

FACTSHEET: ANTI-RACISM

Racism happens when people think that some races are better than others.

Racism involves actions or words that offend, insult, humiliate or treat someone unfairly because of their race, skin colour, background, nationality, ethnicity, or migrant status.

Racism can lead to unfair treatment and discrimination against people who are seen as different. This can happen in everyday interactions or be built into rules and systems. People may experience discrimination in employment, education, housing, with police, banking, transport, hospitals, restaurants or shops.

Discrimination on public transport: Lani's story

Lani, who is of Pacific Islander background, uses public transport to travel to school each day. One afternoon while waiting at the train station, she was approached by two Protective Services Officers (PSOs). They questioned Lani aggressively, asking for her ID and insisting on searching her bag. Despite Lani's cooperation, one officer made a comment about "people like her" causing trouble, which Lani felt was racist. The interaction caused Lani to miss her train and be late for school.



After the incident, Lani spoke with her parents and a trusted teacher who encouraged her to report the incident. Lani made an appointment with a Northern Community Legal Centre lawyer, who advised her to file a complaint with the Public Transport Ombudsman. The complaint detailed the officers' behaviour and the racist comment.

The Public Transport Ombudsman informed Lani that they would investigate the complaint and work to find a fair outcome.

Discrimination at work: Imad's story

Imad, who was born in Pakistan, started a new job at a company. Despite having the same qualifications and experience as his colleagues, Imad was frequently left out of important team meetings and social events. He was consistently passed over for promotions and opportunities for advancement.

He overheard a colleague saying, “I’m not sure Imad is the right fit for a leadership role; his appearance might not align with what we want for the team.”

Feeling frustrated and isolated, Imad decided to take action. He reached out to Northern Community Legal Centre for help. A lawyer at NCLC explained Imad’s rights and the legal options available for addressing workplace discrimination, and how the law protects against unfair treatment based on race and appearance. The lawyer guided Imad through the process of filing a formal complaint with the company’s HR department.

Your rights

In Australia, it is against the law to offend, insult, humiliate, intimidate or discriminate against someone because of their race, skin colour, background, nationality, ethnicity, or migrant status.

What can I do?

If you experience racism or discrimination, taking action can be a powerful step. Depending on what has happened, you could report discrimination to senior management

at a business (such as a bank), an employer, or a school. If you are not able to get a good result, you can complain to the Ombudsman, the Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission, or the Australian Human Rights Commission.

Taking action by reporting racism and discrimination can be empowering. Reporting also contributes to a safer and more inclusive community. It allows you to stand up against discrimination and to advocate for your rights and the rights of others.

Where can I get help?

Northern Community Legal Centre provides free legal services to people in Merri-bek, Hume and Mitchell Shire.

We can provide advice to people seeking to make a complaint about racism or discrimination. We can help you to work out where to direct your complaint and give you advice about what may happen once you make a complaint.



Get help today

To make an appointment to see a lawyer,
contact: (03) 9310 4376 or admin@northernclc.org.au