

Submission to the Inquiry into racism, hate and violence directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

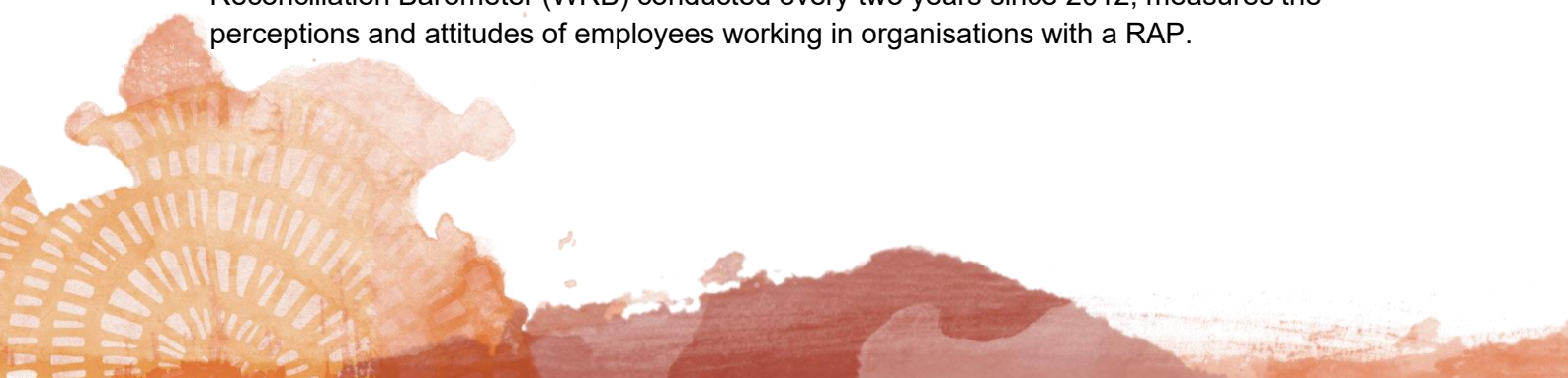
About Reconciliation Australia

Reconciliation Australia is the national organisation promoting reconciliation, which at its heart, is about strengthening relationships between non-Indigenous Australians and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Our vision is for an Australia that embraces our shared histories and honours the unique cultures, rights and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, creating a stronger, more just society for all.

Our approach to reconciliation is underpinned by five interrelated dimensions: race relations, equality and equity, historical acceptance, institutional integrity and unity. Anti-racism is both a central pillar and a cross-cutting issue which has a profound impact on the advancement of all dimensions. It is therefore fundamental to our mandate that we contribute to work that seeks accountability and systemic change to meaningfully address racism, hate and violence, and which creates the conditions for strong, united thriving communities in which there is no place for racism. We believe a reconciled Australia is one where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are genuinely afforded the opportunity and access to participate equally and equitably in all areas of life, are deeply valued, and where self-determination is embedded in our institutions, policies and practices.

For 25 years, Reconciliation Australia has been learning about and delivering programs, insights and advocacy around systems change in support of these aspirations by helping to creating the conditions which enable workplaces, schools and communities to prevent and address racism.

1. Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) Program supports thousands of organisations across all sectors to move from symbolic recognition to structural accountability.
2. Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education program supports schools and early learning services to take actions which build understanding, respect and relationships.
3. Community Truth-telling Pathways program supports communities doing local truth-telling and builds the capacity of Australians to actively and appropriately engage with our shared history and its impacts.
4. Since 2008, the Australian Reconciliation Barometer (ARB) – conducted every two years – has delivered unique insights, including almost two decades of data on racism and discrimination experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across all contexts of life. The ARB is the only national survey that measures the progress of reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians. The Workplace Reconciliation Barometer (WRB) conducted every two years since 2012, measures the perceptions and attitudes of employees working in organisations with a RAP.



Summary

The complex challenges we face as a nation in addressing racism, hate and violence directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples do not include a lack of evidence. The data clearly demonstrates the pervasive and deeply harmful nature of racism experienced in workplaces, education settings and communities. The evidence also tells us that while racism is a profoundly personal experience, the impacts are harmful at a level requiring structural and systemic responses. Central to the challenge is the ongoing gap in coordinated, effective, and sustained action designed in partnership with the people it impacts, and which is consistently embedded in the fabric of our institutions, policies and practices. Without this we cannot adequately address the systemic racism that has existed since colonisation and which is manifesting itself in new and profoundly concerning ways.

Our latest Australian Reconciliation Barometer (2024) gives us evidence for a decade long trend, showing that the incidence of racism, hate and violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is increasing, and its forms are evolving and expanding. This aligns with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reports that 24% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over felt they had been treated unfairly at least once in the previous 12 months because they were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, and Mayi Kuwayu: the National Study of Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing (2018-2022) which found around two in three Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experienced everyday discrimination. Experiences and impacts of racism in our workplaces and education institutions are highlighted by significant evidence from First Nations research organisations, particularly the Centre for Indigenous People and Work (CIPW)'s groundbreaking Gari Yala (Speak Truth) reports.

The period since the 2023 referendum marks a concerning chapter for Australia. Media coverage and public discourse inform and reflect a shift and increase in public expressions and acts of racism against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The 2026 attempted bombing of an Invasion Day rally in Perth, declared a terrorist act, and attacks by a Neo-Nazi group at Camp Sovereignty in 2025 starkly exposed the presence of violent and harmful acts and attitudes in the community towards First Nations peoples. The racism at recent Anzac Day services also highlights the unashamed and unbridled pattern of behaviour in the public sphere and its capacity to cause harm and division.

This demands as a priority, a national commitment to addressing racism against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through a multi-faceted approach including stronger legal and human rights protections, coordinated policy responses, institutional and systems transformation, and robust reporting, response and accountability mechanisms. This work must be undertaken in meaningful partnership with First Nations communities, grounded in principles of self-determination. It must also go hand in hand with sustained and well-resourced work to support constructive and positive race relations. A critical part of this work involves embedding truth-telling in our communities and institutions to foster respect and understanding, ensuring that the historical silencing of injustices and their ongoing impacts is actively responded to. This is critical to creating the conditions for healing, justice and dignity for First Nations peoples and a stronger, more united Australia.

Response to Inquiry

Reconciliation Australia will respond to the following Terms of Reference:

1. The nature, prevalence and impact of racism, hate and violence towards First Nations people, including trends over time
3. Initiatives that are effective in combating racism targeted at First Nations people and reduce individual and collective harm
5. The effectiveness of avenues for reporting and responding to racism against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Reconciliation Australia's responses stem from knowledge and experience acquired through programs which work directly with two key areas of society – the education system and workplaces, through our Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education program, and the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) Program. Our submission draws on evidence from Reconciliation Australia's two key quantitative studies; the Australian Reconciliation Barometer (ARB) and the Workplace RAP Barometer (WRB), in addition to the significant evidence base from First Nations research organisations, the Centre for Indigenous People and Work (CIPW) and its groundbreaking Gari Yala (Speak Truth) Reports measuring First Nations perspectives and experiences of racism in the workplace.

TOR 1: The nature, prevalence and impact of racism, hate and violence

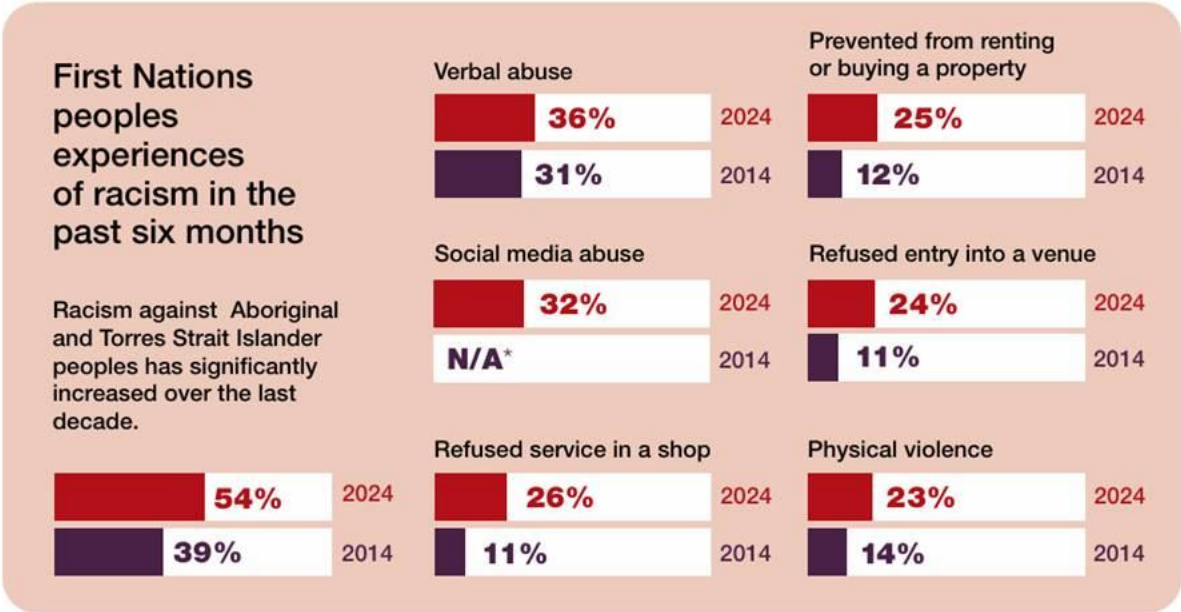
The Australian Reconciliation Barometer (ARB) and Workplace RAP Barometer (WRB) provide national level data, including trends over time about the nature and prevalence of racism, hate and violence towards First Nations peoples.

Individual experiences of racism – increases in racism

- ARB results quantify and track the scale of racism experienced by First Nations people at a national level while reports such as the 2025 Call it Out Register Report are critical in capturing the lived experiences and harm that these increases in data represent in the lives of First Nations people. It is significant to note that reported impacts of racism in the 2025 Call it Out Register were diverse and severe including; mental health issues, anger, sadness, fear, emptiness, constant shame, suicidal ideation and suicide attempts, financial loss and exhaustion from the persistent weight of racism.¹

¹ Allison, F., Cunneen, C., Whyman, A., Lewis, B. and Selcuk, A. (2025) 'Everywhere I go no matter where, if it's around non-Indigenous people I feel a hate vibe. It feels like I'm being watched'. The Call It Out Racism Register 2024-2025, Sydney: Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research, University of Technology Sydney.

- ARB data clearly shows that in 2024 First Nations peoples reports of experiences of racism were much higher than reported in 2014, increasing from 39% to 54%.²
- The level of physical violence reported by First Nations people as a form of racial prejudice has also increased substantially over the past 10 years, increasing from 14% to 23%.
- The forms of experienced racism are broad and pervasive and young First Nations people experience racism at higher levels than other age groups.



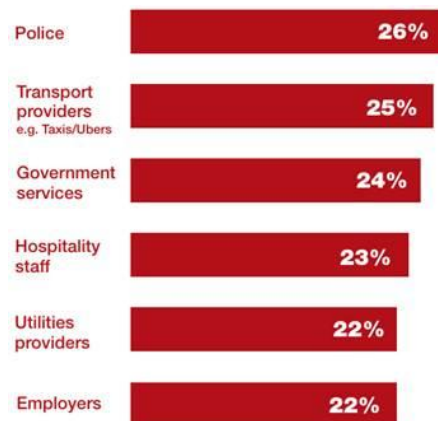
Australian Reconciliation Barometer 2024

Systemic and institutional racism

It is recognised that racism embedded within key institutions and services results in complex forms of marginalisation and inequities for First Nations peoples.³ It is therefore deeply concerning that ARB data trends (2014 to 2024) show significant increases in experiences of racial discrimination over the past decade from services who hold substantial influence and power over life outcomes.

² Reconciliation Australia, Australian Reconciliation Barometer Tracking Data 2014- 2024 Unpublished Data

³ Calma T, Hirvonen T and Bray A (2025) ‘Relationship between systemic anti-Indigenous racism and social and emotional wellbeing and mental health: recent national and international evidence, policy and programs’ AIHW, Australian Government (p.11)



Australian Reconciliation Barometer 2024

Racism in workplaces: As microcosms of broader society, workplaces mirror external inequities and power dynamics, and reflecting this, First Nations employees experience significant levels of racism and exclusion in the workplace with deeply harmful impacts on emotional and physical wellbeing, employment opportunities and advancement, and sense of cultural safety and identity.⁴

Gari Yala surveys with First Nations employees (2020 and 2026) provide clear, firsthand evidence of the nature and extent of experienced workplace racism, with the 2026 Gari Yala 2 report (Speak the Truth) reporting that almost 60% of First Nations employees experience racism in Australian workplaces. The nature and scope of these experiences include: inappropriate comments or assumptions about Indigenous people; being ignored or not taken seriously by their boss because they are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander; being subjected to racial or ethnic slurs or jokes; and, unfair treatment at work because they are an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person.⁵

Racism in schools: Schools are significant settings for racism and harm for First Nations children, with the 2025 *Call it Out* Racism Register Report highlighting that First Nations youth are most likely to experience racism in a school/educational setting than in other domains⁶ and other ACT research showing how for First Nations students overt racism from teachers can be as concerning as racism from peers.⁷ Racism and discrimination directed at First Nations students in learning environments is both interpersonal in nature, and deeply systemic, embedded in the policies, practices and

⁴ Centre for Indigenous People & Work (Young, N., Gilbert, J., Evans, O. and O'Leary, J.) 'Gari Yala 2 (Speak the Truth): Centring the Work Experiences of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Australians in 2025-2026', Sydney, CIPW. Available at: [Indigenous Work Experiences in Australia: Gari Yala 2](#)

⁵ ibid

⁶ Allison, F., Cunneen, C., Whyman, A., Lewis, B. and Selcuk, A. (2025) 'Everywhere I go no matter where, if it's around non-Indigenous people I feel a hate vibe. It feels like I'm being watched'. The Call It Out Racism Register 2024-2025, Sydney: Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research, University of Technology Sydney. Available at: [Jumbunna-Call-It-Out-Annual-Report-2024-2025.pdf](#)

⁷ Fawcett, Amalia & Australian Capital Territory. Human Rights Commission (issuing body. & Multicultural Hub. (contributor) & Curijo Pty Ltd. (contributor) & Australian Capital Territory. Human Rights Commission. Children and Young People's Commissioner (Contributor) (2023). It really stabs me: from resignation to resilience - children and young people's experiences of racism in the ACT. ACT Government, Canberra City, Australian Capital Territory, (p.27)

assumptions of education structures with harm that impacts social and emotional wellbeing, educational outcomes and life-long opportunities.^{8 9} Reconciliation Australia's recent consultations with education sector stakeholders, highlighted perceptions of aversion within the education sector to hard, open discussions about racism.¹⁰ This is echoed by studies that show that Australian teachers are actively avoiding or silencing conversations about race and racism in the classroom, and that many lack confidence and competency in issues around racism.¹¹

Impacts of racism: Racism experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples impacts every facet of life. Racism is experienced through interpersonal interactions in daily life, institutionally through government services, systems, schools and workplaces, and is underpinned by structural inequality driven by policy and socio-economic conditions. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare evidence shows that racism is a determinant of health and wellbeing, impacting physical and mental health, and social and emotional wellbeing, and is a factor in accessing health services.¹² The evidence also shows that racism impacts access and participation in education, housing security, safety and opportunity in employment. Consequently, the impact of racism on individuals and communities can be seen as a major contributor to the lack of progress on Closing the Gap targets and gives the Australian Government a clear mandate to address racism against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as a key accountability to deliver on Priority Reform Three – Transforming Government Organisations.

TOR 3: Initiatives that are effective in combating racism targeted at First Nations people

Driving structural change to combat racism

1. Truth-telling through all layers of Australian society

Addressing racism against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples must be underpinned by truth-telling. A strong national culture of truth-telling is critical to understanding the roots of racism towards First Nations Australians and to address it and foster respectful relationships. A fuller and more accurate account of Australia's history recognises both the systemic injustices perpetrated against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their strengths and contributions. To address racism

⁸ First Nations Collective Consulting (2024). *An Anti-Racism Framework: Voices of First Nations Peoples*. Sydney, Australia: Australian Human Rights Commission.

⁹ John Bosco Ngendakurio (2024) *Report: Racism in Australian Schools Impacts and Possible Solutions*. Available at: [Report-Racism-Within-Australian-Sch https://humanrights.gov.au/resource-hub/by-resource-type/publications/race/policy-reports-race/anti-racism-framework-voices-first-nations-peoples-ools.pdf](https://humanrights.gov.au/resource-hub/by-resource-type/publications/race/policy-reports-race/anti-racism-framework-voices-first-nations-peoples-ools.pdf)

¹⁰ Reconciliation Australia (2026) Narragunnawali Education Forum Report 2026, (p.8) Unpublished Report

¹¹ Yared, H., Grové, C. & Chapman, D. (2020) How does race play out in schools? A scoping review and thematic analysis of racial issues in Australian schools. *Soc Psychol Educ* 23, 1505–1538 . <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-020-09589-5>

¹² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2024) Chronic physical health conditions and the mental health and wellbeing of First Nations people, catalogue number IMH 025, AIHW, Australian Government.

Australia must reckon with the legacies of advantage and disadvantage on which our nation has been built. Without it we will not see personal and institutional responsibility which transforms attitudes, systems and behaviours.

The impact of truth-telling processes is evidenced by the recent Yoorrook Justice Commission. Yoorrook laid bare the profound ongoing harms of historical racism, making an irrefutable case for proactive measures to eradicate racism in the present. It established an evidence base and lines of accountability and identified solutions that address the source of the problem rather than the site of its symptoms.

Transformative change is also driven by truth-telling at the local level. This work is personal, connected to people, relationships and place. Community truth-telling promotes shared histories and nurtures greater understanding, respect and connection between diverse parts of our communities. This creates the conditions to understand, name and address disparity, racism, hate and violence against First Nations peoples.

Most Australians support the need for truth-telling, with 71% believing it is important to undertake truth-telling processes to acknowledge the reality of Australia's shared history and to move forward on our reconciliation journey.¹³ We also know that a limited number of non-Indigenous Australians currently engage with local truth-telling activities, although numbers are slowly increasing.¹⁴ Improving culturally safe participation by non-Indigenous people in local truth-telling is key to creating the conditions for more respectful relationships which reduce the likelihood of racism and violence against First Nations peoples. Reconciliation Australia's Community Truth-telling Pathways program contributes to this work.

There is also an important role for truth-telling within institutions. First Nations peoples have consistently called for truth-telling and for First Nations histories and perspectives to be embedded in education systems as fundamental to anti-racism action.¹⁵ The impact of exposure to these perspectives on overtly racist attitudes is well documented.¹⁶ There are increasing calls for truth-telling in workplaces, with the Gari Yala 2 report recommending workplace truth-telling practice that create space, listens deeply, and then acts in response to transform anti-racism action in workplaces.¹⁷

¹³ Reconciliation Australia (2024) Reconciliation Snapshot: Truth-telling and Historical Acceptance, 2024 Australian Reconciliation Barometer [2024-ARB-Truth-telling-and-Historical-Acceptance_web.pdf](#)

¹⁴ *ibid*

¹⁵ First Nations Collective Consulting. (2024). An Anti-Racism Framework: Voices of First Nations Peoples. Sydney, Australia: Australian Human Rights Commission

¹⁶ Bonam, CM, Vinodharen ND, Coleman, BR, Salter, P (2019) 'Ignoring history, denying racism: Mounting evidence for the marley hypothesis and epistemologies of ignorance', *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 10, 257-265.

¹⁷ Centre for Indigenous People & Work (Young, N., Gilbert, J., Evans, O. and O'Leary, J.) (2026). Gari Yala 2 (Speak the Truth) Full Report: Centring the Work Experiences of Aboriginal and/ or Torres Strait Islander Australians in 2025-2026, Sydney, CIPW (2025), Available at: [Indigenous Work Experiences in Australia: Gari Yala 2](#)

2. RAPs as tools to support practical anti-racism action

RAPs leverage the critical role that the government, corporate organisations, and community institutions can play in working with First Nations peoples and organisations to create culturally safe and inclusive environments that are free from racism, and value and respect First Nations knowledges, rights and interests.

The RAP framework provides a clear set of principles to drive reconciliation through a structured approach based on three core pillars: Relationships, Respect, and Opportunities. There is increasing evidence that organisations with strong RAP anti-racism actions and commitments that address systemic racism in their workplaces can effect substantial change.

Workplace RAPs:

The workplace RAP framework requires organisations with a RAP to commit to anti-racism actions and educate staff and leaders on the impacts of racism. There has been increasing commitment by RAP organisations to embed strong actions that tackle racism at a structural level within their organisation.

Examples of transformative anti-racism actions taken by RAP organisations include policy and governance reform, staff learning and development programs, human resource practices, procurement, service design, transparent reporting, and executive accountability.

RA's 2024 Workplace RAP Barometer (WRB) findings¹⁸ demonstrate that **81%** of First Nations staff working in organisations with a RAP, believe their organisation has a visible stance against prejudice and racism internally at work, and **61%** believe their organisation has an effective process in place to deal with prejudice or racism towards First Nations peoples.

We also know that workplace RAPs can promote change in non-Indigenous employees, fostering respect for First Nations peoples, and historical and cultural understanding through RAP activities. By comparing results across our surveys, we see that RAP employees are more likely to hold positive views in areas that underpin understanding of racism towards First Nations peoples. For example;

- **92% of RAP employees** believe it is important to learn about the past issues of European colonisation compared to 80% of the broader population
- **88% of RAP employees** believe it is important to undertake truth-telling compared to 71% of the broader population.¹⁹

¹⁸ Reconciliation Australia, 2024 Workplace RAP Barometer Report, unpublished report

¹⁹ Reconciliation Australia (2024) Reconciliation Snapshot, Workplace RAP Barometer 2024: Australian Reconciliation Barometer and 2024 Workplace RAP Barometer, Available at [2024-ARB-and-2024-WRB-Snapshot_web.pdf](#)

Narragunnawali Education RAPs: Learning environments are key settings for eliminating racism through development of critical, unflinching awareness of racism and its impacts, and understanding of unconscious bias in whole of school communities. An increasing imperative to counter online racist discourse and ideology that can target young people heightens the importance of educational environments as spaces for critical thinking and learning about racism.

As foundational settings for personal and academic development, all learning institutions - from pre-school to university - must provide culturally safe and supportive settings for all First Nations young people. Narragunnawali Education RAPs are important tools for improving the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by involving all students and members of educational communities in taking shared responsibility for acting against racism, and towards reconciliation. Dedicated anti-racism strategies embedded as part of RAP commitments in learning environments, have proven to be effective, working to counter racism by building school/service-wide awareness of racism, its impacts and how to respond effectively.

Two key dedicated actions within the Narragunnawali RAP framework: 'Take Action against Racism' and 'Cultural Responsiveness for Staff' provide a whole-school approach to building strong community relationships and an increased awareness and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, histories and cultures.

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) reported that, "as a framework for action and accountability, a RAP is a useful starting point and continuing reference, reflection and guidance point if embedded alongside other culturally safe processes, frameworks and policies."²⁰

3. Government action and accountability to combat racism

Australian governments must commit to comprehensive implementation of two key mechanisms that harbour significant power to address racism and discrimination through law, policies and practice: The National Anti-Racism Framework and the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP). UNDRIP provides the framework for minimum standards which recognise, promote and protect the rights of Indigenous peoples, including outlawing discrimination and promoting full participation in matters that concern Indigenous peoples. The National Anti-Racism Framework has been developed in an Australian context to provide a roadmap for government, business and community to address racism, and includes sector specific recommendations which enable a whole of society approach.

²⁰ The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) Building a culturally responsive Australian Teaching Workforce, pg 21, Available at [aitsl_indigenous-cultural-competency_final-report .pdf](https://aitsl.gov.au/indigenous-cultural-competency-final-report.pdf)

TOR 5: The effectiveness of avenues for reporting and responding to racism against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Current formal avenues for racism reporting, such as anti-discrimination bodies, human rights commissions, and police complaint mechanisms can be intimidating and ineffective for First Nations people. Potent barriers to reporting include mistrust of government services and institutional systems, fear of retribution, and lack of trust in effective responses and accountability.²¹

In organisations and institutions, internal racism reporting avenues can also be largely absent or ineffective. Two thirds of First Nations participants in the Gari Yala 2 survey indicated that their workplace does not have a racism complaint procedure.²² Alongside this result, Gari Yala 2 data also highlights how workplaces with effective racism reporting avenues have lower incidences of racism against First Nations people.

In schools, and other learning environments, there can commonly be failure to identify racism directed at First Nations students, and to provide reporting mechanisms that offer transparency, safety and accountability.²³

There is also a tendency to conflate racism and bullying, which means harm inflicted by racism is under identified and minimised, and lacks distinct pathways for racism reporting and accountability.²⁴ Research with First Nations students in the ACT heard how they have learned not to report racism to school authorities as previously their experiences have been disbelieved, minimised and not followed up with visible, transparent action.²⁵

RAPs can provide effective frameworks for organisations to commit to the development of internal robust, safe, trusted anti-racism reporting mechanisms that have proven utility in reforming systems, structures and workplace culture.

For the broader community, the importance of independent, First Nations led racism reporting services such as the Call It Out Register cannot be overstated for the provision of accessible, trusted, culturally safe mechanisms. Australia requires a consistent, coordinated national approach to reporting and accountability, designed in partnership with First Nations communities and prioritising cultural safety.

²¹ Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (2023) Understanding the discrimination experienced by First Nations people, Available at [Understanding the discrimination experienced by First Nations people: Data report 2022–23](#)

²² Centre for Indigenous People & Work (Young, N., Gilbert, J., Evans, O. and O'Leary, J.) (2026). Gari Yala 2 (Speak the Truth) Full Report: Centring the Work Experiences of Aboriginal and/ or Torres Strait Islander Australians in 2025-2026, Sydney, CIPW (2025), Available at: [Indigenous Work Experiences in Australia: Gari Yala 2](#)

²³ Australian Human Rights Commission, (2026) Respect at Uni: Study into Antisemitism, Islamophobia, racism and the experience of First Nations people, Australian Human Rights Commission, Sydney.

²⁴ Fawcett, Amalia & Australian Capital Territory. Human Rights Commission (issuing body.) & Multicultural Hub. (contributor) & Curijo Pty Ltd. (contributor) & Australian Capital Territory. Human Rights Commission. Children and Young People's Commissioner (Contributor) (2023). It really stabs me: from resignation to resilience - children and young people's experiences of racism in the ACT. ACT Government, Canberra City, Australian Capital Territory, Available at: [Microsoft Word - 2023-03-17-It really stabs me-FINAL](#)

²⁵ *ibid*

Recommendations

- Full implementation of the National Anti-Racism Framework, including the establishment of a National Anti-Racism taskforce to oversee its implementation and a dedicated First Nations implementation plan.
- Embed UNDRIP principles into Australian laws, policies and institutional practices affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Advance a national culture of truth-telling which includes support at federal, state and local levels.
- Support Reconciliation Action Plans in government departments and agencies as effective frameworks for contributing to Closing the Gap Priority Reform Three – Transforming Government Organisations.