



**MHiMA**  
Mental Health in Multicultural Australia

## **Mental Health in Multicultural Australia (MHiMA)**

**SUBMISSION TO THE NATIONAL ANTI-RACISM STRATEGY**

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**Contact Details**

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## QUESTION

1. ***What can we learn from how Australia has dealt with racism in the past? What achievements should we build on? What mistakes should we learn from?***

Mental Health in Multicultural Australia (MHiMA) builds upon the work previously done by Multicultural Mental Health in Australia (MMHA). It is a collaborative project that aims to provide a national focus on mental health and suicide prevention related issues for immigrants, refugees and their families and offers advice and support to government and non-government providers and service users. This project works across the lifespan, across the spectrum of mental health and has a recovery focus.

We are pleased to participate in the National Anti-Racism Strategy as our main goal is to improve the wellbeing of migrants, refugees and their families, a group at higher risk to racism as mentioned in your discussion paper. We can add that research also shows that there is a link with experienced racism and psychiatric symptoms as well as perceived racial discrimination that leads to stress which in turn leads to negative health outcomes. Also, when a racial group is stigmatized, people belonging to this group face a problem of social exclusion and in extreme instances they are seen as *alien* to society. That is why MHiMA think a National Anti-racism strategy and partnership is important to improve the mental health and wellbeing of immigrants, refugees and their families. Integrated measures that enhance cultural and global understanding in the community, together with strategies to promote equality and social access, are necessary to ensure the effectiveness of anti-racism campaigns.

Our perspective is that the development of a National Anti-Racism Partnership and Strategy should:

- Address all systemic levels of racism;
- Promote pro-active preventative measures to accompany structural changes that might give rise to racist sentiments
- Address the different components - stereotypes, prejudices, discrimination – of racism;
- Address the new challenges of the evolving migrant and refugee groups that build the Contemporary Australian society.

As mentioned in the discussion paper, Australia has dealt with institutionalised racism by introducing laws and regulations. Another step towards the fight against racism taken by the Australian society was the acknowledgment that it can be racist. To move forward and build on achievements to stop prejudice, stereotype, discrimination and racism, we now have to act at each systemic level, legislative, services response and individual awareness and behaviors.

Mass media campaign to reduce stigma associated with mental illness and mental disorders have been implemented in many countries and have showed improved public perceptions. These campaigns were even more effective when accompanied by complementary community engagement activities.

Actions taken by our government to reduce racism must include the systematic inclusion of data on Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities inclusive of those who speak another language than English, funding of specific research on the

impact of racism on CALD communities and of the accessibility of interpreters that will help service providers be more culturally responsive. Continuous underfunding of these areas could be perceived as institutionalised discrimination.

We should also remind ourselves that our attitudes towards refugees can be a lever for racism.

*I hope that our country would benefit from immigration of peoples from countries of conflict, or those subjected to political persecution, who are simply seeking refuge from violence and a better life for their children. I believe Australia has a moral and social obligation to demonstrate a higher level of kindness to and acceptance of refugees<sup>1</sup>.*

Organisational racism will only be address if practices are culturally sensitive. That will happen if the authorities and government are not seen as complicit in the experience of racism in Australia<sup>2</sup>.

*Australia has become multicultural and racism has diminished over the last 50 years but it disturbs me when I hear some of our politicians reassuring overseas governments that it doesn't exist at all<sup>3</sup>.*

As we raised the awareness of mainstream Australians, we have also to build resiliency of the CALD communities and improve their capabilities to respond to discriminatory behaviors and report incidents.

The evolving situation of Australia must remind us that racism is also changing. In western countries, pathologising of cultural differences has gradually replaced biological explanation as the basis of new racism<sup>4</sup>. A human rights agenda stresses that cultural or biological differences are not grounds for any form of racial or social discrimination.

The overseas-born population in Australia is increasing in number as well as diversity. Between 1996 and 2006, it grew by 13% (from 3.9 million to 4.4 million people) and featured a major increase in Asian immigration. Of people who arrived in Australia between 2002 and 2006, 6 of the 10 most common birthplaces were Asian countries. A number of Australia's recent arrivals were born in countries affected by war and political unrest. Over 73% (or around 13,000) of Australian residents born in Sudan arrived in 2002 or later. Similarly, a high proportion of those born in Zimbabwe (42% or 8,000), Afghanistan (36% or 6,000), and Iraq (29%, or 9,000) arrived in 2002 or later. The ongoing growth in arrivals from Asia has resulted in large increases in the number of Buddhists, Muslims, and Hindus. In 2006, these three faiths collectively accounted for 907,000 affiliates compared to 468,000 a decade earlier in 1996<sup>5</sup>. As pointed out in the discussion paper, visible minorities are at greater risk of racism. Migration by this group has increased and is continuously increasing as shown by the previous statistics. Australia needs to increase its efforts to reduce racism if we wish to be a harmonious multicultural society.

## **2. What information would be useful to include in a campaign to prevent and reduce racism**

Such a campaign should aim at:

Raising awareness

Preventing racist behaviors;  
Reinforcing resiliency  
Ensuring that racism is condemn

The actual campaign of stigma reduction by the Queensland government, "Change our minds" can inspire a campaign to prevent racism. It builds on facts, personal stories and ways to show support.

Provide organisations ( in our case mental health, health and community services) with information, resources and support to implement anti-racism measures. A good practice example of this is the work of the Vic Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission. The commission has been building the capability of organisations (including mental health services) to address racism and other forms of discrimination. In addition to educating the general public, it is important that anti-racism strategies are directed at service providers. In addition, steps need to be taken to ensure that this does not just become a compliance exercise.

In our experience, working to improve the cultural responsiveness of government funded services, services need external assistance (and an external legal or policy requirement to do so) to act on the requirement to meet service responsibilities with to respect human rights - ie to ensure freedom of discrimination in service provision, to respect cultural rights and so on - and develop strategies to address these issues.

**3. *How could we better acknowledge the contributions to Australia of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and culturally and linguistically diverse communities?***

The role of government and the media is very important in acknowledging contributions. There are already major events where the contributions of culturally and linguistically diverse communities are acknowledged. These events need sustainable funding to ensure their impact on the reduction of stereotype, prejudice, discrimination and racism.

**4. *What are the priority areas in which we should be addressing racism (employment, education...)***

Social inclusion relies on non discriminatory behaviors in all the following sectors: employment, education, housing, health and justice. The media has a major role to play in order to not incite racism and to support the fight against racism. It is unfortunate that although multiculturalism is promoted and supported by many sections of the Australian society both public and private, much good work is undone by media reports which name certain cultural and ethnic groups and incite fear and concern directed at these groups.

**5. *What measures should governments at all levels take to address racism?***

- Implement anti-discriminatory measures across government and regulatory bodies ;
- Support the workforce development to a culturally sensitive approach;
- Tighten laws in regard to media reporting of cultural, ethnic and religious groups

- Raise the awareness on the impact of racism on mental health, build resiliency in CALD communities and encourage the disclosure of all racist events;
- Support the research and the implementation of anti-racist strategies by sufficient funding.
- Be aware of the structural impact of socio-economic conditions on the occurrence of racist sentiments

**6. *What role can business, the arts, sporting organisation, community groups, service organisations and the media play in addressing racism?***

In this time and age, there is a lot of competition for funding activities in all domains from physical health to mental health and not much is left for domains like racism. Those different sectors could fund activities, collaborate in joint ventures to raise awareness and outreach service providers, consumers and the general public to promote inter-cultural contact and communication through their various programs and activities. As stated above, the media play a large role in reducing racism.

**7. *How can we involve young people in addressing racism?***

Programs to build resiliency in culturally and linguistically diverse communities (BRITA Futures for children, young people) have shown positive results<sup>6</sup>.

Integrated measures should include a greater emphasis on global, inter-cultural and linguistic learning and understanding throughout the education system

**8. *Can you give examples of strategies that you have seen used or been part of that have been successful in preventing or reducing racism? Why were they effective?***

Programs to change attitudes towards racism can be divided in two types<sup>7</sup>: multicultural program where people learned about culture and lifestyle of minority groups, and anti-racist program where people are encourage to recognise racism in themselves and in society. When intervening with a multi-level approach, the use of these two types of program can be useful. Building cultural competencies of mental health services workforce has lessen stigma and improved help-seeking in CALD communities. At a practical level providing avenues for people of different cultures to engage and interact, particularly at an early age, is an effective way to promote understanding.

**9. *What tools or resources do we have at the community level which could be better utilised in the fight against racism?***

Stepping out of the shadow is a program<sup>8</sup> developed especially for people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds to explore the problem of stigma and reduce its negative impact with people in interesting and meaningful ways. Community support and development programs that assist new communities to engage with the broader society, and embrace strategies to reduce inequity at an early stage, can assist to prevent social problems that lead to racist sentiments. This is particularly so amongst vulnerable refugee and asylum seeker communities.

**10. How could these experiences be shared to help promote good practice?**

Using existing network like MHiMA to disseminate knowledge to stakeholders.

**11. What strategies or approaches can be used to help individuals and communities who experience racism to speak up or take action? If you have experienced racism, what would have helped you to speak up or take action?**

System of reportage of racist incident and ways the authorities deal with them are most important to ensure their reduction and also encourage victims to report these incidents. Individuals must feel that their reports are taken seriously and acted upon and this needs to be demonstrated and made public.

**12. What strategies or approaches can be used to help bystanders address racism where and when it occurs?**

Both strategies - the multicultural or the anti-racist one - can be used to outreach the general public, raise their awareness and build their knowledge and capacities to act upon racism.

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<sup>1</sup> Turning point to a greater Australia, Charles Theo Australia Day speech 24<sup>th</sup> of January 2012

<sup>2</sup> Poynting, S. (2004) *Living with racism: The experience and reporting by Arab and Muslim Australians of discrimination, abuse and violence since 11 September 2001*. Centre for Cultural Research, University of Western Sydney: Sydney: 20.

<sup>3</sup> Turning point to a greater Australia, Charles Theo Australia Day speech 24<sup>th</sup> of January 2012

<sup>4</sup> Poynting, S. (2004) *Living with racism: The experience and reporting by Arab and Muslim Australians of discrimination, abuse and violence since 11 September 2001*. Centre for Cultural Research, University of Western Sydney: Sydney: 20.

<sup>5</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2009), *A Picture of the Nation: The Statistician's Report on the 2006 Census*

<sup>6</sup> Mitchelson, M.R., Erskine, H.E., Ramirez, E., Suleman, F., Prasad-Ildes, R., Siskind, D. and Harris, M. (2010) BRiTA Futures: A resilience-building program for children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds - Program description and preliminary findings. In *Advances in Mental Health* 9(3). 243-254.

<sup>7</sup> R. N. Turner, R. Brown (2008) Improving Children's attitudes towards refugees: An evaluation of a School-Based Multicultural Curriculum and an Anti-Racist Intervention, *Journal of Applied Psychology* 38, pp.1295-1328

<sup>8</sup> Multicultural Mental Health Australia. (2008) *Stepping out of the shadows - reducing stigma in multicultural communities training package (Community Trainer Manual)*. NSW Health: Sydney, NSW: