



Social Justice STOCKTAKE



Racism and Discrimination

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Were you surprised by the concern of race-based discrimination experienced as noted in the Stocktake results?

Racism is more common in Australia than many of us would like to admit but it is not always visible to those who are not experiencing it first-hand. It is not surprising that it was identified by around one in eight respondents across Australia and more commonly in some electorates than in others.

Isn't there legislation which protects people from discrimination in Australia? Why is this not enough?

Anti-discrimination legislation only applies in specific circumstances so while it is definitely important and helpful, there is only so much it can do to address the underlying issue. A lot of racism and discrimination is subtle but no less damaging than overt racism. Racist 'jokes' for example are legal but can lead to real harm in terms of affecting a person's mental health, their community connection and even their ability to access critical services.

What can individuals do to reduce the prevalence of racism and discrimination in Australia?

Individually we have so much power to address racism and discrimination. We can examine our own behaviour and become anti-racist, doing our very best to address our own racism and being open to others calling us out. We can examine the way our social groups, community organisations and workplaces deal with race and if we are privileged by that, we can use our privilege to bring about change.

What can governments do to ensure true equality for all?

There is no glib answer to what government can do. Ensuring true equality involves examining both the culture of Australia and also the systems and structures that govern how we live. A racist system will produce racist outcomes – even when the people within the system are not racist.

One powerful way to start to address systemic racism is to ensure that people with culturally diverse backgrounds are actively involved and valued in the process of policy formulation.



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How can we challenge our own unconscious bias in this space?

There are a few things we can do. Firstly, we can learn more about unconscious bias in general and in particular how unconscious bias relates to race. Secondly, we can critically examine our own assumptions about race. Thirdly, we can actively seek out the voices of people who are of a different race to ourselves. Importantly we need to do this in a way that does not put the burden on the person experiencing racism to 'educate' us – there are so many wonderful ethnically diverse people on social media for example that we can follow with a focus on listening (and not feel the need to comment). Finally, we need to accept the discomfort of being challenged and hearing viewpoints that might feel critical or even unfair. Continuing to listen through that discomfort is critical to addressing biases we may not even know we hold.