



Racism and Child and Youth Health | Symposium Statement

This summary and recommendations were developed as part of a one-day symposium on Racism and Child and Youth Health funded by the Lowitja Institute and hosted by the Melbourne School of Population and Global Health, University of Melbourne and the Centre of Citizenship and Globalisation, Deakin University on Friday 27 June 2014. More than 100 participants from academic, government, non-government and community sectors, including leaders of Aboriginal and multicultural community groups, across Australia and internationally attended the symposium.

The content and recommendations of the statement were developed by participants attending the 27 June 2014 symposium. Following the symposium the statement was drafted and circulated to all participants for endorsement prior to its release on 14 July 2014.

Racism is a prevalent and pervasive issue that harms health and hinders the development and participation of children and young people in Australia throughout their life stages. Children and young people need skills and support to achieve optimal health and development in the increasingly multicultural world in which we all live.

There are multiple forms of racism that affect children in the Australian context. These include intentional and unintentional behaviours, biases, beliefs, assumptions, and stereotypes. These can occur within systems and institutions of society, as well as via interpersonal and internalised racism. All of these forms of racism require carefully considered, evidence-based solutions.

There is limited evidence in Australia to help us to understand the extent to which the multiple forms of racism are experienced by children and young peoples, and the forms of racism experienced across racial and ethnic groups. Greater understanding of diverse experiences of racism, and their impacts on children and young people, requires systems in which children and young people can voice their own experiences and offer up the means to collect, curate, educate, disseminate and archive those experiences for understanding and action.

Racism is a key determinant of mental and physical health and wellbeing, and thus should be prioritised in child and youth health policy and discussions. This includes identifying and addressing the impacts of racism on children and young people in other national initiatives and inquiries such as those focused on suicidal behaviour and self-harm, bullying, and access to mental health prevention and care services. Evidence-based solutions must be a priority in offering greater support to children and young people experiencing racism and its harms.

Education to combat racism should start in early childhood, have a whole of community focus and should continue across each stage of life. Behavioural change programs need to cross all sectors of the community and be visible to a wide audience. Positive work within a number of existing programs that aim to address and prevent racism and its adverse effects for children and young people is acknowledged. Programs need to be grounded in evidence and respond to common experiences of racism, but also nuanced for specific racial/ethnic groups and contexts. Anti-racism campaigns should focus on creating sustainable attitudinal and behavioural change and subsequently must be implemented over time rather than as one-off events. Research documents that ill-conceived anti-racism campaigns can do more harm than good, further reinforcing the need for evidence based approaches that are regularly monitored and evaluated.

Historic and political forms of racism impact on particular racial/ethnic groups, at different times and for different reasons. The symposium identified that children in immigration detention and Aboriginal children in out-of-home care were two groups requiring urgent and targeted attention. It was clearly stated that wherever possible, children should be supported to remain with their families and in family based settings. Settings that institutionalise family life have clear and serious impacts on children's mental, physical and emotional health. Child protection systems must consider cultural identity and connection to culture as an important factor in the picture of children's health, safety and development.

Recommendations:

Participants in the 'Racism and Child and Youth Health Symposium' called to attention the critical need to:

- Invest in systematic, quality, data collection reflecting the multiple ways in which racism can operate and be expressed, and impact on the lives of children and young people across different population groups, settings and contexts. This must include good quality data collection of children and young people's racial/ethnic background and identity, within national representative population data.
- Deliver evidence-based solutions offering support to children and young people who experience racism within programs focused on suicidal behaviour and self-harm, bullying, and access to mental health care services, as well as via initiatives specifically targeting racism. This may include peer-support programs; multicultural programs; and training in schools promoting resilience and coping, as well as anti-racism and prejudice prevention initiatives.
- Identify the audiences and placement for education and behaviour-change programs combating racism, with particular focus on introducing anti-racism programs in early childhood.

For more information about the symposium visit:

<http://www.lowitja.org.au/racism-symposium-event>