



“It is instruments like the Racial Discrimination Act that make us stronger and more united—ensuring that every Australian can enjoy the assurance that they will be treated equally and with dignity.”

Dr Tim Soutphommasane, Australia’s Race Discrimination Commissioner, in his opening address to the RDA@40 Conference in Sydney, 19-20 February 2015.

On the anniversary of the commencement of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975, we are examining racial discrimination in Australia—what it means, why it happens, and what we can do to stop it.

Did you know?

- Racial prejudice was brought to national attention 50 years ago by a group of Sydney University students led by late the Charles Perkins, who embarked on a [freedom ride through country NSW](#) in 1965.
- The Racial Discrimination Act (RDA) has protected people in Australia against racism for 40 years. In this time, the RDA has been used to resolve more than 6000 complaints.¹
- Discrimination and [racism can cause severe health problems](#) amongst victims. Race-based discrimination is associated with depression, anxiety, illicit substance use, psychological distress and poor health status.²
- If you feel you have been discriminated against, you can make a complaint to the [Australian Human Rights Commission](#).

Racism and the RDA today...

For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, racism is an everyday reality. Too many people experience racism in the street, their workplaces, and their schools, causing lasting harm. We all saw the manifestation of racism in Australia when Adam Goodes, a man at the top of his sporting career, faced on-field racist taunts. The fact that a sporting legend, one

¹ <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/news/speeches/brave-act-opening-remarks-rda40-conference>.

² <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/lookup/4704.0Chapter450Oct+2010>.

who is held aloft by many, can still face overt racism today, highlights the need for ongoing protections against racism in our society.

The cornerstone of protection against racial discrimination and vilification is the Racial Discrimination Act, which came into force 40 years ago on 31 October 1975. It was the first piece of federal legislation that protected human rights in Australia and continues to be a significant statement of Australia's commitment against racism. The RDA protects people who experience racism in Australia and ensures Australia meets its obligations under the [International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination](#).

For four decades, the RDA has stood firm against prejudice and bigotry. As the Race Discrimination Commissioner said in his opening remarks at the [RDA@40 conference](#) in February 2015, the RDA "...stands as a statement from our society that it is committed to the equal dignity of its members. It stands to remind people that their country will protect them from discrimination and vilification".³

There are many examples of why the RDA remains relevant and necessary in Australia today. The behaviour towards Adam Goodes is only one of many. An Aboriginal man displaying the oldest continuing culture in the world should be celebrated, not vilified. As a society, we must work together to change this. We must call out racism whenever and wherever we see it. What we stay silent on as a nation, is the standard we accept.

Learn more about the Racial Discrimination Act and the protections it offers at the [Australian Human Rights Commission website](#).

Quick facts...

- **31%** of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians have experienced verbal abuse in the last six months compared to **13%** of the general population.⁴
- **Over half** of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who experience racial discrimination report feelings of psychological distress, which is a risk factor for anxiety and depression.⁵
- **25%** of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians have experienced discrimination from their employer compared to **12%** of the general community who have experienced discrimination at work.⁶
- We believe that, together, we can overcome these statistics. **Over two-thirds** of us believe Australia can become a reconciled nation.⁷



³ <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/news/speeches/brave-act-opening-remarks-rda40-conference>.

⁴ Australian Reconciliation Barometer 2014.

⁵ <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/resources/for-me/stop-think-respect-home/the-invisible-discriminator/racial-discrimination-and-mental-health>.

⁶ Australian Reconciliation Barometer 2014.

Take action...

"We live, eat and breathe discrimination every single day, and until we walk in the shoes of someone who's lived that, you'll never know how much it hurts." Nova Peris, The Guardian, 25th June 2015.

We can each take action to ensure racial discrimination is never acceptable in Australian society. Learning about the histories and cultures of Australia's First Peoples will allow us to build a deeper understanding of one another, and help us to call out racism when we see it.

- Check out [Share our Pride](#) to become more aware and knowledgeable about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in Australia.
- Consider joining our [Reconciliation Action Plan](#) or [Narragunnawali Reconciliation in Schools and Early Learning](#) programs to promote reconciliation in your workplace or school.
- Sign up to the [Racism. It Stops with Me](#) campaign to find out how you can counter racism when you see it.
- Join beyondblue's national anti-discrimination campaign, [Stop, Think, Respect](#) which highlights the impact 'passive racism' has on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Try using the [Anti-Hate Spray](#) to report hate online and read stories of anti-hate heroes.
- Join the [Recognise](#) movement and support constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples so we eliminate racial discrimination from the Australian Constitution.



Photo credits

Banner: AFL Captains support the Racism. It Stops with Me campaign, courtesy AFL Media
Take action: Australian Human Rights Commission

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⁷ Australian Reconciliation Barometer 2014.