

Embargoed: 10am Wednesday 18 November 2009

REPORT: RACIAL DISCRIMINATION HARMS HEALTH

A new report launched today reveals the health damaging effects of race-based discrimination. Research indicates that nearly half of people from non-English speaking backgrounds report have experienced discrimination.

The Indigenous report rate is even higher with up to three quarters of the population experiencing discrimination.

Called *Building on our strengths*, the report also provides strong evidence that programs are urgently needed to reduce the harmful impacts of racial discrimination.

It has been put together by VicHealth in collaboration with experts from the University of Melbourne and the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission.

“VicHealth in conjunction with its partners has developed a road map to address the problem. The report proposes actions for addressing race-based discrimination drawing on the best available theory, evidence and practice,” Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) CEO Todd Harper said.

“The Report identifies a range of strategies for addressing discrimination, one of which includes raising awareness of the issues at a community level.”

“VicHealth will support a number of activities including allocation of \$2 million to assist Victorian arts organisations, as well as Indigenous and migrant artists to reduce racial discrimination.”

“This new report shows there is a clear link between race-based discrimination and mental health problems, particularly depression.”

One of the main authors of the report, Dr Yin Paradies from the University of Melbourne, notes that: “Racial discrimination can cause stress-related heart and immune system problems. There are also strong links between discrimination and cigarette smoking, as well as drug and alcohol misuse.”

“Discriminatory attitudes can lead to very serious consequences. As we have seen over the past year, a number of people from diverse cultural backgrounds have ended up in hospital after receiving injuries from direct physical attacks.”

According to Mr Harper: “Victoria has a great record of fostering cultural diversity, nine out of ten Victorians (90%) agree it is good for society to be made up of different cultures.”

“Yet the report shows that people from Indigenous, migrant and refugee backgrounds continue to experience high levels of discrimination, in turn affecting their health and wellbeing.

“There is strong evidence that Indigenous and overseas-born Victorians continue to report high rates of discrimination, in ‘everyday’ contexts, like when shopping, on public transport, around sports, in schools and workplaces.

“Nearly one in two (45%) Victorians from non-English speaking backgrounds report having experienced racial discrimination at a sporting or other public event.

“Evidence shows that racial discrimination leads to violence and trauma which has implications for people over generations,” Mr Harper said.

“Indigenous Australians continue to experience high levels of racial discrimination. This has profound impacts on their self esteem and overall mental health and wellbeing,” Dr Paradies said.

Dr Helen Szoke, Commissioner of the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission says addressing racial discrimination is an issue of fundamental human rights.

“We have seen a groundswell of change in community attitudes around reducing racial discrimination over the past 20 years but we have a long way to go,” Dr Szoke said. “Our aim is to prevent discrimination from occurring in the first place so that every person can enjoy real freedom, equality, respect and dignity as their right.”

According to Mr Harper, “preventing discrimination will provide significant social, economic and health benefits for all Victorians.”

“*Building on our strengths* highlights the need to work through the arts as well as targeting workplaces, schools and sporting environments to reduce discrimination,” Mr Harper said.

“Victoria has an interest in reducing race-based discrimination not only because of the harms on individuals but also because of the significant social and economic gains that can be made through valuing our diversity,” said Mr Harper.

The VicHealth report also coincides with a new study to be released November 19 by the Foundation for Young Australians, which provides further evidence on the impact of racial discrimination on youth in Australia.

VicHealth’s report is titled:

Building on our strengths - A framework to reduce race-based discrimination and support diversity in Victoria

The Report is being launched by:

- **VicHealth CEO, Todd Harper**
- **The Victorian Attorney General Rob Hulls**
- **David Smorgon, Western Bulldogs AFL Club President**

Where:

**The Immigration Museum, 400 Flinders Street, Melbourne at 10.00am,
Wednesday, November 18.**

The report has been produced by VicHealth, the Onemda VicHealth Koori Health Centre at the University of Melbourne, the McCaughey VicHealth Centre for the Promotion of Mental Health and Wellbeing and the Victorian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.

For more on discrimination [click here](#)

www.vichealth.vic.gov.au