



# VicHealth

LETTER

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Making the link  
between cultural  
discrimination and health



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# Embracing diversity for health

**D**iscrimination based on a person's ethnicity, culture or religion carries an enormous cost on the individual and has devastating effects on families and communities. It is a universal problem and a violation of human rights: both in itself and because it compromises health, a fundamental human right to which VicHealth is strongly committed. Discrimination has the potential to harm us all by undermining community relations and social cohesion, stifling productivity and placing an unnecessary burden on our health, welfare and legal systems.

For some time VicHealth has identified discrimination and its resulting disadvantages as one of the important drivers of mental ill health. Successive, well-designed studies support this view by indicating a strong relationship between exposure to ethnic and race-based discrimination and poor mental health.

These findings represent a significant public health concern, with more than 13% of Victorians born in non-English speaking countries; one in five speaking a language other than English at home and a further 20.1% having at least one parent born overseas. Despite their skills, strengths and the world-view they can bring to our country, many migrants and refugees in Victoria are discriminated against.

And of course, integral to dealing properly with culturally-based discrimination is the inclusion of Indigenous Victorians, who as a group continue to bear the greatest burden of discrimination, experiencing markedly poorer physical and mental health and to have lower life expectancy than other Victorians.

To successfully tackle this insidious problem we need approaches that are multi-layered. Discrimination occurs at an individual level, but it's also supported by the institutional barriers created by policies and procedures or laws that result (inadvertently or otherwise) in locking people out of mainstream society and services, thereby creating disadvantage.

By working together to protect the health of those directly affected by discrimination, we can also ensure that the wider community reaps the social and economic benefits of the diverse cultural heritage contributed both by newcomers to Victoria as well as by Indigenous Victorians, its original inhabitants and custodians.

We hope this issue of *VicHealth Letter* will not only raise awareness of the problem of discrimination and its associated health, social and economic costs, but will also provide some ideas towards reducing it.



*Todd Harper*

**TODD HARPER**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Victorian Health Promotion  
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PHOTO: Mark Farrelly



*Ian Anderson*

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PHOTO: Les O'Rourke

In September VicHealth will be launching a new report with the latest data on the link between discrimination and health, Victorians' experiences of discrimination, community attitudes and a synthesis of the literature examining the most effective approaches to reducing discrimination. If you would like to receive an invitation to the launch please contact [hfinnie@vichealth.vic.gov.au](mailto:hfinnie@vichealth.vic.gov.au)

# Tackling discrimination is GOOD FOR HEALTH

Real estate agents repeatedly tell a family that no homes are available for rent although this is untrue. Teenagers at a bus stop are abused by a carload of strangers driving past. An anxious mother with limited English cannot understand what the doctor is saying about her sick baby.



These disparate incidents may, at first glance, seem unrelated. But they are not. They are all actual cases of discrimination, of a sort that too many Australians face on a regular basis.

Despite laws and policies designed to stamp out discrimination, the uncomfortable reality is that many people – particularly migrants, refugees and Indigenous Australians – continue to face subtle and not-so-subtle forms of prejudice.

It might be reflected in the comments or actions of individuals or it might take the form of what is sometimes called ‘institutional discrimination’, whereby the systems and structures of organisations and institutions are not as inclusive of some groups as they are of others.

A number of recent Australian studies show that people from Indigenous and culturally diverse backgrounds continue to experience unacceptably high rates of discrimination.<sup>1, 2</sup> Such findings have important implications for those seeking to improve the Australian community’s health and wellbeing. Discrimination is not only an issue of social justice and fairness. There is growing evidence that it can have a devastating impact on health.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the area of mental health, with studies showing that people who suffer discrimination are also more likely to develop problems such as depression and anxiety. As a psychiatrist who specialises in working with people from diverse cultural backgrounds, Associate Professor Harry Minas is all too familiar with the relationship between discrimination and mental health.

“A number of things are required for people to maintain good mental health,” says Professor Minas, Director of the Victorian Transcultural Psychiatry Unit and Centre for International Mental Health at The University of Melbourne.

“These include seeing oneself as a valuable human being who is a valued member of a group – the family, wider network or the broader community. Having self-esteem, feeling reasonably comfortable with oneself and that one has a place are also critical. Discrimination undermines all these factors, and erodes the sense of being worthwhile.”

How people respond to discriminatory comments or actions can vary, Professor Minas adds. They can become depressed, anxious, frightened or angry. They can also engage in

self-destructive behaviour, whether smoking, drinking, or by the abuse of other substances, while young people, in particular, may respond with violence.

Discrimination can be even more damaging for people who have previously endured significant trauma, such as torture, prolonged periods in refugee camps or dislocation from family and friends.

Ms Maria Tucci, a counsellor/advocate with the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (also known as Foundation House), says it can be devastating for people who have come to Australia, hoping for a new life free of the problems of their past, to encounter discrimination.

“When people come from backgrounds where human rights are violated on a mass scale, they come to Australia expecting human rights to be championed and to find a fair society. But when the reality doesn’t match up, they feel the disappointment very keenly. If they’ve experienced violence directly or have lived in a violent culture, that sort of background can leave long-lasting effects. Encountering discrimination can add to the effects from the past. It’s like re-traumatising them.”

Ms Tucci says people who’ve been traumatised or persecuted in the past can be more sensitive to slights that other people may ignore, or perhaps not even notice.

“One of the consequences of trauma is a super-heightened sensitivity to injustice,” she says. “So even tiny things that other people might be able to shrug off easily are experienced as very painful and an assault on one’s dignity.”

Young people are also especially sensitive to the effects of discrimination because their sense of identity is still developing, and thus are particularly vulnerable to attack.

“If you come to a society where your identity is disparaged and ridiculed or not accepted, the mental health outcomes may be terrible,” Ms Tucci says, “I’ve had young Sudanese people tell me they’ve been standing at a bus stop and have had people screaming at them out of cars, ‘you’re monkeys, why don’t you go back to the jungle?’”

There is good evidence of a strong link between poor mental health and poor physical health, so the impact of such mental distress is a double whammy of ill health.

Dramatic changes have occurred in recent decades with the aim of making Australian society fairer and more inclusive. Laws have been enacted to prohibit many forms of discrimination, with tough sanctions for offenders.

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the referendum giving Indigenous Australians the right to vote and to be counted in the Census (previously they were considered part of the Flora and Fauna portfolio).

These days, few people would put their hands up to admit that such blatant racism is acceptable. Surveys have shown that no more than 10% of Australians report believing that some races are superior to others.<sup>3</sup>

The research also shows Australians have a complex set of attitudes on cultural diversity, and discriminatory attitudes still exist. Surveys indicate that the majority of Australians support multiculturalism, and believe immigration is good for the economy and the community.<sup>4</sup>

However, many people are uncomfortable with differences in cultural practices and behaviours, and are resistant to migrant groups maintaining their cultural heritage. A report soon to be launched by VicHealth quotes data from a Victorian survey conducted in 2006 that indicates almost 38% of respondents thought ‘Australia is weakened by people sticking to their old ways’.<sup>5</sup>

The marginalisation of groups perceived to be outside the mainstream appears to be worsening, according to Professor Minas. There’s a sense that Australia is a less fair and welcoming place than it was 10 or 15 years ago.

“The discrimination that occurred in the ‘50s and ‘60s was a softer thing,” he says, “people would resent being called wogs but they could get work and felt they could get ahead, whereas now many minority groups feel discriminated against and seriously marginalised.”

“I think the discrimination is worse in a number of ways. It’s more systematic and it seems to carry the authority of major community leaders, including government.

All of the discussion and arguments about asylum seekers and refugees have contributed to that.”

Whereas discrimination in the past may have been based on notions of racial inferiority, these days it may be more subtle, and reflected in comments or actions on others’ cultural, political or religious practices or beliefs, and whether these fit with being a ‘good’ Australian. Of great concern is the identification of certain groups as not ‘belonging’ or ‘fitting into’ Australian society.

The VicHealth report shows more than one in three respondents identified groups they thought ‘did not fit into Australian society’, with the most frequently mentioned groups being Muslim Victorians and people from the Middle East and Asia.<sup>6</sup>

Some experts argue that attitudes that undermine acceptance of diversity provide subtle support for discrimination. This can be reinforced by the comments or actions of prominent members of the community. When community leaders are reluctant to acknowledge the existence of discrimination or to take action against it, this can also encourage the very problem they are denying.

A failure to acknowledge the existence of prejudice can attribute responsibility for the difficulties faced by some groups to their individual failings, rather than to the broader social conditions and barriers they face. This may lead to further stigmatising of groups who ‘fail’ to meet expectations.

Similarly, the nature of institutionalised discrimination has become less overt than in the days of the White Australia Policy. Now it is more likely to be a product of the ethnocentric viewpoints of policy and decision makers, rather than a deliberate attempt to restrict access, but it nevertheless results in some groups having poorer access to services and less opportunity to participate fully in society.

The ongoing impact of institutionalised racism is painfully obvious for Dr Melika Sheikh-Eldin, who manages women’s and youth issues for the African umbrella group, the Horn of Africa Communities Network. It is apparent from the moment members of her community arrive in Australia, and struggle to access information from government agencies and other service providers in a language and form they can understand and use, she says.

Societies that truly embrace diversity reap many benefits and not only in enhanced cultural and culinary opportunities.



“There has to be a way of providing them information that’s appropriate to their needs,” she says.

It is also apparent in the struggles that many face in finding meaningful employment. And it is particularly apparent in their difficulties of finding somewhere to live, she adds. With long waiting lists for public housing, many of the Network’s clients struggle to find rental accommodation, often because of their cultural background.

“I have evidence of many people who apply to a real estate agent for housing, who are told the house is already let,” says Dr Sheikh-Eldin, “and then a few days later, it’s still available. This impacts negatively on their wellbeing.”

As a result, many of her clients are forced to stay in crowded conditions with family members.

“It can take months for a family to find any accommodation at all,” says Dr Sheikh-Eldin. “Staying with relatives in very crowded situations puts a lot of pressure on both families. This can delay access to education and to settling and can affect relationships. There are people who regret coming here. They felt happier in the refugee camp.”

It is not only African migrants who face such problems. According to Maria Tucci, some migrants and refugees from other backgrounds also struggle to access culturally and linguistically appropriate services.

“Language is obviously a huge issue,” says Ms Tucci. “If they are dealing with agencies they can’t communicate with, this affects their access to services. There are lots of things service providers can do so people feel welcome when using their services.”

Meanwhile, Mr Peter Van Vliet, the executive officer of the Ethnic Communities Council Victoria, says health services are among the worst offenders when it comes to institutionalised discrimination.

“There’s no doubt that discrimination against people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds exists in health care today,” he says. “Probably the most acute aspect is in regard to the inadequate interpreter services in the health system, which compromises its duty and quality of care.”

Dr Sheikh-Eldin says language barriers often deter her clients from seeking health care. “The lack of culturally and linguistically trained people reduces use of the health system,” she says.

This is a particular issue for Indigenous Australians and often delays them from seeking help, according to Mr Ian Hamm, Deputy Director of Aboriginal Affairs Victoria. It is one of the reasons Indigenous Australians are more likely to present to hospital for treatment when they are acutely ill, rather than having preventative or primary care treatment earlier, he says.

## Discrimination is not only an issue of social justice and fairness. There is growing evidence that it can have a devastating impact on health.

Indeed, academics from Curtin University have argued that ‘institutional racism’ means that health policy and services systemically fail to meet the needs of Indigenous Australians.<sup>7</sup>

Professor Minas adds that such discrimination also affects research. People who don’t speak English are routinely excluded from studies because involving them would take more time, money and effort.

“The impact of exclusion from research is that while our knowledge about the general community improves over time, the gap between what we know about the general community and some of those minority groups continues to widen,” he says.

“That’s a systematic process that undermines our capacity to think in an informed way about how we respond to their needs.”

Discrimination is not only an issue for individual wellbeing; it can also have a broader impact across the community, by reducing social cohesiveness, tolerance and other characteristics of a healthy society.

“It can lead to community-level tension and unrest, and undermine the qualities that make a community worth living in,” says Professor Minas. Societies that truly embrace diversity reap many benefits – and not only in enhanced cultural and culinary opportunities. Economic benefits also flow when societies are deliberately and explicitly inclusive.<sup>8</sup>

Ensuring that people are able to realise their potential and maximise opportunities to bring their skills and attributes to education and the workforce has many benefits for a country’s productivity.

This is particularly significant given that almost one in four Australians were born overseas and skills shortages mean we are increasingly reliant on workers from overseas.

Discrimination is associated with significant costs for workplaces and government, including dealing with grievances through formal complaints mechanisms, reduced productivity and absenteeism, and staff turnover.



It has been estimated, for example, that 70% of workers exposed to violence, harassment or discrimination take time off work as a result.<sup>9</sup>

Discrimination can also cause problems across generations. For example, when parents suffer stress and unemployment as the result of discrimination, this may affect their capacity to support their children's education, in turn contributing to intergenerational cycles of poverty and disadvantage.

And then there are the health care and social service costs associated with discrimination. Reducing discrimination may contribute to significant savings for the public purse. All of these factors mean that the costs of discrimination are not only borne by those directly affected. The broader society also pays a heavy price.

"Ultimately, everybody loses," says Professor Minas. Given the many health, economic and social costs of discrimination, it seems clear that concerted action is needed – across all sectors of society.

Some tips for the best ways forward come from a recent review of the literature undertaken by VicHealth, which identified several promising strategies.

These include programs to increase contact and co-operation between different groups and other initiatives to promote cross-cultural learning. Education campaigns to tackle discrimination and promote diversity are also recommended for schools and communities.

Advocacy, communications and social marketing strategies, such as providing training for journalists and communication campaigns targeting either the whole community or specific groups, can also be helpful.

The review also recommends community development through measures such as cultivating local leaders to take a stand in support of diversity and by supporting leadership within diverse communities.

The workplace is another key site for action, through management training and the development of policies and procedures making it clear that discrimination is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

The review also recommends policy and legislative reform, as well as measures to systematically address institutional discrimination.

Dr Melika Sheikh-Eldin says strenuous efforts are needed to promote greater cultural awareness within government agencies, in particular. This might translate into not only more appropriate and accessible services, but also more employment opportunities.

"We need positive discrimination in all government departments and agencies to help people find work," she says. "Give them a chance. Let them prove themselves. If they need training, give them training."

The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture provides training in cultural awareness to service providers and government agencies, but also works with at-risk groups to help build their resilience.

"We do a lot of group work with young people," says Maria Tucci. "It's focused on building identity, emotional resilience and cultural understanding as protective factors in resettlement."

"If young people can be sure of who they are, where they're from, and who they belong to, it's of huge benefit in terms of resilience. We also work with adults in newly arrived communities on the same issues."

Ms Tucci says it's important for adults to understand the benefits for young people of knowing the stories of their origins.

"There's often a tendency for silence, for people to want to put the past behind them," she says. "Parents hope that the

children and young people won't remember, but that idea of 'just getting on with it' doesn't work."

Ian Hamm cautions that tackling an 'insidious' problem like discrimination requires persistence and commitment.

"You need to take a long-term view and acknowledge that you are never going to completely eradicate it," he adds.

"Without that sustained effort, both through education and also through [sanctions], there will be no long-term reduction in its effect on health and wellbeing."

According to Professor Minas, however, the single most important solution is strong leadership from governments, particularly at the national level, to show that diversity is valued.

"The clearest need is for national leadership, to say 'we recognise that Australia has been immeasurably enriched by the arrival of people from all over the world, and while we recognise that diversity presents all kinds of challenges, we're up to those challenges, and we value the diversity that is now a core feature of the Australian population'," he says.

#### MORE THAN TOLERANCE: EMBRACING DIVERSITY FOR HEALTH

In September VicHealth is launching a report summarising research on discrimination affecting people from migrant and refugee backgrounds and its impact on their health. The report includes: a review of studies into the link between discrimination and health; a telephone survey of 4,000 Victorians on their experiences of discrimination and attitudes towards people from a range of cultural backgrounds; and reviews of strategies to challenge and improve attitudes. This included past communications and marketing strategies.

The survey confirms that Victorians are more supportive of cultural diversity than other Australians. Very few people believe some groups of people are inferior to others. However, there remain some concerning attitudes and there is ambivalence about multiculturalism. There are also differences between metropolitan areas and regional Victoria, and between different urban areas.

If you would like to attend the launch, please email [hfinnie@vichhealth.vic.gov.au](mailto:hfinnie@vichhealth.vic.gov.au) to be included on the mail list.

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# Discrimination against Indigenous People

Recent research indicates that racism has a direct association with ill-health. So with a history of genocide, loss of culture and human rights, how are our Indigenous people faring?

Indigenous people are one of the most disadvantaged groups in Australian society, suffering from high rates of unemployment and incarceration, low income, sub-standard housing and poor educational outcomes. Together with intergenerational trauma, this material deprivation (see Table 1) results in a high burden of ill-health and mortality, including a life expectancy that is approximately 17 years less than other Australians.<sup>1</sup>

Such inequality stems from a history of discrimination that includes genocide and alienation as well as loss of land, culture and human rights. Colonisation of Australia occurred over many decades, as waves of white settlers invaded Indigenous lands. Australia's pastoral industry was predicated on the theft of Indigenous land, the murder of Indigenous people who were using scarce resources, and finally exploitation of those who survived as an unpaid labour force (including the sexual abuse of women).

After this early period of Australian history, colonisation continued through government efforts to monitor and control the socialisation, mobility and reproduction of Indigenous people through either protection or assimilation. This resulted in no less than 67 definitions of Indigenous people in Australian legislation.<sup>2</sup> The following description captures the profound affect that such definitions had:

*In 1935 a fair-skinned Australian of part-Indigenous descent was ejected from a hotel for being an Aboriginal. He returned to his home on the mission station to find himself refused entry because*



Illustration: GETTY IMAGES

**By their inaction our institutions and governments continue the colonisation begun in 1788.**

*he was not an Aboriginal. He tried to remove his children but was told he could not because they were Aboriginal. He walked to the next town where he was arrested for being an Aboriginal vagrant and placed on the local reserve. During the Second World War he tried to enlist but was told he could not because he was Aboriginal. He went interstate and joined up as a non-Aboriginal. After the war he could not acquire a passport without permission because he was Aboriginal. He received exemption from the Aborigines Protection Act and was told that he could no longer visit his relations on the reserve because he was not an Aboriginal. He was denied permission to enter the Returned Servicemen's Club because he was.<sup>3</sup>*

Although such overt forms of control are now defunct, unfortunately there is considerable evidence of continued systemic racism against Indigenous people in the policies and practices of Australian governments and institutions.<sup>4</sup>

For example, contrary to the myth of 'buckets of money' poured into Indigenous health, the real picture is one of under-funding. Although Indigenous people have mortality rates

three to five times greater than other Australians, per capita spending on Indigenous health is only 1.2 times that of the non-Indigenous population.<sup>5</sup> Recent studies have shown that even within existing hospital services Indigenous patients are not receiving the same quality of medical care as their non-Indigenous counterparts, with systemic racism identified as a possible cause.<sup>6,7</sup>

The state of Indigenous housing has many parallels. In 1994, it was estimated that more than \$3 billion was required to address the backlog of housing and infrastructure needs.<sup>8</sup> In comparison, the 2007-08 federal budget provides approximately an additional \$300 million over four years. Meanwhile, Indigenous people are discriminated against in the provision of existing housing services.<sup>9</sup>

Misconceptions of Indigenous people as being welfare dependent, more likely to drink alcohol and as getting special 'government handouts' still abound,<sup>10</sup> serving to fuel racist attitudes and behaviour. Such continued racism against Indigenous people is borne out by survey research. Indigenous people in a 2001 survey reported racism at twice the rate of non-Indigenous Australians including experiences of being treated with disrespect and being discriminated against in shops and restaurants.<sup>11</sup>

Recent research has indicated that racism can have a direct association with ill-health. A review of existing research in this field found that racism is particularly detrimental to mental health.<sup>12</sup> Research in Australia shows that for Indigenous people the stress caused by being the target of racism is associated with chronic conditions such as diabetes, heart disease and cancer as well as smoking, substance use, psychological distress and poor self-assessed health status.<sup>13, 14</sup>

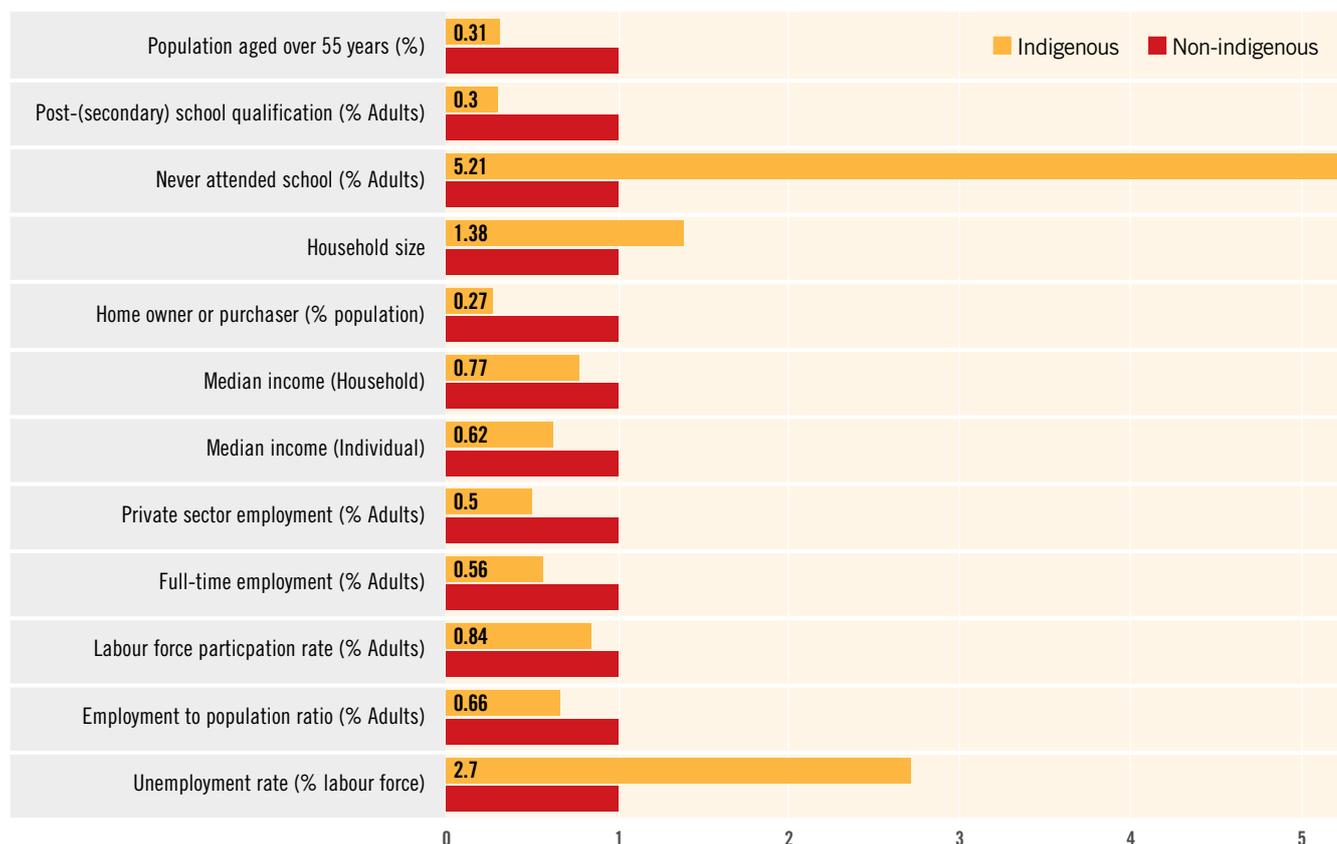
Such stark evidence underlines the need to know more about the extent and nature of racism in Australia, to better gauge its impact on population health and to discover effective approaches to reducing racial and cultural-based discrimination.

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## RATIO OF INDIGENOUS TO NON-INDIGENOUS OUTCOMES, 2001



Source: Altman et. al. 2004

# Flattened by a falafel

An excerpt from an article by Thomas Keneally.

**F**or many of us the main aspect of the newcomer story is the supposed threat they present to Australian society as we would like to know and identify it.

I've always been fascinated by the way we become what we are, and by the way we decide whether another person belongs in our world or not. My first conscious awareness of race was seeing Aboriginal children walking down River Street in West Kempsey, NSW, to go to town.

These were descendants of the Dangaddi. Although I did not know it, the Dangaddi had been sympathetically depicted as a powerful and handsome group by Clement Hodgkinson, surveyor of the Upper Macleay River. The Cambridge archeological expedition of the 1890s also photographed many Dangaddi, as did a Port Macquarie man, Thomas Dick in the mid-19th century.

One sees from all these illustrations what a striking people they were. But the children who went past our place in River Street were the racially and physically eroded version. Even by the standards of post-Depression Australia, they seemed scabby, skinny, weepy-eyed. At the time I didn't ask who was to blame for their condition. I remember being more interested in why they had to sit at the front of the cinema.

My other childhood experience of race and tribe was the Catholic-Protestant divide, potent in those days and largely an Anglo-Celtic divide. I was very interested, in an incoherent way, about why we were suspected and considered secondclass citizens. Why were there firms that wouldn't employ us? Why were our fathers and uncles full of stories of the others getting promotions quicker than them?

Even in the trenches of France my uncle had written a letter about how someone had been made sergeant-major, but of course that was to be expected: the Masons, you understand.

While at the time people on both sides believed that divide to be a crucial and disqualifying one, in practice the Australian community was turning us into the one sort of man and woman, with shared enthusiasms, hopes, civic virtues and flaws.



Illustration: PAUL NEWMAN/NEWSPIX

## At what stage does a suburb go from being a ghetto to a tourist attraction?

unappeasable and homogeneously un- or anti-Australian.

There is no doubt that the strangeness of newcomers can be a challenge. At Homebush we were shocked when the Calabrians next door saved their night soil for deployment as manure on their tomatoes. Their tomatoes were rip-snorters, but when the Italian mother offered them over the fence to us – well, my progressive mother had to do the best she could. I'm sure the daughters of that Calabrian couple are now living somewhere in the Australian suburbs in overdisinfected, overfumigated manors.

Racial suspicion is an opportunistic beast, a great ruminant that grazes on one set of newcomers and then on another. And 'they' are not individuals with personal and complex histories, they are one and indivisible and all in it together. They live in ghettos, they refuse to learn English, they'll never be true Australians.

And all the stuff about ghettos! In the '50s people were frantic about Leichhardt in Sydney's inner west going Italian. In the '70s it was about Cabramatta going Vietnamese. At what stage does a suburb go from being a ghetto to a tourist attraction? Leichhardt's there and Cabramatta's on the way. Yet how much useless hysteria has been spent just on these two?

*Thomas Keneally is one of Australia's most successful modern writers. Reprinted with permission by The Australian Literary Review.*

The full article first appeared on February 7, 2007, and can be found at <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au>

# A HUMAN THING

Despite 30 years of anti-discrimination legislation in Victoria, we still find that racism exists.

At the 1968 Mexico Olympics, Australian 200m sprinter Peter Norman, shared the winners' podium with two African-Americans. Tommy Smith and John Carlos won gold and bronze, but what froze this moment in time was their silent protest, through raising black-gloved hands with heads bowed, to draw attention to racial discrimination occurring in the USA. Norman stood in solidarity with them and, later explaining his actions, said that it was not a black thing, it was a human thing! Norman was lauded, but in ironic contrast, Carlos and Smith were banished from the US Olympic team and spent the rest of their lives 'paying' for their actions.

This is an iconic story that supports the image Australians have of ourselves: we support the underdog, we support the notion of having a 'fair go'. However, if we scratch the surface, there remains a vein of racism that has existed since the colonisation of Australia more than 200 years ago.

The target of this racism changes over time. Since white settlement it has been directed to our Indigenous population. We were recently reminded of this institutionalised racism on the 40th anniversary of the referendum that finally gave Indigenous Australians the right to be counted in the Census and to vote.<sup>1</sup> This was after many years of various 'Aboriginal Acts' that pro-actively prevented Aboriginal people living with their families, caring for their children, marrying the person they chose and retaining a claim to their land.<sup>2</sup>

In the 1950s, the target of the post-war period was the thousands of non-British migrants who sought refuge in a 'White Australia', "...so many Jews; so many swarthy, dark-skinned, southern Mediterranean types. UnBritish, unAustralian, 'unsuitable'.<sup>3</sup> More recently the target has been Muslim and Arab-Australians.<sup>4</sup>

Despite celebrating 30 years of anti-discrimination legislation in Victoria, we still find racism exists. The challenge for bodies such as the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission is to identify strategies to address it. Under state equal opportunity legislation, we are charged with the functions of reducing discrimination in the Victorian community. We achieve this by providing a free and impartial complaints resolution service, through our education and training and through our policy and campaign work. More recently the Commission has assumed additional functions under the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006*, which enshrines in one law civil and political rights relating to freedom, equality, dignity and respect.

In the last financial year we received 196 complaints relating to race discrimination and seven complaints which were lodged under the *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2002*.<sup>5</sup>

We know, however, that these complaints are only the tip of the iceberg, and that there are many instances of racial discrimination

not reported to the Commission. Racial discrimination may occur in employment, on the sporting field, in renting accommodation, in the daily interactions that occur in restaurants and retail outlets. Very few of these experiences will ultimately result in the lodgement of a complaint. Many people will not go on to take some action that will protect their rights or challenge the unlawfulness of the behaviour directed at them. According to the Department of Justice's quarterly *Perceptions of Justice Survey*, only about 25% of respondents who experienced discrimination seek independent help to resolve the matter.

It is of concern that people who are treated unfairly on the basis of their race may be missing out on employment opportunities or reasonable access to services or goods. Of additional concern is that the experience of racism also impacts on their health, as evidenced in research undertaken by VicHealth.

There is no 'one-size-fits-all' solution on how to reduce racism or ensure that we strive to become a community that supports a fair go. This is evidenced in the research of Dunn and others,<sup>6</sup> which reinforces the contradictory set of attitudes Australians have towards multiculturalism.

For the Commission, it is important to continue to provide the opportunity for individual redress. Recent amendments to the *Equal Opportunity Act 1995 (Vic)* provide for representatives' complaints, which means that a group of people who experience similar discrimination can lodge a single complaint, or have a representative organisation lodge on their behalf. However, complaint resolution is only one part of the response – our current project work is focusing on racism in employment, with a view to highlighting strategies to deal with it. In 2006, the Commission, in partnership with Yarra Trams, Connex and Metlink, ran an awareness campaign focusing on the diversity of people using public transport. It portrayed different people using public transport all for the same ends – 'Just Like You'.

To sharpen the focus of this campaign work in future, authorities need to know how to frame campaign messages to make a difference. That is the human thing – we all want to have the community that we deserve to live in.

*Dr Helen Szoke is Chief Executive Officer of the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission.*

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Many people will not go on to take the actions that will protect their rights

# Shifting attitudes through sport

Kiemi Lai is from Hong Kong, she immigrated to Australia as a five-year-old. Now Lai works in Australian football, teaching the game's basics to young people in the western suburbs. Before she started, many who she teaches wouldn't have known a football if it bounced past them.



Fuat Yalin, Farhan Hasan, Erhan Cakici, Hakan Ajir and Hasan Asir unite in their love of footy.

Photo: PETER WARD/HWT

Employed by the AFL and hosted by the Western Bulldogs, Kiemi Lai delivers a six-step introduction to Australian football at primary and secondary schools, AMES and English Learning Centres. And she does not muck around. “I just get straight into it,” says Lai. “The kids pick up visual things a lot quicker and we do plenty of hands-on activities.”

Lai is at the frontline of the AFL's Multicultural Football Program. It is designed to increase – among new arrivals – an awareness of the game that dominates Melbourne's media and conversation during winter. One of five Multicultural Development Officers linked to AFL clubs, over a six-week period Lai explains the game's rules, runs a basic skills session and is joined by an AFL player at the school. To finish, participants are invited, along with family, to attend an AFL match. Last year, as part of the program 16,000 people saw an AFL game for the first time.

The program is a partnership between the AFL, AFL Victoria and the Department for Victorian Communities, with support from VicHealth and AFL clubs. Consultation with new-arrival community leaders drives its direction. AFL Multicultural Development Program coordinator, Nick Hatzoglou, says he did a lot of listening when he first started the job. He wanted to engage community leaders and get the message out that “Australian football wants to include people in the decision-making process.”

Ahmed Ahmed, who works with young people with an African heritage, became involved. He told Hatzoglou, “What you need to do is come to them and show them the game.”

AFL CEO Andrew Demetriou – a former AFL player and first-generation Australian of Cypriot heritage – was a supporter. A strategy took shape and the AFL endorsed the objective in its *Next Generation* blueprint.

The business logic stacked up: a new market of possible participants and supporters existed. The five multicultural development officers, all with new-arrival backgrounds, were attached to AFL clubs Essendon, Hawthorn, Richmond, Collingwood and the Western Bulldogs. It was an important step, says the AFL's National Participation Manager, Dean Warren. "People don't support the AFL; they support a club." The clubs provided the development officer with an identity; in return, clubs have the opportunity to turn people without an affiliation into club supporters. For the first time, leaders of community groups had a devoted group within the AFL to discuss issues and ideas.

## The AFL doesn't only want fans; it wants players, coaches and volunteers to be included regardless of background.

But participation wasn't the only motivation for the AFL. It takes its role as a community leader seriously. It wants the game to be inclusive, to connect people and involve anyone who wants to join. The AFL wants fans; it wants players, coaches and volunteers to be included, regardless of background. For this it needs to build safe, inclusive club environments.

The challenges are very real. A report in Melbourne's *Herald Sun* in June 2007 provided shocking examples of racial abuse being directed at players by opponents and spectators at suburban junior football games. The program developers understand that for the program to be a success, attitudes within the mainstream community must shift. The welcoming environment must be universal, within clubs and when taking on opponents. Football competitions must see eliminating racism as a major priority. A coordinated effort to create football clubs that embrace multicultural diversity as part of their operations is essential, says Hatzoglou.

### INDIGENOUS CONNECTION

A big shift in attitudes towards Indigenous players and their culture has taken place in AFL football since 1990, prompted by the courageous actions of pioneering Indigenous players.

The AFL's experience with Indigenous players has taught the game plenty. Until the early '90s, racism was hidden, largely ignored, its impact disregarded, the cultural differences misunderstood. In 1993, St Kilda champion **Nicky Winmar** pointed to his chest after receiving racial taunts from the crowd at Collingwood's Victoria Park. He was making a stand: enough was enough. "You should be able to work and play top-level footy at your best without being vilified about your culture and your colour," he said recently.

In 1995, Essendon's **Michael Long**, a premiership player and Norm Smith medallist, was racially vilified during a game by Collingwood's Damian Monkhorst. Long went public, explaining the impact of the comments, and pointing to the history of racial abuse suffered by players with Indigenous heritage. Backed by his club, he inspired the AFL to take action.

"At one level we're doing work in the schools, drumming up interest and building up momentum for footy. On another we've recognised that some clubs' education might be limited, so we're doing cross-cultural awareness training within the AFL and with clubs within the regions where the multicultural development officers work. Clubs can't be expected to understand the issues; it's complex. We need to help make clubs better informed and educated."

Mick Daniher is AFL Victoria's Development Manager. AFL Victoria has been working to improve local clubs' understanding of cultural discrimination issues since 2003. That year it implemented the Bouncing Racism Out of Sport program, to coincide with the Victorian Government's Racial and Religious Tolerance Act. The program contained a booklet, a video and a series of presentations to clubs and leagues to ensure all were aware of the legal ramifications and penalties for racial discrimination. AFL Victoria went further to ensure its response was pro-active. Policies were included into AFL Victoria's constitution and therefore League and club-based policies, then embedded in coaching and club administration education programs. "There is a higher awareness among clubs that they need to be community-based," says Daniher.

AFL Victoria has also introduced mediation training for leagues to ensure they can deal with racial incidents. Apart from penalties, mediation counselling and education of those individuals involved is critical. Both AFL Victoria and the AFL recognise the need to build on this, with more work scheduled for the second half of 2007.

It will take time for new arrivals to become players, although progress is being made. Auskick sessions are held within high-rises in Flemington, Richmond and Collingwood. "Taking the game to children's own backyards was an important factor," says Ahmed. The recent debut of Bachar Houli for Essendon – the AFL's first practising Muslim to play AFL football – is a bonus. Such players, says Ahmed, are inspiring for young people. "They see that no matter what colour or background you are, you can still get a game."

### Online program details:

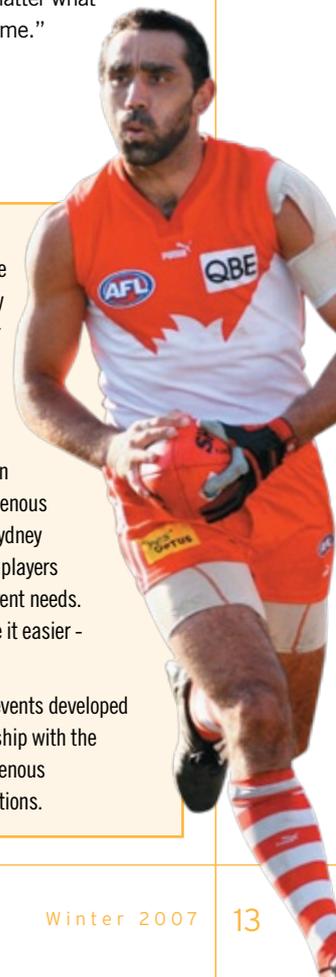
See: [www.footballvic.com.au/?s=multicultural](http://www.footballvic.com.au/?s=multicultural)

*Peter Ryan is a writer with the AFL Record.*

The Racial and Religious Vilification Rule was introduced: the first significant step to eliminate racism from the game at the elite level. The rule includes serious penalties for any player or club official who racially abuses another player or official. It ran with a community awareness program and changed attitudes within the game – racial abuse on the field at AFL level is now rare.

Now every AFL club has Indigenous players – there are 71 in total. The past 10 premiership teams have contained Indigenous footballers, including last year's Brownlow Medallist, the Sydney Swans' **Adam Goodes**. He says the situation for Aboriginal players has changed considerably. "Indigenous players have different needs. Having a good support network behind the clubs has made it easier - Indigenous players can take every chance to succeed."

It's a massive change. Underpinning it are programs and events developed by Indigenous representative bodies, instigated in partnership with the AFL, government and the corporate sector, to support Indigenous communities to improve their health and meet their aspirations.



# Timeline of action INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS

Focusing on positive actions against discrimination towards Indigenous Australians

<b>1856-58</b> South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales become self-governing with all male British subjects 21 years and over, including Indigenous people, entitled to vote.	<b>1967</b> More than 90% of Australians vote for constitutional changes to allow the Commonwealth the power to make special laws for Indigenous Australians and to include Indigenous Australians in the national Census.	<b>1994</b> The Australian Bureau of Statistics conducts the first <i>National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey</i> .
<b>1895</b> All adult women in South Australia, including Indigenous women, win the right to vote.	<b>1971</b> Neville Bonner is sworn in as Australia's first Aboriginal Senator.	<b>1997</b> Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation formed.
<b>1924</b> The Australian Aborigines Progressive Association formed in Sydney under the leadership of Fred Maynard.	<b>1972</b> The Tent Embassy is erected on the lawns of Parliament House in Canberra to bring attention to the importance of land rights and Indigenous sovereignty.	<b>1997</b> The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission releases <i>Bringing them home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families</i> .
<b>1932</b> The Australian Aborigines League founded in Victoria by William Cooper.	<b>1972</b> Aboriginal Affairs becomes a separate ministry and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs is established.	<b>1999</b> Federal Parliament passes a motion of 'deep and sincere regret over the removal of Aboriginal children from their parents'.
<b>1938</b> The Day of Mourning and Protest Conference lead by William Ferguson and John Patten is held at Australian Hall, Sydney on Australia Day.	<b>1975</b> The national <i>Racial Discrimination Act</i> comes into force.	<b>2000</b> More than 300,000 people march across the Sydney Harbour Bridge in support of reconciliation.
<b>1949</b> The right to vote in federal elections extended to Indigenous people who had served in the armed forces, or who are enrolled to vote in state elections.	<b>1975</b> Leasehold title of Wave Hill Station is granted to the Gurindji people.	<b>2000</b> The Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement is created in order to address the ongoing issue of Aboriginal over-representation in all levels of the criminal justice system.
<b>1957</b> The Victorian Aborigines Advancement League formed.	<b>1984</b> Compulsory enrolment and voting in Commonwealth elections for Indigenous people comes into effect.	<b>2001</b> The Victorian <i>Racial and Religious Tolerance Act</i> comes into force.
<b>1957</b> The first National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Celebration held.	<b>1989</b> Indigenous people are identified for the first time in the national health survey.	<b>2002</b> The <i>Social Justice Report 2001</i> and <i>Native Title Report 2001</i> are presented to Commonwealth Parliament. Both reports express serious concerns about the nation's progress in achieving the exercise of Indigenous rights.
<b>1958</b> Federal Council for the Advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders formed.	<b>1990</b> The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission is established with the goal of furthering the economic, social and cultural development of Indigenous Australians.	<b>2002-4</b> Data on discrimination against Indigenous people is collected for the first time in the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social and Health Surveys.
<b>1962</b> The <i>Commonwealth Electoral Act</i> provides that Indigenous people should have the right to enrol and vote at federal elections. Indigenous people also gain the right to vote in Western Australian elections.	<b>1991</b> The final report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody is released.	<b>2003</b> The first <i>Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage</i> report is released and formally endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments.
<b>1965</b> Queensland allows Indigenous people to vote in state elections.	<b>1991</b> The Council for Reconciliation is formed.	<b>2007</b> The Australian Medical Association releases its report card on Indigenous health focusing on institutionalised inequity and racism.
<b>1965</b> The Freedom Ride against racial discrimination is led by Charles Perkins.	<b>1992</b> The High Court judgement in the Mabo Case overturns the concept of <i>terra nullius</i> .	
<b>1966</b> Wave Hill walkout led by Vincent Lingiari to protest unequal wages for Aboriginal workers.	<b>1993</b> The Office of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner is created to monitor the human rights of Indigenous Australians.	

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# Timeline of action MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

Threshold moments in addressing discrimination affecting migrant and refugee communities

**1850s-90s** While Chinese, Melanesian, Japanese and Middle Eastern immigrants contribute to a range of industries here, they experience exploitation and exclusion.

**1901** The Commonwealth *Immigration Restriction Act* makes it virtually impossible for non-British immigrants to enter. Commonly referred to as the 'White Australia' policy, such restrictions prevail until the '60s.

**1947** Beginning of Australia's post-war mass migration program marked by the arrival of displaced persons from war-torn Europe. More than six million ultimately settle through this program.

**1948** Adult migrant education classes conducted by volunteers at Bonegilla migrant centre, ultimately to become today's Adult Migrant Education Program.

**1948** The General Assembly of the United Nations, with Australia's support, proclaims the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

**1959** The Immigration Reform Group is founded, advocating an end to the 'White Australia' policy.

**1965** Australia signs the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*.

**1973** The 'White Australia' policy – incrementally softened throughout the 1960s – is formally ended.

**1973** Then Minister for Immigration, Al Grassby publicly canvasses the benefits of multiculturalism, marking multiculturalism's debut in Australian political thinking.

**1973** First *Victorian Migrant Workers Conference* organised addressing the wages and conditions of migrant workers and their integration into the union movement.

**1974** Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria established to support liaison between ethnic communities, government and the wider community.

**1975** Commonwealth *Racial Discrimination Act* prohibits discrimination on the grounds of race, religion, colour, descent or ethnicity.

**1975 -76** Refugees begin arriving from countries torn by war and civil conflict including East Timor, Vietnam, Lebanon, Cyprus and Chile.

**1976** First Resource Centres for migrants established in Parramatta and Richmond.

**1978** Galbally *Review of Post Arrival Programs and Services to Migrants* released, marking a shift in Australian migrant policy from assimilation to multiculturalism.

**1979** Giovanni Sgro, former resident of Bonegilla, becomes the first Italian member elected to Victoria's Parliament.

**1980** Channel O/28 begins broadcasting SBS in Melbourne and Sydney.

**1981** Refugees from African backgrounds begin to arrive, mostly from Ethiopia.

**1983** Victorian Ethnic Affairs Commission (now the Victorian Multicultural Commission), established to promote full participation by ethnic groups in Victoria.

**1984** The *Equal Opportunity Act 1977* (Vic), previously outlawing discrimination on the grounds of gender, marital status and disability, amended to include discrimination on the basis of race, religion, ethnic origin and political belief.

**1991** Sang Nguyen elected Mayor of the City of Richmond, making him the first

**1995** The *Racial Hatred Act* amends *Racial Discrimination Act (1975)* to make racial vilification unlawful.

**1999** Alex Andrianopoulos is the first migrant from a non-English background to be Speaker of the Victorian Parliament.

**1999** Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission releases *New Country New Stories* identifying means of addressing discrimination affecting Australia's small and emerging ethnic communities.

**2002** *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act (2001)* introduced to prohibit behaviour promoting hatred or contempt on the basis of race or religion.

**2002** The *Valuing Cultural Diversity Policy* statement provides a framework for Victoria's multicultural policies and programs.

**2003** '*Celebrating Cultural Diversity Week*' introduced, providing an opportunity to celebrate cultural and religious diversity.

**2004** The *Multicultural Victoria Act* builds on existing policy and legislation to enshrine the principles of multiculturalism.

**2004** *The Ambassador* becomes the first community newspaper in Australia for Horn-of-African communities. *Neos Kosmos* and *Il Globo* – first issued some 40 years previously – continue to publish in Greek and Italian.

**2004** Exemption from the *Equal Opportunity Act 1995* (Vic) granted, allowing women-only sessions at the Shepparton pool, making the facility accessible to Muslim women who are excluded from mixed gender swimming for religious reasons.

**2004** Victoria Police Constable Maha Sukkar becomes the first police officer in Australia granted official permission to wear a hijab in the line of duty.

**2004** Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission report *Ismae: Listen* identifies strategies for preventing prejudice against Arab and Muslim Australians.

**2006** *The Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities* spells out civil and political rights, among them the rights of people from diverse backgrounds to enjoy their culture, declare their religion and use their language.

Philippa McLean is the Senior Project Officer for Social Inclusion – Community Projects at VicHealth.

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# Living in a culture of Anglo dominance

Most people, when asked, don't believe they are racist<sup>1</sup>, and we have all read public commentary about how successful multiculturalism is in Australia. However, the reality is far from rosy.

**T**he dominance of an Anglo culture, and civic organisation based on a British system of law and governance inadvertently leads to systemic racial discrimination, creating barriers to the economic resources necessary to maintain good health and wellbeing (see box opposite page).

The truth is that particular ethnic groups and Indigenous Australians are denied access to quality education, jobs and housing, often by the fact that they are only available within a narrow ethnocentric paradigm. There is also evidence of these groups accessing health services and participating in sport and recreation at lower rates than the rest of the population. Their political representation is also lower, which is likely to impede change required for greater inclusion.

## ACCESS TO WORK

Employment is fundamental to an independent, healthy existence in Australia today. It provides income for housing, food and other basic needs; additionally, for migrants it provides opportunities to improve English skills and build social connections. These are all important resources for health.

Some studies show that employment improves for migrants the longer they are in Australia, but this is not always the case. Research

has found that Indigenous people, North African, Middle Eastern and Vietnamese migrants all face more difficult employment trajectories, despite their qualifications and skills capacity.

In Western Australia, researchers found a segmented labour market where racially and culturally visible migrants, especially those from refugee backgrounds, were allocated the lowest jobs regardless of their formal qualifications, skills and experience.<sup>2</sup> They also found most employers do not reflect on the diversity of their workforce nor consider whether it represents the population profile of the area.

**For Muslim Australians, even after more than 10 years of residence in Australia, the average unemployment rate was still almost double the Australian average.**

Data collated by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library found that people from North Africa, the Middle East and Vietnam have unemployment rates much higher than other overseas-born people.<sup>3</sup> The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission found that for Muslim Australians, even after more than 10 years living in Australia, the average unemployment rate was almost double that of the Australian average.<sup>4</sup>

## NOT A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD

Participation in sport and recreation is important for health and wellbeing, but in this area too our migrant, refugee and Indigenous Australians are disadvantaged. Within organised sport, the number of people involved is significantly lower for migrants from non-English speaking countries (12% compared to 31% for Australian-born people).<sup>5</sup>

In terms of physical activity, a 2006 ABS study compared the participation of all Australian adults (62%), with migrant groups. Involvement was lowest for migrants from Southern and Eastern Europe (42%) and those with North African and Middle Eastern backgrounds (31%). Sport participation rates for children aged 5-14 years are also lower for children born in non-English speaking countries.



This trend is observable with children's involvement in cultural activities and sport outside of school hours. Just over half (56%) of children from non-English speaking countries were involved in any after-school activity, compared with almost three-quarters of Australian-born and English-speaking children.<sup>6</sup>

### A DENIAL OF POWER

Indigenous people and people from non-English speaking backgrounds are under-represented in our political institutions too. As measured in March 2006, despite 17% of Victorians being born in non-English-speaking countries only 11% of state MPs were born in non-English speaking countries, and there are no Indigenous members of Parliament.<sup>7</sup>

Further, in relation to the appointments to government boards and advisory committees, migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds make up only 8% of all non-executive appointments.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, only 9% of Victorian local government councillors were born in non-English speaking countries.<sup>9</sup>

### OVERCOMING THE LACK OF CULTURAL PRESENCE

By continuing to lock out particular cultural groups, current Australian civic and social systems are reinforced as dominant and acceptable. Those with decision-making power are not encouraged to reflect on why some cultural groups are not represented, and this may act to further deny access by these groups.

Developing indicators of institutional racism is useful in identifying where policy alternatives need to be generated to overcome health inequalities and barriers to participation faced by some cultural groups. The uneven experiences of different cultural groups demonstrate that it is not lack of English-language proficiency, length of settlement or qualifications that explains inequality, but the effects of systemic racism.

*Mark Boyd is the Senior Project Officer in Health Inequalities at VicHealth.*



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Institutionalised or systemic racism is when policy and procedures or laws unintentionally disadvantage a specific group. Systemic racial discrimination is the application of beliefs, values, presumptions, structures and processes by the institutions of society (be they economic, political, social or cultural) that often indirectly treat the values of a particular racial group as inferior. It often involves a failure to acknowledge historical discrimination against a particular group that has resulted in that group occupying an inferior or unequal position in society.<sup>10</sup> Institutional racism is likely to be a product (whether deliberate or unintentional) of the ethnocentric viewpoints of policy and decision makers.



# Getting to know you

What better way to bring young people together than through cars? Out in the community, a car restoration project – along with other innovative ideas – is helping break down the barriers between people from different cultures.

In Dandenong, in Melbourne's outer south-east, 20 young people get together each fortnight to restore a second-hand Holden. It's not your typical gathering of teenage revheads: half the group are Australian-born and half are newly arrived refugees from Sudan, Afghanistan and Burma who had never met before. As a group, they don't necessarily share a language, skin colour, religion or culture. But the young men and women share a passion for cars.

Called 'Kar Kulture', this practical and unique project aims to help create social networks, break down cultural barriers and ultimately reduce prejudice and discrimination. And at the end of it, there'll be a roadworthy car available to use for driving practice and road safety training.

"We wanted to do a project that hadn't been done before – something new and innovative and that young people would have an interest in," says Nancy Badr, Youth Services Team Leader with the South Eastern Migrant Resource Centre. "Young people tell us they want to be more integrated with their [Australian-born] peer group, and they also want to get a licence, get on the road, and be independent."

## CULTIVATING COMMON GROUND

Finding 'common ground' is an effective way of shifting prejudices and helping new migrants settle well and be genuinely welcomed by their new community, according to recent studies. "But it's got to be done sensitively," says researcher Anne Pedersen.

"In emphasising commonality, there's a risk that the 'out-group' will only be accepted on terms acceptable to the 'in-group'," she says. "It's most successful to emphasise both the similarity and differences between groups."

Strategies to build attitudes that prevent culturally based discrimination – such as direct participation programs, for example – are promising. "They do challenge stereotypes and can promote learning about other cultures effectively," says Pedersen.

'Contact' projects such as Kar Kulture, which foster cooperation between groups who would otherwise be socially isolated, are valuable, she says.

Building empathy is key. "It's about encouraging people to 'walk in the shoes of the other'," says Pedersen. "Empathy can lead to tolerance, and there is some evidence that it can also bring about attitudinal change."

Fundamentally changing people's attitudes is the challenge, however. "Some experts are of the view that attitudes are very difficult to change," says Pedersen. "Improvement is more likely to be achieved by focusing on behaviours – with attitudinal change to follow as a result."

## VISITING THE SUDAN

In April this year, two Victoria Police officers spent three weeks in southern Sudan helping on a community building project, visiting tribal villages and getting first-hand experience of daily life. For Senior Constable Joey Herrech and Senior Sergeant Ian Gillespie, this 'workforce development' experience was an eye-opener.

"Their environment has been destroyed by 55 years of war, and the last 20 has been really hard-core war," says Herrech. "All the infrastructure's destroyed – their hospital facilities are horrific. They are suffering so greatly and just do not have the general means to survive as we do here."

Despite the shocking poverty, both policemen were overwhelmed by the generosity and kindness of the people they met. "They are so giving and so hospitable. They're in one of the worst situations you could imagine, and yet they offer you the clothes off their back."

Herrech is a member of Victoria Police's multicultural liaison unit, whose brief is to promote harmonious relationships between the police and Melbourne's culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. This demands a lot of understanding from both sides. The multicultural unit gets involved in community organisations through recreation, driver, drug or parenting education and talks about the role of the police, people's rights and responsibilities, basic laws and safety in the community. Within the police force, the unit also provides cross-cultural training to police officers.

## The local Sudanese community were involved in the poster campaign, which revealed their aspirations, skills and 'what they loved about Warrnambool'.

For refugees from the Sudan, a policeman's uniform – or any uniform – can be a terrifying reminder of the brutality they suffered at home. "Families witnessed other family members dying at the hands of the police," says Herrech. "Seeing a uniform can be traumatic for them."

For Herrech, the trip to the Sudan has helped enormously in talking to members of the Sudanese community with greater credibility. "I can tell them: 'I know where you've come from, I know the situation that you're in'," he says. And it helps with building trust in the police force.



Senior Constable Joey Herrech from the Dandenong multicultural liaison unit and Lorien Vecellio (far right) from the South East Migrant Resource Centre with youths involved in 'Kar Kulture', a program where young people get together to restore a second-hand car.

Photo: MARK STEWART/NEWSPIX

Herrech is concerned about negative media portrayals of the Sudanese community. In his experience, it doesn't mesh with reality. "We have a youth council that meets with us regularly – we find that we can resolve many issues immediately just through open-table discussion," he says. "They're a fantastic community."

## SOCIAL MARKETING IN ACTION

Using social marketing campaigns to address discrimination and promote cultural diversity can help shift attitudes, according to recent research by Robert Vlasis and Rob Donovan. Their recommendations – drawn from a review of national and international campaigns – set out 'good practice' guidelines for campaign development.

These include planning using 'multi-level field mapping' to determine relevant factors, including current media representations, current influences on social norms, existing research, and demographic or geographic variations. It's also critical to understand the factors that influence negative attitudes.

Since negative beliefs are often directed to a specific ethnic group, it is important in the implementation phase to focus on one group at a time. "Campaigns that promote broad concepts of 'inclusion', multiculturalism or diversity may do little to lessen negative views about particular groups," says Professor Donovan, from Curtin University, Western Australia.

"Objectives should be based on comprehensive theoretical models relating to the attitudes underlying discrimination, behavioural change and marketing," he says.

It's also worth augmenting a campaign through direct participation and community development activities, believes Donovan. "Anti-discrimination strategies are more effective when the target group is involved including pre-testing the messages and strategies," he says. "This is especially relevant where campaigns emphasise similarities."

## ENRICHING THE COMMUNITY

Since 2004, when Warrnambool won a national award for its refugee migration project, the city has been regarded as a model of refugee resettlement. Warrnambool is now home to a small but thriving Sudanese community of 16 families – in total 93 people, half of them children.

In this regional city, with a predominately Anglo-Celtic population, the proposed resettlement needed to be carefully planned. A thoroughly researched strategy – tailored to fit the town – and proper funding for implementation were essential, says Anne Waters, Executive Manager Community Development, Warrnambool City Council.

The 'whole of community approach' meant early and repeated consultation with the locals. This included 'attitude mapping' forums where 15 to 20 community opinion leaders – including employers, service clubs, churches – were asked questions and, over time, gave their support to the program. Feedback was sought at all stages. "People needed to talk about their concerns, and be listened to," says Waters.

Some 18 months later, refugee families were gradually invited to relocate to Warrnambool. "We provided a package of support including relocation costs," says Waters. Once in Warrnambool, the families were introduced to their neighbours, and with the help of a migrant liaison officer began building networks through jobs, schools and church.

Communication was ongoing and included a set of posters for display around town that told the stories of the newly arrived Sudanese. Developed with the local Sudanese community, the posters revealed their aspirations and skills and 'what they love about Warrnambool,' says Jill Warne, who worked on the VicHealth-funded dissemination strategy. "It was a way of personalising the program – showing how resourceful these refugees are."

Importantly, the resettlement program hasn't stopped with the actual relocation: there is now a Sudanese Community in Warrnambool Association (SCWA) and a Warrnambool Integrated Settlement Services Network. "We've observed quite radical social change in a conservative regional community," says Waters. "Their arrival has enriched the community and opened up people's minds."

For the Sudanese residents of Warrnambool, it's a new beginning. Otha Akoch, his wife Charity and their young children were the first family to relocate to Warrnambool in 2003. "We wanted a quiet place where we could rebuild what we had lost during the war," says Akoch, who is now president of the SCWA and a part-time council employee. "In the Sudan we could not improve our lives because everything was totally destroyed by war. We had nothing left."

In Warrnambool, Akoch and his family have felt welcomed. "This is a good social environment and it is very easy to make friends and to live peacefully," he says. "I now call Warrnambool home."

*Krista Mogensen is a freelance writer and editor specialising in education and health.*

# LOCAL SOLUTIONS

## How councils can combat racism

When people think about local government it is often in terms of the old cliché of the ‘three Rs’ – roads, rubbish and rate collection.

**B**ut local councils have a far broader responsibility to the wellbeing of their communities, which should include combating racism and all the societal and psychological ills that go with it.

Indeed local government, with its close relationship to the community, is in a particularly good position to deal with the issue of racial disharmony. Both the form and extent of such problems tend to vary from place to place, making locally-tailored policies far more practical than any one-size-fits-all solution.

According to Tanja Dreher, Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Technology, Sydney, who has penned a recent report on responses to racism,<sup>1</sup> “the challenge [in overcoming racism] is really to understand local dynamics, and to develop locally appropriate responses and solutions, and that’s clearly where local government has a crucial role.”

### ACCESS, EQUITY AND RESPECT

Local government’s first and most urgent responsibility is to make sure its own official culture is fair and equitable. It goes without saying that its services should be available to everyone regardless of background, ethnicity and language – but how do you make sure this happens?

The City of Greater Dandenong is the most multicultural municipality in Victoria, with 54% of residents born overseas and coming from 151 different birthplaces – which makes ensuring equity a big task.<sup>2</sup> “We work very closely with staff to train them to keep diversity issues in mind – how to communicate with the different groups in the community, what types of communities are out there at the moment and what kinds of issues they are facing,” says Michelle Watts, Greater Dandenong’s cultural diversity officer.

Good communication between council and the community is essential, and requires, for one thing, a comprehensive multilingual and interpreting service for residents with poor English skills. It is also crucial that council staff meet with representatives of different ethnic groups in order to get a picture of the needs of their communities – the City of Greater Dandenong conducts regular meetings with the



Ethnic Communities Council of the South East, for example. This kind of consultation is, for Watts, “the only way to really find out what’s going on in the community, so we can respond appropriately.”

According to Roderick McIvor, manager of social policy for the City of Darebin, another of Melbourne’s highly diverse municipalities, it is also a good idea if the ethnic mix of council staff reflects that of the

community. The council tries to “employ a workforce that looks like Darebin,” says McIvor, which means staff are active in their role bi-lingually.

As well as listening to the needs of the community, showing respect and recognition for culturally diverse groups is important for fostering good relationships – for example, recognising the traditional owners of the land and their still-living history. “I would see that the preservation of identity and the re-establishing of recognition [for Indigenous Australians] is one of the biggest things that local government can do,” says McIvor.

### THE WIDER COMMUNITY – BROKERING RELATIONSHIPS

Making sure that everyone has equal access to the benefits of government regardless of background is one thing, but local government also has an obligation to address discrimination in the wider community. In her study, Dreher found that in many cases it has been the groups suffering the effects of racism that are also trying to deal with the problem, with few resources and little support.<sup>3</sup> By comparison, government has the advantage of far greater access to resources, as well as a ‘neutral’ status which puts it in a good position to broker relationships between different groups. It clearly has an important role to play.

Local government can encourage dialogue between groups through initiatives such as interfaith programs, which allow different religious leaders to meet up and promote understanding between their faiths. Greater Dandenong Council has a close alliance with the Interfaith Network; and indeed, for Michelle Watts, working with the network constitutes “close to half of my job.” As well as facilitating meetings between faith leaders, council helps the network organise events such

as tours of places of worship and public gatherings. “The reason we spend so much time on this is that the network contributes so much to community harmony, understanding and education,” says Watts.

According to Roderick McIvor, interfaith dialogue is also a way of relieving isolation, both for individuals and for whole communities. A survey conducted by the City of Darebin, which has a strong focus on interfaith programs, showed that “a lot of people are very isolated, with their only avenue of community being their religion” – making this kind of faith-based program a very important way of creating connections across cultures.<sup>4</sup>

## In highly diverse municipalities, it is a good idea to have the ethnic mix of council staff reflecting that of the community.

As well as encouraging these kinds of broad connections, local government can tackle specific problems in communities in a more focused way. A good example of this kind of approach was the Cramer Street Neighbourhood Project, initiated by the City of Darebin in 2003. The project was a response to tensions developing in the Cramer Street area, as large crowds came to pray at the Omar Bin Khattab mosque during the Muslim festival of Ramadan. Disputes over issues such as parking space and noise levels were exacerbating an already existing resentment of the Muslim community linked to recent political events.<sup>5</sup>

The project, which was a partnership between the City of Darebin and representatives of the Cramer Street neighbourhood, brought people together in social settings like community barbecues, seminars and an open day at the mosque, as well as an education campaign about Islam. It was a great success, leading to an 80% decrease in the number of complaints during Ramadan, for example, and a 50% drop in parking infringements. Feedback from the community was also resoundingly positive.<sup>6</sup> “[The feedback] shows that the community feels that multiculturalism is very important, it’s not just council banging on about diversity and no one else caring,” says McIvor.

### KEEPING DIVERSITY ON THE AGENDA

A recent report, produced by Deakin University in partnership with Darebin Council, indicated that there is a very high regard for multiculturalism among Victorians – and, crucially, that most people see local government as having a big role to play in fostering harmony in the community.<sup>7</sup>

Unfortunately, local governments don’t always fulfil their potential in this regard. In a 2003 survey by the Victorian Multicultural Commission, it was found that only 28 of the 63 councils that responded had a policy related to cultural diversity, for example.<sup>8</sup>

But there are ways to encourage councils to focus on these issues without the need for ‘cookie cutter’ solutions to be imposed from above. The Local Area Multicultural Partnerships (LAMP) program was developed in Queensland in 1999 as a joint project of the state government and local councils with the purpose of bringing a focus on diversity issues into local government. There are currently 16 Queensland councils involved, all of them employing full-time LAMP workers.

According to Lindy Drew from the Local Government Association of Queensland, who coordinates the LAMP program, just having someone around to remind council staff about multicultural issues is highly valuable. “Probably at first councils didn’t even really understand their responsibilities toward their culturally diverse communities,” she says. “But that changed over time.”

The program encourages councils to tailor policies to local issues, and to embed the idea of diversity into all its functions. “The program is about building [diversity issues] into the planning of council, into the consultation and community engagement, into community boards – all the things they do normally, but making sure they do them inclusively,” says Drew.

According to Drew, much has changed since the policies were introduced. Some councils didn’t even have clear ideas of the ethnic make-up of their communities before they created diversity plans through LAMP. Some have adjusted local laws to accommodate community needs. For example in Caboolture Shire Council, a LAMP member, an issue arose when people from the Pacific Islander community were told they were not allowed to have an umu – a traditional earth-barbeque – in a public park. After reviewing this, council decided this was an unnecessary restriction, “so they’ve changed the local laws, they’ve looked at the various health and safety issues and made sure that their officers can cope with that, and they’ve made sure that the community is aware,” says Drew.

### MAKING IT HARD FOR RACISM TO FLOURISH

It is hard to measure exactly how effective local government programs are at fighting racism and encouraging community harmony; although anecdotal evidence is generally positive, there is a dearth of in-depth study. Are events such as mosque open days really getting to the root of the problem, or are they preaching to the converted, so to speak?

According to Dreher there is generally too much focus on things such as harmony and dialogue and not enough on racism itself – which, she says, is about power rather than ignorance or lack of communication. “There are tricky questions that cannot be dealt with in that conversational dialogue model, because dialogue assumes equal power, but it can ignore that there are power issues,” she says.

Nevertheless there seems little doubt that local government’s approach to diversity can have many positive effects on the community – and importantly, there is plenty of evidence that the kinds of programs discussed above are highly valued by the culturally and ethnically diverse communities themselves.<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps the real goal of having local governments commit to diversity is, as Lindy Drew puts it, “to help create an environment where it’s much harder for racism to flourish”.

*Adam Ferguson is a freelance journalist specialising in social justice issues.*

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# BLUEPRINT FOR COEXISTENCE

## Bridging the gap – Australia deliberates

Could more personal contact with ‘others’ rub off some of our prejudices?

**W**E should never judge a book by its cover but, as marketing experts and politicians know, perceptions are powerful.

One of the themes of a weekend during which 340 typical Australians were confronted with how Muslims live and want to live in this country was how surprised they were to find that people in Islamic dress sounded and talked and often thought just like them.

This reflects the reality that, although people often have very strong opinions about Muslims, few have had personal contact with them, with the 300,000 in Australia comprising just 1.5 % of the population, according to the 2001 Census. The participants in the deliberative poll in Old Parliament House in Canberra were exposed to a weekend of analysis and arguments from academics and religious leaders. But it was discovering what many Muslims are really like – that they are just as diverse as many other Australians and just as similar as other human beings – that probably was the main factor in Newspoll measuring a shift in opinion less hostile to Muslims.

Just how misleading perceptions can be is corroborated by research Edith Cowan University academic, Nahid Kabir has conducted among 140 Muslim students in south-western Sydney. “They have the same sense of humour, they use the same slang words, they play the same music as non-Muslim kids,” she said. “They follow sport, particularly rugby league. But it is their appearance: people cannot relate to them as Australians.”

Kabir says this is one reason there are concentrations of Muslims in small areas, such as Lebanese Muslims in western Sydney. Women wearing Islamic dress readily find jobs in stores or restaurants in suburbs such as Bankstown and Lakemba, where many of the customers are Muslims and those who are not are used to interacting with them. But she says they often cannot get identical jobs in nearby suburbs such as Merrylands, even though the stores and restaurants are owned by the same chains, because employers are concerned that Muslim staff will discourage customers.

The idea of the deliberative poll was to bring a typical group of Australians together to discuss relations with Muslims and expose them to a wide range of views on the issues involved. The 340 non-Muslims were part of a representative sample of 1400 Australians surveyed in depth by Newspoll before the weekend’s deliberations. They were joined by 40 Muslims who had participated in earlier focus group discussions. At the end of the weekend, the participants were surveyed again. It was an exercise designed to demonstrate

how opinions evolve when people have the opportunity to learn more about a subject and discuss it with their peers.

Former Prime Minister Bob Hawke pointed out that in less than a span of an average lifetime, more than seven million immigrants and refugees had settled in Australia from more than 180 countries, and our population had trebled to more than 20 million. “Rarely, if ever, in the whole of history has such a massive and radical demographic enhancement of a nation occurred in such an overwhelmingly peaceable and constructive manner,” he added.

The question is whether the same will happen with Muslim immigration. There are particular problems, such as a halt or slowdown for some Lebanese groups in the typical pattern of the second and

subsequent generations dispersing into the general community. One explanation for this is the discrimination such as that found in Kabir’s research. Economic disadvantage is another, with poorly educated young Lebanese finding it difficult to get jobs. Alienation towards Western society increases the potential appeal of radical Islam.

Then there is terrorism, the elephant in the room in all discussions of relations between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Sydney Catholic Archbishop George Pell said that there was a very small number of Muslims in Australia who wanted to provoke a clash of civilisations and that some Muslims needed to overcome the tendency to respond to criticism with evasion. It was the radical views on which the participants in this weekend’s deliberations wanted assurance. Many of the questions were about sharia law, separatism and extremist leaders.

Australian public opinion has shifted in recent decades towards acceptance of immigrants from a great variety of countries and races. But it is vigilant about any suggestion that immigrants impose their values on Australia, rather than the other way around. Swinburne University of Technology sociologist Katharine Betts quoted a survey that found that only 16 % of Australians agreed that ethnic minorities should be given assistance to preserve their own culture and 61 % disagreed. Even among non-English-speaking Australians, only 31 % were in favour and 42 % were against.

When the deliberative poll findings are released in detail, they will confront governments with a challenge: basing decisions on informed opinion rather than the perceptions that normal opinion polls measure.

**The poll was designed to demonstrate how opinions evolve when people have the opportunity to learn more about a subject and discuss it with their peers**

*Mike Stekete is The Australian’s national affairs editor.*



# VicHealth News

## VICHEALTH MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION SHORT COURSES: Bendigo, Ararat and Echuca

Three rural mental health promotion short courses are to be funded as part of the Department of Human Service's drought strategy. These FREE two-day courses are will be held in Bendigo (August 27-28), Ararat (September 4-5) and Echuca (October 9-10), and are aimed at organisations from a wide range of sectors. For further information and registration details go to [www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/shortcourse](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/shortcourse), or contact Cassie Nicholls directly on [cnicholls@vichealth.vic.gov.au](mailto:cnicholls@vichealth.vic.gov.au) or (03) 9667 1317.

## INITIATIVE WILL HELP PREVENT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Launched in July by Jacinta Allen, Minister for Women's Affairs, this new grant scheme will see VicHealth investing \$810,000 over 29 diverse community-based projects aimed at preventing violence against women. More information and summaries of the projects can be found in the publication [VicHealth partnership activity to prevent violence against women](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/assets/content.aspx?topicID=107) at [www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/assets/content.aspx?topicID=107](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/assets/content.aspx?topicID=107)

## McCAUGHEY CENTRE OPENS...

The McCaughey Centre – the VicHealth Centre for the Promotion of Mental Health and Community Wellbeing, was officially opened in July by Peter Batchelor, Minister for Victorian Communities. Located within the University of Melbourne and overseen by Director Professor John Wiseman, the purpose of the centre is to create and share knowledge which strengthens the foundations of healthy, just and resilient communities leading to improved mental health and community wellbeing. For more information: <http://www.mccaugheycentre.unimelb.edu.au/index.php>

## ...AND COMMUNITY INDICATORS VICTORIA GOES LIVE!

A flagship project of the McCaughey Centre, the Community Indicators Victoria website also went live in July. Using local community wellbeing indicators to improve citizen engagement, community planning and policy making, the aim is to build healthy, just and sustainable communities. The indicators refer to a broad range of measures designed to identify and communicate economic, social, environmental, democratic and cultural trends and will be a useful resource for a wide range of people including state and local government policy and planning staff. Explore the site at [www.communityindicators.net.au](http://www.communityindicators.net.au)

## COCHRANE WINS FIVE-YEAR FUNDING

Awarded five-year VicHealth funding in May, the Cochrane Health Promotion and Public Health Field will make the transition over that time from a Cochrane Field to a Cochrane Collaborative Review Group. The group will see the development of a dedicated team that will focus on reviewing the effects of interventions designed to improve population health. Keep updated on our progress or register your interest at: [www.ph.cochrane.org](http://www.ph.cochrane.org)

## WALKING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

Two new Walking School Bus (WSB) resources are now available: Walking the Walk – an evaluation on phases one and two of the Walking School Bus program and Walking School Bus Snapshot Data. They provide an insight into the participation rates, challenges and successes of the program and are available from the VicHealth website: [www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/wsb](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/wsb)

## LOOKING GREAT AND A NEW WAY TO KEEP IN TOUCH!

The VicHealth website has been going through a makeover process that not only includes a new bright, clean look but you can now be in touch with us directly. When you subscribe to the RSS feeds on our site, you will receive an alert whenever we update the funding, seminars and jobs pages. Check out our new look at [www.vichealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au) and subscribe – then you'll really know what's going on at VicHealth!





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