



28 November 2024

Victorian government to boost responses to racism

The Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) welcomes the Victorian government's new anti-racism strategy which was launched at State Parliament yesterday.

This is our state's first comprehensive plan to tackle the problem of racism in our community. It was developed through widespread consultation with Aboriginal Victorians, multicultural and multifaith communities, people with direct experience of racism as well as experts. ECCV contributed our views as a member of the Anti-Racism Taskforce that helped government with its approach.

Recent research conducted by Victoria University in collaboration with ECCV confirms how often racism goes unreported. In a survey of more than 700 Victorians, the research found that more than 75% of respondents had experienced racism, yet only 16% reported it. Strikingly, the most common setting for experiencing racism was employment (57%).

"These findings show how important it is to take considered action to tackle racist attitudes and behaviours, and better support people in the community who have experienced racism and yet feel powerless to seek remedies," said ECCV CEO Farah Farouque. "We look forward to working with the government to implement the actions and ensure there are strong processes for evaluating impacts."

ECCV Chairperson Eddie Micallef said: "Anti-racism is core to ECCV's work and has been since our inception in 1974. Racism strikes at the heart of community cohesion. We congratulate the Allan Government on laying out a roadmap for change over time."

The Strategy is a five-year plan and sets out steps for government and wider society to take to prevent and address racism and discrimination in schools, workplaces, within government services and in daily interactions.

Key actions include:

- A new round of Local Anti-Racism Initiatives grants program for affected communities to deliver grassroots solutions to racism
- Grassroots community campaigns to tackle antisemitism and Islamophobia
- A statewide awareness campaign through the platform of community sport
- Train frontline police to address the unequal use of discretion in policing and the disproportionate impacts this has on Aboriginal Victorians, multicultural and multifaith groups
- Build capacity of the Victorian Public Service to prevent and respond to racism
- Design new education programs for complaint and oversight bodies to respond to racism more effectively
- Develop workplace race discrimination guidelines to educate employers about their race discrimination obligations and help them identify racism, develop prevention plans, and undertake audits

- In a new move, introduce an anti-racism “tick” accreditation scheme targeted at community and private sector organisations to help address systematic racism and unconscious bias

The launch of the Victorian plan follows the Australian Human Rights Commission releasing a national Anti-Racism Framework earlier in the week. This proposal included 63 recommendations, including a call for the Federal Government to lead a national response.

Anti-vilification laws to be toughened

In a major change to the legal landscape, the Allan Government has also introduced a new bill into the Victorian Parliament this week to expand anti-vilification legislation in Victoria.

The proposed new laws extend existing racial and religious protections to also cover disability, gender identity, sex, and sexual orientation.

New criminal offences with tougher jail penalties have been created, including for those who “incite hatred against, serious contempt for, revulsion towards or severe ridicule” of a protected person or group. There is also a new criminal offence against those who “threaten physical harm or property damage”.

The changes have been introduced in recognition that there had been only two prosecutions under the existing Racial and Religious Tolerance Act since it took effect more than 20 years ago.

The Bill also introduces two new civil protections to make it easier for people to pursue legal action for comments made in public spaces, including on social media. To protect freedom of expression, the proposal retains existing exceptions for activities carried out for “genuine religious, academic, artistic, public interest or scientific reasons”, while introducing a new defence for political expression.

For media enquiries, please contact Media & Communications Officer Xiaoran Shi by calling 0431 091 738 or sending an email to media@eccv.org.au.