

Media Release

REPORT ON ISSUE OF RESPECT FOR ALL CULTURES

A VicHealth study of 1500 Victorians shows that while they are prepared generally to accept people of different backgrounds and agree that 'in this day and age we should be tolerant of all people no matter what their background, belief or lifestyle' they are much less likely to believe that indigenous Australians deserve more tolerance.

"It's unacceptable that still today so many people in our community openly express intolerance of Aboriginal Australians," said Dr Rob Moodie, CEO of VicHealth. If you consider that Aboriginal Australians have the poorest health outcomes of all groups in our nation, past and continuing racist and discriminative practices only contribute and exacerbate this."

"The single most significant thing non-Aboriginal people can do to improve and contribute to improving the health of Aboriginal Australians is to STOP discriminating. Their health will not improve until we make a concerted effort to address the social and economic inequities of this group."

"This is NAIDOC week (8-15 July) and it's about time we started joining forces to get things right-to finally eliminate the discrimination that permeates our community."

According to Dr Moodie, for Australia's Aboriginal population, policies of isolation, protection, assimilation and integration have led to four generations of Aboriginal families experiencing forced removal of children, family disintegration, social and economic disadvantage, and racism.

"It's blatantly obvious that for too long, we've got it wrong. These policies and practices have contributed to poor physical and mental health. The spiritual and psychological impact of these policies have resulted in generations of grief, outrage, denied hope, and the reinforcement that they have little control over their own lives."

Dr Moodie stresses the fact that research shows a clear link between discrimination and lower self-esteem, social isolation, depression and anxiety, drug and alcohol misuse and suicidal tendencies."

"Evidence suggests that many Aboriginal Australians are not accepted and included within our communities. I think most of us want to feel that we belong and be part of something - whether it is our local street, community club or workplace. Strong social relations are vital and having a strong sense of community is a positive thing. We all need to ask ourselves what happens if you are not included as part of this community."

Dr Moodie emphasises that it is time to address the underlying causes of ill-health in Aboriginal communities and the structural issues which affect emotional and spiritual well being. "Ultimately the path to working with Aboriginal people to improve their health and wellbeing lies in listening to Aboriginal voices and advocating with and on behalf of Aboriginal people for land rights, self determination and resources to develop, own and control health services and resources for their people."

"We need to acknowledge and support the level of diversity within communities. These groups make an enormous contribution to the well-being of our community."

"It's time to get serious about this issue. We need to get it right. It means having the political and civic leadership that focuses on the symbolic and real organisational changes that enhance our social cohesion and celebrate our diversity. We need leaders who can say sorry to the stolen generation, who value the diversity that enriches Australia, and who include those who are marginalised."

"The more we can collectively focus all of our community's efforts on these issues the more successful we will be. And for this we need an increasingly inclusive, tolerant and productive society. Together we *can* do better."

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