the need to build a robust evidence-base through research, reporting and ongoing measurement. This would help ensure that the Strategy achieves what it sets out to do. The collection of high-quality data was identified as critical to informed decision-making and for describing the impacts of racism, “particularly in the area of mental health”:

*... on a structural level, the lack of data disallows the ability to talk about racism as well. If I know from personal experience, it is difficult to... you know there is not much diversity in this particular sector, let's say. I know that from experience but I don't have the data. It's hard to talk about when you don't have hard facts. So it sounds very clinical to talk about data when it comes to racism.*

Having a robust evidence-base to draw from would also ensure that the Strategy can be sustained and is effective in the long-term. The long-term sustainability of the Strategy was of particular importance to participants. Many expressed a sense of responsibility for their own children and future generations as a motivating factor in attending the consultation sessions. They reflected on their role and interest in building a more inclusive and socially cohesive community for younger people:

*There is a need for this strategy, but it needs to be sustained in the long-term. .... I still think of myself as a foreigner, in many ways in this country, and I shouldn't after all the time I have been here. My children shouldn't feel alien either. And they should be able to live as Australians. And what that means is an issue because the image of what an Australian is we all know something ... doesn't look like us, anyway. (Session 2)*

*[E]veryday I'm working in this circle of trying to make a difference to young people of colour's lives. And what they see is... they're in a situation of no hope. Especially young people who are black. They are named ... the way they look, they don't get a job. And any job that is created during COVID has maybe a 6 – 12month life. And it is only tokenism, and it returns them to ground zero and a loss of hope. They always say that. (Session 1)*

*“This needs to be a sustainable strategy. This is something that in the next 15-20 years ... my kids will **not** be talking about this.”*

Participants also hoped that the Strategy would be sufficiently resourced to make a real impact in our community. The Government must “give a chance for [this] to work” by investing in long-term funding and resourcing. Without such resourcing, the Strategy would not be able to sustain lasting outcomes:

*[I]n the long term... the government must give it more time and more chance for it to work. for example, the government funded the community connectors program, where they had 10-12 leaders from CALD background to help CALD communities who had children with a disability to connect with the NDIA. I know that that program*

*after just 6 months, the funding stopped. You don't stop things like that in just 6 months. It takes 6 months to take that off the ground. To just halt a decision like that without providing data, real evidence... this is what we talk about in the long term. To give a chance for these things to work.*

The Strategy must also be adaptable to changing community needs. This requires the incorporation of an ongoing review period, particularly in the early stages of implementation:

*[It] would be good if the strategy is a living document, so that it can be reviewed quite often. Give yourself 6 months to see how it works, and then another 12 months. It needs to be changeable and adaptable. It needs to go with the way that things are going in the community, so that it can be agile to change over time. It needs to do what it says it is going to do in 12 months, but it needs to also be willing to review and adapt to whatever is happening.*

**Recommendation 13.**

That the Strategy is resourced and funded on an ongoing, multi-year basis to effectively address racism and achieve lasting outcomes.

**Recommendation 14.**

That a monitoring, reporting evaluation framework is developed alongside the Strategy to provide mechanisms for the ongoing review of actions and priorities, and to adapt those priorities to changing community needs.

*“Without measures it's as good as the paper it is written on. So that will be important in the longer run.”*

## Other Recommendations

### A conceptual framework is needed

Racism is currently addressed within a legal framework that focuses on interpersonal forms of racism. Structural forms of racism are not yet addressed by the law. The law pushes the burden of responsibility for addressing racism onto the individual. This is reflected in the current system of anti-discrimination and anti-vilification laws, which require individuals to report incidents of discrimination in specific contexts. Under anti-discrimination law, the default way to resolve complaints is through conciliation, which requires both parties to discuss the issue and settle the matter on their own terms. Victoria's anti-vilification laws are largely ineffective and are currently being reviewed.

This represents a big gap in how racism is addressed. Many people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds do not have the capacity to pursue formal complaints. Others may not want to report to police and other systems that they may have been experienced as racist. As suggested in **Recommendations 1 and 2**, a trauma-informed framework would assist in filling the gap in how the long-term impacts of racism on individuals and communities are addressed.

A conceptual framework is also needed to address racism from a systems perspective. Adjacent frameworks exist in family and domestic violence prevention to help conceptualise the range of structural and situational factors that put people at risk of violence. This includes, for example, the socio-ecological model, which sees violence as multifaceted and as arising from the interplay between society, community and the individual. A social determinants of health model also helps us conceptualise the inequities that arise from broader structural and institutional forces, and which flow 'downstream' to affect individual health.

There is currently no conceptual model that is focused specifically on racism, or that has been adapted for use in this area of practice. Participants in our consultation sessions described racism as a form of power and control that is used by one group to exert influence over another. This was discussed in the context of Australia's colonial history. Developing a conceptual framework that can help us better understand the impacts and harms of structural racism, and how to better address them, would be a great asset to the Anti-Racism Strategy.

#### **Recommendation 15.**

That the Strategy resources and is informed by the development of a conceptual framework that can help us better understand and address the long-term and structural impacts of racism.

## Engaging other communities

The consultation sessions hosted by ECCV are one of several others conducted to inform the Victorian Anti-Racism Strategy. ECCV understands that the consultation sessions held by the State Government will reach other sections of society.

The Strategy must be informed by co-design and participatory principles on an ongoing basis. This can include, for example, workshops and seminars at the grassroots-level and targeted, in-language community consultations. As noted under **Limitations**, this approach will help reach a deeper level of inclusion and help align changing community needs and priorities, particularly among First Nations, regional, and migrant and refugee communities.

Consultations must be adapted to reach and engage communities that face language, cultural, and material barriers to participation. Some communities may have specific fears around engaging with government due to pre-migration experiences, including fears around visa status, worry about the receipt of welfare support, and other concerns about economic loss in the COVID-19 recovery context.

There is the risk that these communities will be further excluded if their views and concerns are not adequately reflected in the Strategy. A co-design model will ensure that everyone in the community has a sense of ownership over the Strategy and feels responsible about its success.

*“It is also about looking for possible solutions. This is a long road ahead. What we are trying to achieve in terms of the end goal is ... certainly the first step.”*

### **Recommendation 16.**

That the Strategy commits to ongoing co-design by engaging with communities that otherwise face a range of language, cultural and material barriers to participation.

# Appendix

## Appendix A. Demographic survey

The survey questions were adapted from standardised Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) questions about gender, age, residential status, country of origin, and year of arrival to Australia. Multiple choice answers were presented as categorical values. For example:

### Gender

- Female
- Male
- Prefer to self-describe
- Prefer not to disclose

### Year of arrival in Australia

- Arrived before 2001
- Arrived 2001–2005
- Arrived 2006–2010
- Arrived 2011–2015
- Arrived 2016–2020
- Arrived 2021
- Born in Australia
- Prefer not to disclose

One open ended question was included to invite written answers to the consultation questions:

*What do you feel is needed to address racism? What needs to be included in the Strategy so it addresses racism effectively? This question will be asked at the session, but you are welcome to share your thoughts in writing here. You are also welcome to share any other thoughts you may have about the Anti-Racism Strategy here.*

### Demographic summary

A total of 15 people completed the demographic survey. The majority of respondents were female (67%) and aged between 35 – 54 (67%). Eight people identified as Australian citizens (53%), five as permanent residents (33%), and two as temporary visa holders (13%). Twenty per cent of respondents were born in Australia. A majority of those born overseas arrived in Australia prior to 2001 (33%), between 2011 – 2015 (20%), and 2015 – 2020 (13%).

Countries of origin included Australia, Malaysia, Chile, Indonesia, Hong Kong, India, China, Italy, Cambodia, Vietnam, Pakistan, and South Africa.