5 COMMON MYTHS & MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT RACISM

Australian Human Rights Commission

RACISM. IT STOPS WITH ME

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Australian Human Rights Commission acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land, sea, waterways, and sky throughout Australia and pays respect to First Nations Elders past and present.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sovereignty has never been ceded.

The Commission also acknowledges the ongoing work of First Nations communities in anti-racism efforts since colonisation.

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INTRODUCTION

This **self-reflection and education guide** aims to support and enhance understandings of race, racism, and anti-racism in Australia. The guide seeks to encourage us to stop and think about the various opinions, stories, and terms we encounter about race, racism, and anti-racism and empowers us to identify, and think critically about common myths and misconceptions.

The way race and racism are talked about in Australia has largely been shaped by the ongoing impacts of British colonisation, since it began in 1788. However, many of these ideas predate colonisation in Australia and developed in Europe, built upon pre-existing theories on racial hierarchies and the classification of human beings based on physical difference.* This has led to structural and systemic racism across the continent, including intersectional forms of discrimination, which are deeply rooted in myths and misconceptions. These myths and misconceptions can often prevent us from having meaningful and productive conversations about race or addressing racism. Awareness and understanding of these concepts better equip us in conversations about race and racism and support the development of our personal anti-racism practice and skillset.

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*   *Race, as a concept, originated in Medieval Europe, with the Iberian Reconquista and became more popular and widespread during the Enlightenment, gaining legitimacy amongst the European elite. Ideas related to racial inferiority formed the ideology used to justify the Atlantic slave trade and slavery as a concept more broadly.[i]*

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What do we mean by 'myth'?

A widely held but **false** belief or idea.

What do we mean by 'misconception'?

A belief or idea that is **incorrect** because it is based on **faulty** thinking or understanding.

A **myth** is inconsistent with widely supported research whereas a **misconception** is incorrectly inferred from other information.

# THE MISCONCEPTION THAT RACISM IS ABOUT INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS AND BELIEFS

Racism is not just about harmful actions, words, or beliefs of individuals. Racism is reflected in inequitable policies and laws, shaping institutions and social norms that affect all of us. Many people only recognise racism when it is overt **interpersonal racism.** Examples of this could include racist comments, slurs, and attempted jokes. However, racism includes all the laws, policies, ideologies, and barriers that prevent people from experiencing justice, dignity, and equity because of their race. Whilst racism can come in the form of harassment, abuse, or violence, it also exists in systems and institutions and manifests in inequity and injustice.

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What do we mean by 'interpersonal racism'?

Interpersonal racism occurs between individuals through their behaviours and interactions towards one another. It is what most people recognise as racism, often occurring in everyday settings. Interpersonal racism can come in many forms, including abuse, harassment, bullying, humiliation, violence, exclusion, or intimidating behaviour. It can also be presented by perpetrators as off-hand comments or jokes which were "not intended" to cause offence. However, lack of intent does not reduce the negative impacts of racism.

You can read more about 'interpersonal racism' on the Key Terms page of the *Racism. It Stops With Me* website.
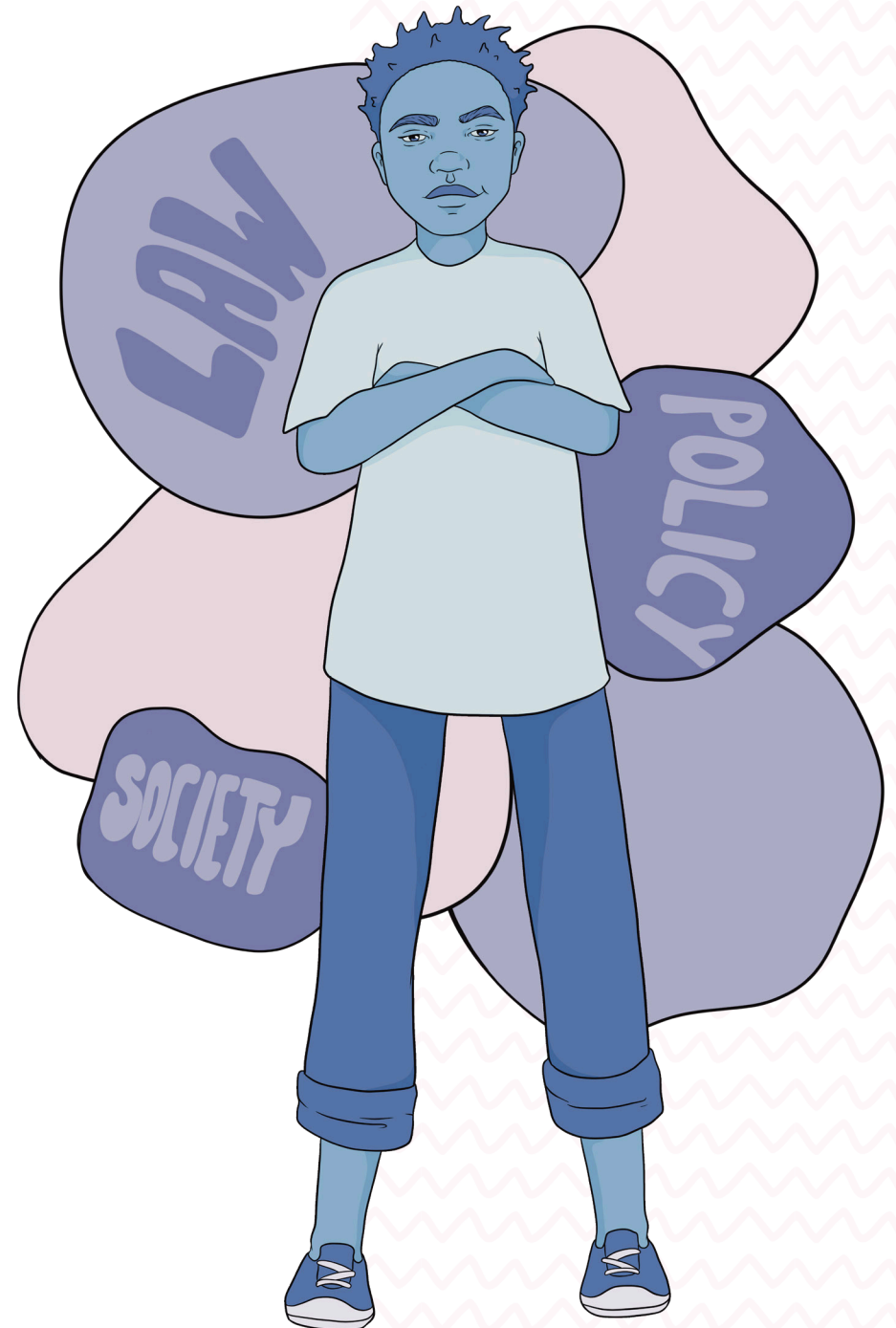
Racism not only harms individuals, families, and communities, but also undermines our values and our potential to become a free, just, and fair society. Anti-racism, both as a principle and skillset, is integral to creating an **equitable society**.

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> ### What do we mean by 'equity' and 'equitable'?
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> Equity involves the recognition of unique needs and strengths of different individuals and communities, and the provision of resources to ensure equality of opportunity. This does not mean treating everyone the same. Regarding race, an equitable society recognises and acknowledges that systemic racism impacts different people and communities in varied, overlapping, and intersectional ways. Therefore, there are differing requirements for support and solutions across communities to ensure that all people can meaningfully access their rights. Equity exposes systemic racism by identifying that institutions are geared to empower and support specific racial groups, whilst simultaneously hindering and disempowering others.

Whilst people's individual beliefs and biases are impactful, they only contribute in part to racism in society. Racism appears in interpersonal, **institutional, systemic, and structural** forms. While these experiences of discrimination are interrelated, they can also be distinct. The way that we engage with others in society is important, but it's also important that we acknowledge that we all participate in discriminatory systems and have a role to play in changing them. Our beliefs alone are not enough to do this and must be followed by individual and systemic action to create change.

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> ### What do we mean by 'institutional, systemic, and structural racism'?
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> Terms like systemic, institutional, and structural racism are often used to refer to similar concepts and can be much harder to recognise and understand compared to interpersonal racism because, for some people, they are less visible and deeply entrenched in society and organisations. Often these terms are used interchangeably, and while these experiences of discrimination are interrelated, they can also be distinct.
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> - **Systemic racism** is the way that cultural norms, laws, ideologies, policies, and practices of a particular society, organisation, or institution result in inequitable treatment, opportunities, and outcomes. Systemic racism relates to entire systems e.g. legal, health, and criminal justice, including the structures that uphold racism. Institutional and structural racism are both forms of systemic racism.
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> > **Example:** The difference in health outcomes based on race. Racism is a key social determinant of health, and there is extensive evidence that shows differences in the life expectancy experienced by people of different negatively racialised identities.

- **Institutional racism** exists when racism is established as a normal behaviour within an organisation, institution, or society. It includes the policies and practices that inform the operations of organisations and institutions.

  Example: Organisations that have an established pattern of progressing job applicants with anglicised names through to interviews rather than applicants with non-anglicised names, that have similar qualifications and levels of experience.

  Example: Organisations that lack representation of negatively racialised employees in leadership roles, despite receiving competitive applications from qualified candidates.

- **Structural racism** describes the inequalities and barriers that prevent people from accessing equitable opportunities within a society. It refers to the kinds of racism that operate deep within the structures or "scaffolding" of society, for example laws, policies, institutional practices, and entrenched norms.[ii]

  Example: The practice of over-policing negatively racialised communities and neighbourhoods.

You can learn more about institutional, systemic, and structural racism on the Key Terms page of the *Racism. It Stops With Me* website.

What do we mean by 'negatively racialised'?

Racialisation is a social process, where people are seen, treated, and understand themselves to belong to a distinct race. When groups of people are 'negatively racialised', other groups have racialised them in a way that they become the target of violence and structural discrimination. This serves to maintain a racial hierarchy where white people and communities take priority. To learn more, you can visit the Key Terms page on the *Racism. It Stops With Me* website.

OUR ROLE IN CHALLENGING THIS MISCONCEPTION:

Combating racism, race hate, and discriminatory attitudes is essential to ensuring that all people can fully participate in public life without fear or intimidation. For some people, admitting racism exists requires a significant change in their thinking, and this can be challenging to overcome. However, racism is a problem created by people, and people have the power to create the solutions and remedies.

Meeting the challenges of racism requires clarity about what it is and how to tackle it, collectively, at a structural and systemic level. This includes everyone taking responsibility to build their anti-racism skill set and strengthen their **racial literacy.** Not only does this require people to work within their sphere of influence to create change in the institutions around them. It also depends on people understanding that change is needed, even beyond their sphere of influence, through collective action.

What do we mean by 'racial literacy'?

'Literacy' refers to our competence, knowledge, or skills in a specific area. Racial literacy encompasses our knowledge and skills on race and racism. **Racial literacy is essential for everyone developing their anti-racism skillset** as it allows them to build their understanding about how race and racism operate, while also being responsive to the needs of communities who are negatively racialised.

Racial literacy aims to equip negatively racialised people with the tools to navigate a society that is systemically racist. Racial literacy focuses on the relationship between race and power and is guided by the needs of communities who experience racism. It seeks to draw attention to how race shapes society.[iii]

BUILD YOUR UNDERSTANDING

→ The Racism. It Stops With Me Conversation Guide provides support for those who want to talk to their colleagues, friends and family about racism.

→ The Let's Talk Race Conversation Guide can help us with challenging conversations about racism in the workplace.

→ Definitions related to race and racism can be found on the Key Terms page of the *Racism. It Stops With Me* Website.

→ Questions and Contexts Page on the *Racism. It Stops With Me Website* "Does racism negatively impact the life expectancy of people in my community?".

→ From Racial Liberalism to Racial Literacy: Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest-Divergence Dilemma, Lani Guinier (2012)

THE MYTH OF MERITOCRACY

Many people believe that Australia is a meritocracy and that everyone has equal access to the same opportunities and outcomes if they work hard enough. The concept of a "Fair Go" is commonly understood as an important Australian value. We also frequently hear other examples that are manifestations of the myth of meritocracy. For example:

- **"...pull yourself up by the bootstraps"** - The phrase "pull yourself up by the bootstraps" originates from the 1800s and describes a scientific impossibility that people could socioeconomically advance through self-reliance and hard work.[iv] This phrase was initially used sarcastically to imply the impossibility of this approach, before it was co-opted by conservative political movements and went on to become a common colloquial phrase.[v]

- **"...level playing field..."** - References to a societal "level playing field" describes a situation where everyone has a fair and equal chance of succeeding. This phrase is used to directly refer to the myth of meritocracy.
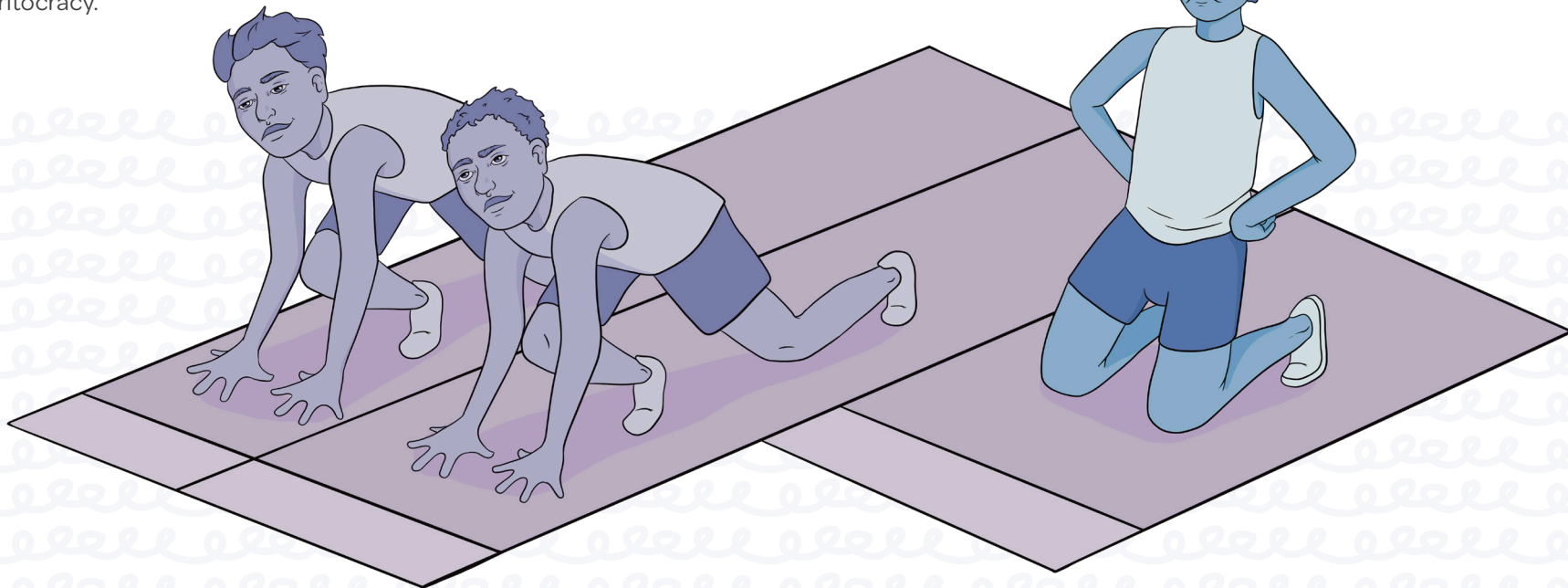
What do we mean by 'meritocracy'?

Meritocracy refers to the common belief that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed based solely on their own abilities, and that this is not impacted or impeded by prejudices based on the way they have been racialised, their social status, gender, or other personal characteristics.

In theory, a meritocracy is a fair and just system that rewards hard work and talent. However, belief in a meritocracy does not take into consideration the many discriminatory structural and societal pressures that continue to have a negative impact on the lives of First Nations peoples and other negatively racialised communities. The reality is that meritocracy is a myth and cannot exist in Australia whilst the impacts of colonisation and racism continue unchallenged.

Many organisations, institutions and governments reinforce racial hierarchies (and racialisation) through laws, policies, and social norms that centre and prioritise **whiteness.** This can lead to the blaming of negatively racialised communities for not achieving better outcomes, whilst also reinforcing harmful racial stereotypes. In practice, these structures benefit white communities, who have gained wealth, land, and social and political power through the displacement of First Nations peoples from their land and active discrimination against them.

This includes successive government policies that favoured white communities such as the White Australia policy.

The myth of meritocracy is damaging and harmful for First Nations and other negatively racialised communities across Australia and internationally, particularly when it is used to normalise and justify the disadvantage of these communities.

What do we mean by 'whiteness'?

Whiteness refers to the way that white racial and cultural identity operates as the standard by which all other negatively racialised groups are compared. The concept derives from the contexts of racial domination.[vi] The normalisation of white racial identity in Australia has created a culture where negatively racialised people are seen as 'other'. Talking about whiteness is not discrimination against white people, but rather acknowledges the ways in which racism manifests in white dominated countries and systems.

White supremacist racial hierarchies prioritise whiteness in order to maintain power and privilege in society. This also relies on the normalisation and 'invisibility' of whiteness so that people continue to lack the knowledge or understanding to tackle racism and oppression. As a result, people racialised as white rarely have to acknowledge their systemic advantage or privilege.[vii] To learn more about white supremacy, visit the Key Terms page on the campaign website.

Implications of the 'myth of meritocracy'

Research shows us that belief in the myth of meritocracy is damaging to the wellbeing of negatively racialised communities, including children and young people.

- A study from the United States looked at how belief in a meritocracy impacted negatively racialised teenagers and children from low-income households. The results revealed that those who were taught to believe in the myth of meritocracy show a decline in their self-esteem.[viii] Additional research has also identified that people who accept meritocracy as true are more "selfish, less self-critical and more prone to act in discriminatory ways".[ix]

- A study conducted by researchers at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Indiana University found that in organisations that held meritocracy as a core value, managers assigned greater rewards to male employees over female employees with identical performance evaluation.[x] This preference disappeared in organisations where meritocracy was not explicitly adopted as a core value. The research also revealed that in situations where individuals and institutions adopted meritocracy as a core value, those with the most power and privilege become satisfied that their positions have been earned fairly and are less inclined to examine their own behaviour and any discriminatory practices.[xi]

The continued use of this myth can create a sense that 'there is nothing to be done' about systemic inequality, and falsely suggests that negatively racialised communities are responsible for the disadvantage they experience.

The myth of meritocracy reflects structural racism and the ongoing impacts of colonisation. It is often used to defend the status quo, justify discrimination, victim blame, and gatekeep power. It has significant and everyday impacts on First Nations and other negatively racialised communities. For example, in the instances where negatively racialised people overcome systemic barriers to achieve a level of success, the myth of meritocracy is often used to further discredit others who have been unable to attain similar outcomes.

OUR ROLE IN CHALLENGING THIS MYTH

The myth of meritocracy harms our collective anti-racism journey. To challenge this, we must be conscious of the myth and where it appears in our interpersonal interactions, organisational or governmental practices, and policies and legislation.

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What do we mean by 'privilege'?

Privilege is an advantage or protection only available to some people, or groups of people. In the context of race and racism, the term 'privilege' often refers to the advantages or protections experienced by people because of their racial identity. Experiencing racial privilege does not mean that you have had an easy life. However, it is important that we all understand the way that racism facilitates the enjoyment of certain rights and experiences for some, while denying them to others. It is important that we also ask why these inequalities exist and take action to address them. To learn more about privilege, visit the Key Terms page on the campaign website.

In addition, it is important that we are aware of our own **privilege** and biases and the ways that we might benefit from or be supporting the myth of meritocracy. We also need to understand that our experience of the world may not necessarily be shared by others. By reflecting on the way privilege impacts our own lives, we can better understand how structural barriers impact others' experience of the world. This growth in understanding allows us to take targeted and considered action, whilst actively using our own privilege to promote change. This way we can work towards the goal of dismantling systems of **privilege** and oppression.

BUILD YOUR UNDERSTANDING

→ The Racism. It Stops With Me Conversation Guide provides support for those who want to talk to their colleagues, friends and family about racism.

→ The Let's Talk Race Conversation Guide can help us with challenging conversations about racism in the workplace.

→ Definitions related to race and racism can be found on the Key Terms page of the *Racism. It Stops With Me* Website.

→ Questions and Context page of the *Racism. It Stops With Me* Website.

→ Clifton Mark's Princeton University Press article exploring the harms caused through belief in the Myth of Meritocracy.

→ Melinda D. Anderson's article, "Why the Myth of Meritocracy Hurts Kids of Color", published by The Atlantic.

→ Research published in the Administrative Science Quarterly on "The Paradox of Meritocracy in Organizations".

→ Dr Chris Sarra's video "Excellence and being Aboriginal go hand in hand".

THE MISCONCEPTION OF NOT "SEEING" RACE

A misconception that commonly arises in discussions of race and racism in Australia is that we do not or should not "see" race. This is a manifestation of what is known as "racial colour blindness" or "racial colour evasiveness".[xii] This misconception appears in many discussions about race, for example when people say that they "don't see colour and treat everyone the same" or that "talking about race is divisive".

Racial colour blindness assumes that racism is primarily interpersonal and to do with individual beliefs and attitudes. It is also based upon the misguided view that racism exists due to physical difference, like difference in skin colour. This is opposed to what we know about race and racism as a mechanism of holding power created to justify racist practices and policies that maintain white supremacy.[xiii] Therefore, the way to combat

racial discrimination is through not acknowledging race at all and by treating everyone as *equally* as possible. This does not, in practice, result in the desired effect of achieving equity between racialised groups (see page 6 for more information on equity). Instead, this approach has the unintended consequence of preventing people from seeing the need to interrogate how racism is imbedded in all aspects of society, including systems and structures. It is based on the faulty thinking that racism doesn't exist if everyone ignores it and assumes that all people, regardless of race, are treated equally in society.[xiv] The misconception of not "seeing" race has been built upon many of the same harmful misunderstandings as the myth of meritocracy, like the existence of a "level playing field" in society.
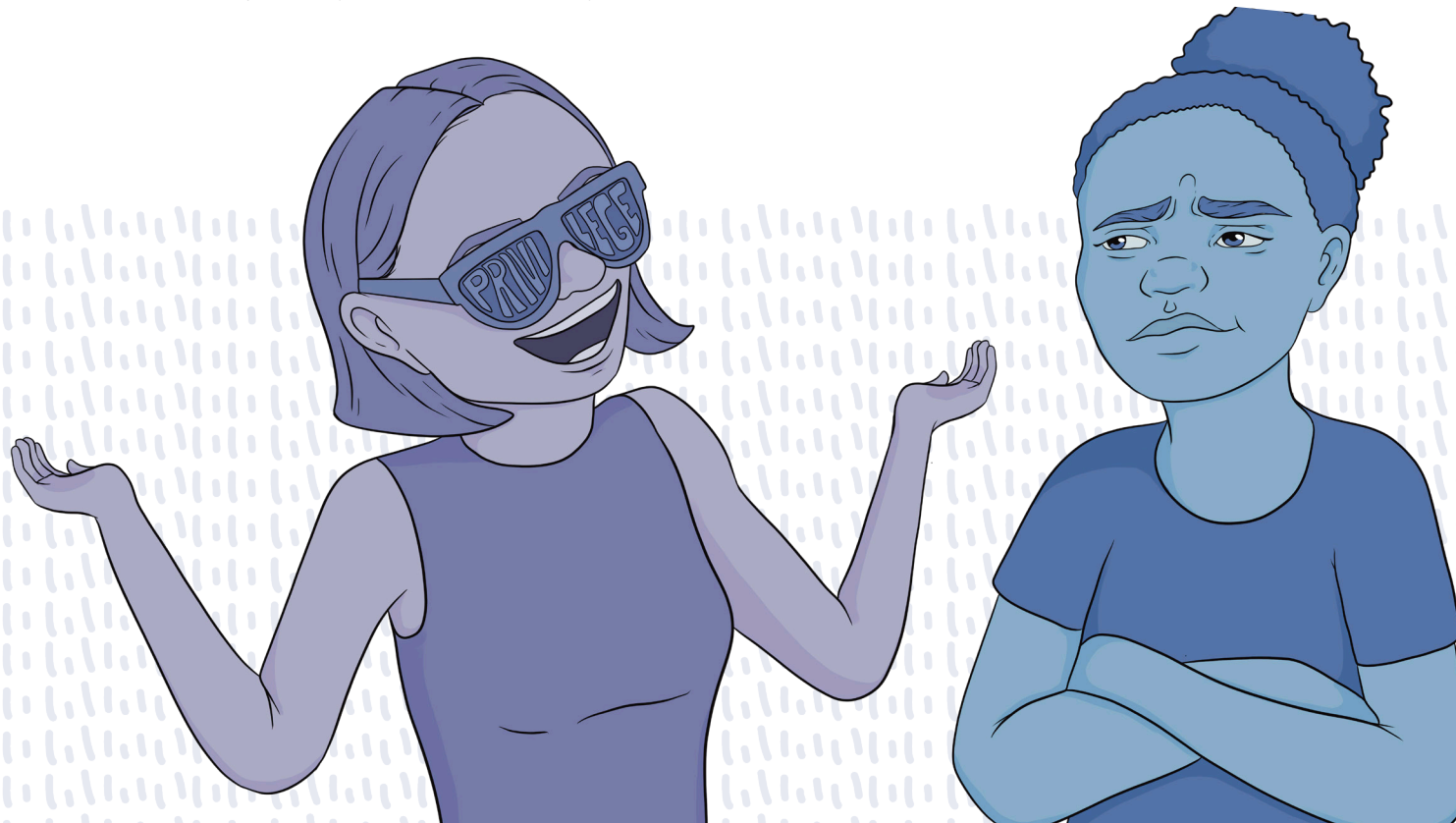
Statements like "I don't see colour" or "I don't care about people's race" may be seen as well-intentioned but ultimately, they are harmful and counterproductive to anti-racism action and initiatives because they hinder people's ability to understand and recognise racism, in all forms.

Additionally, this misconception is now so common in Australian discussions on race, that it appears in many forms that can be challenging to recognise. This includes when people say that talking about race is divisive, or that people of all races can experience race discrimination e.g. 'reverse racism'. It is important for us to understand this misconception and how to recognise it in the different forms it appears.

By claiming to ignore race, this misconception overlooks the reality and severity of racism and denies people's lived experience of racial discrimination. Institutions in Australia are not "neutral" or "blind" to race and often actively maintain the status quo and white supremacist racial hierarchies. As for interpersonal manifestations of racism, there are decades' worth of strong scientific evidence on **implicit racial bias** that suggests that we are conscious of race even if we try to ignore it. The continued use of this misconception has significant everyday impacts on negatively racialised communities, including how people access quality healthcare and education, interact with the police and legal systems, and how likely they are to be employed or promoted.

A 'colour blind' approach to race and racism treats these topics as taboo, and frames conversations about existing racial inequalities as unproductive and not important. A fear of talking about race can encourage people to use coded language such as terms like "bad schools", "certain people", "urban people", and "crime". In truth, this language can be even more harmful, as it still implies racist ideas but hides them in a way that can make them difficult to call out. Additionally, not "seeing" race can discount and discredit people's lived experience of racism, while also denying the significance of their cultural and racialised identities.

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What do we mean by 'bias' and 'implicit racial bias'?

Bias consists of attitudes, behaviours, and actions that favour one group or person above another. 'Implicit bias' is a type of bias that occurs automatically and unintentionally but still affects our judgments, decisions, and behaviour. It is important that these terms are not used to negate our own responsibility for challenging racial bias in ourselves or within organisations or the systems we are part of. You can read and learn more about bias, including implicit and unconscious bias, on the Key Terms page of the *Racism. It Stops With Me* website.

Can white people experience racism?

Whilst white people can experience multiple forms of discrimination or prejudice based on gender, sexual orientation, ability, age, or class; they cannot experience racism. Racism is more than just prejudice, and is accompanied by power to discriminate against, oppress or limit the rights of others. Sometimes terms like "reverse racism" or "anti-white racism" are used to describe situations where white people feel they have been discriminated against because of their whiteness. This is a common and particularly harmful misconception, often resulting from a fundamental misunderstanding of the difference between racism and other forms of discrimination, as well as the relationship between racialisation and power.

In some instances, claims of racism by white people may be a misrepresentation of other forms of discrimination, such as discrimination based on class. Claims of "anti-white racism" ignore the fact that racism relies on societal power, which in systems of white supremacy prioritise whiteness. They also overlook the fact that in an unequal society, some communities will require special measures to produce equitable outcomes.

In Australia, some limited legal protections against racial discrimination are offered by the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth) (RDA). The RDA says that it is "unlawful to do any act that is reasonably likely to offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate a person or group because of their race". While anyone, regardless of their proximity to whiteness can make a complaint under the RDA, the case law shows us that context and power relations are considered in decisions made under the RDA.[*] It is important to note that while the RDA offers some protections against "racial discrimination" and "racial hatred", it does not address racism as a structural problem, and alone is an insufficient mechanism in challenging white supremacy and dismantling racism in society.

Below are some examples of situations where claims of "reverse racism" or "anti-white racism" are used:

- In response to measures designed to achieve an outcome that is equitable. For example, a targeted recruitment program in a workplace or institution may preference the employment or admission of people from a negatively racialised community to address issues of under-representation of people from that community. In the RDA and in international human rights law, these kinds of programs are called "special measures". These claims were prevalent during the 2023 referendum on an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice, causing significant harm to First Nations communities across the continent. Special measures are not discriminatory or "racist" against white people. In fact, the whole purpose of these measures is to attempt to redress the inequality and harm caused by structural and systemic racism.

- Anti-white "racism" claims are also commonplace amongst white supremacist groups, including unfounded fear of "white genocide": a fundamental neo-Nazi tenet.[xv] These beliefs are linked to conspiracy theories that have been identified as drivers for white supremacy terror attacks, including the 2019 Christchurch massacre.[xvi]

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[*]   An example is *McLeod v Power* [2003] FMCA 2 [59] where the magistrate said: "Using these definitions in the Australian context, being 'white' per se is not in my view descriptive of any particular ethnic, national or racial group. Nor is it of itself a term of abuse. White people are the dominant people historically and culturally within Australia. They are not in any sense an oppressed group, whose political and civil rights are under threat. Nor can they be said to constitute a homogeneous group in terms of the definition put forward by Richardson J in *King-Ansell* (supra)."

OUR ROLE IN CHALLENGING THIS MISCONCEPTION:

Racialisation and the social construction of race have a significant impact on the lives and identity of negatively racialised people and communities and is not something people can easily remove or want to ignore. In addition, many First Nations people, and others from negatively racialised communities gain a sense of community, solidarity, and pride through their racialised identities. Not "seeing" race allows white people, who do not experience racism, to continue to reinforce racist structures whilst also feeling more comfortable with their racial privilege in society. It also prevents people from recognising and understanding multiple forms of racism and how they can intersect with differing experiences of discrimination and harms.

It is a choice and form of racial privilege to not "see" race and to ignore racial inequity and discrimination. This is a decision that intentionally overlooks the ongoing impacts of colonisation and structural racism on First Nations and other negatively racialised communities. Instead, we need to actively challenge this misconception and commit to:

- Being aware of the impact of race, racism, and "not seeing" race.

- Acknowledging where "ignoring race" has reinforced barriers to opportunity or resulted in poor outcomes.

- Advocating for anti-racism, building your anti-racism skillset and supporting First Nations and other negatively racialised communities and their leadership in anti-racism initiatives and advocacy.

BUILD YOUR UNDERSTANDING

→ The Questions and Context section of the *Racism. It Stops With Me* website: "How old was I when I became aware of my race?".

→ The Racism. It Stops With Me Conversation Guide provides support for those who want to talk to their colleagues, friends and family about racism.

→ The Let's Talk Race Conversation Guide can help us with challenging conversations about racism in the workplace.

→ Definitions related to race and racism can be found on the Key Terms page of the *Racism. It Stops With Me* Website.

→ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's *Racism Without Racists* (2013)

→ Comedian Aamer Rahman speaking on "Reverse Racism".

→ Luke Pearson's article for IndigenousX, 'Is it possible to be racist to white people?'.

THE MYTH THAT "RACISM IS A THING OF THE PAST"

The myth that racism is no longer a problem in Australia or that it is a "thing of the past" is based on the belief that racial equality has, for the most part, been achieved. This myth is informed by the misguided belief that historical changes, such as the introduction of federal anti-discrimination legislations like the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth) and the official end of the White Australia Policy, have made Australia a racially equitable country. Whilst these were important steps towards eliminating the more overt racism of the past, they alone have not resulted in racial equity or eliminated racism.

This myth purports that Australians are now protected against racism, assumes that all forms of racial segregation are made unlawful, and claims that "overt" acts of racism and racial hatred are generally deemed socially unacceptable. This myth strongly aligns with the myth of meritocracy and the misconception of not "seeing" race, where race and racism are assumed to have been overcome. However, in reality, racism remains an everyday experience for First Nations and other negatively racialised communities and has deep structural roots that continue to shape Australia.

The idea that "racism is a thing of the past" is false and contrary to the lived experience of First Nations and other negatively racialised communities, as well as reports and data on racism in Australia and the urgent need for it to be addressed in all areas of public life. Nor is this idea consistent with the ongoing impact of racial injustice on key outcomes for different communities, like life expectancy. Racism continues through policies and practices that maintain the status quo and perpetuate the supremacy of whiteness. In 2022, the Australian Human Rights Commission released its National Anti-Racism Framework Scoping Report which found that racism in Australia is still a significant issue for First Nations and other negatively racialised communities and called for a consistent and comprehensive national approach to anti-racism.[xvii]
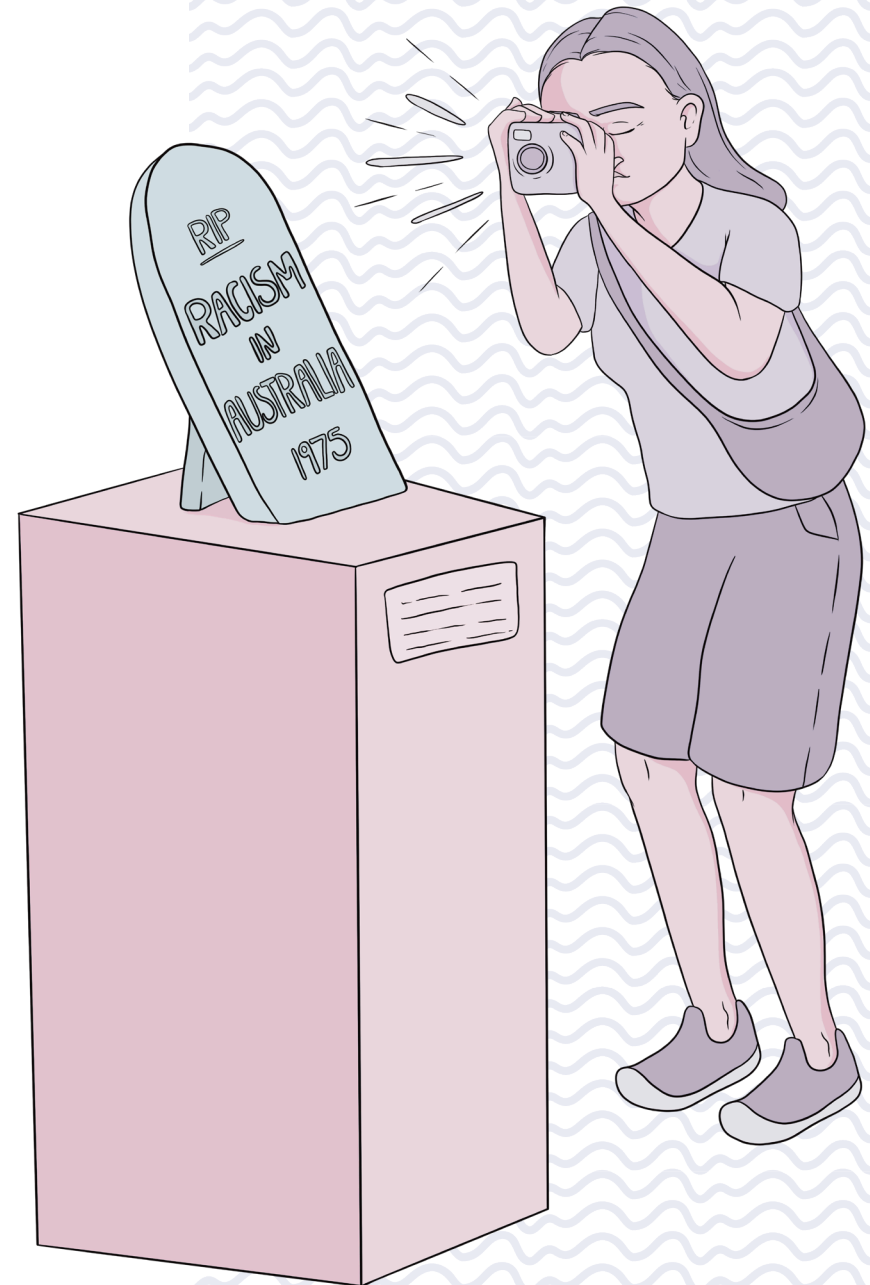
The report references several studies, including (but not limited to):

- Reconciliation Australia's Barometer which found that 52% of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander People reported experiencing at least one form of racial prejudice within the past six months.[xviii]

- The Scanlon Foundation's 2021 *Mapping Social Cohesion* research survey which revealed that 16% of Australians had experienced racism on the basis of their skin colour, ethnic origin, or religious belief within the past 12 months. These figures increased to 34% for those from non-English speaking backgrounds.[xix]

- The Australian National University's *Research Note: Asian-Australian experiences of discrimination*, which found that in 2019, 65.1% of Asian Australians who participated in the research had experienced discrimination within the workplace or in education.[xx]

Some people believe racism is a "thing of the past" because they see an increase in diversity around them. This is often in terms of the racial and ethnic makeup of workplaces, organisations, or representation in the media. This does not recognise that increases in diverse representation of racial or ethnic groups alone do not lead to systemic change. Without anti-racist policies and procedures in place, organisations can still be culturally unsafe and perpetuate racism despite the diversity of their staff. **Diversity is not an accurate reflection of the distribution of power.**[xxi] For example, an organisation can have a diverse workforce, but all of the senior executive staff could be white. Often, associated terms like "social cohesion" and "multiculturalism" can mask the issue of racism, hinder anti-racist actions and, as a result, perpetuate racism.

Whilst racism in Australia can be traced back to 1788, Australia as a nation is yet to come to terms with its brutal history of colonisation, violence, displacement, and genocide. Colonialism, generational trauma, and inequity continue to have an impact on First Nations communities today. By ignoring this, we make it much harder to challenge and dismantle racism.

The impacts of historical wrongs continue to be felt in Australia, including through embedded structural discrimination, but also for many Australians in structural privileges from which they benefit. Therefore, while many do not feel personally responsible for these historical wrongs, we all have a role to play in acting against racism including supporting and listening to those with lived experience. All people who have settled in Australia benefit from colonisation at the expense of Indigenous peoples and have a responsibility to take part in action to repair the damage that it continues to cause.

OUR ROLE IN CHALLENGING THIS MYTH:

Racism is not a "thing of the past", and progress towards racial equity is not inevitable. It takes work and collective action. We must acknowledge, recognise, and understand that racism is as much a contemporary issue as it is a historical problem. Australia is experiencing rising rates of racism, including anti-Indigenous, anti-Black, anti-Asian, anti-Arab, and anti-Palestinian racism as well as Islamophobia and antisemitism. Here, and globally, calls for action to address the impact of systemic racism are increasing, and more work is required to counteract all forms of racism.

BUILD YOUR UNDERSTANDING

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→ The Let's Talk Race Conversation Guide can help us with challenging conversations about racism in the workplace.

→ Definitions related to race and racism can be found on the Key Terms page of the *Racism. It Stops With Me* Website.

→ Fethi Mansouri's article published in *The Conversation,* "Racism is still an everyday experience for non-white Australians. Where is the plan to stop this?".

→ The National Anti-Racism Framework Scoping Report.

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT ANTI-RACISM

Anti-racism involves actively working to challenge racist policies, practices, culture, and ideas. It requires more than being "not racist". It involves active decisions that seek to combat injustice and promote racial equity. Developing an anti-racism skillset and practice is an important part of promoting a better and more equitable society.

Anti-racism work requires a consistent and dedicated approach alongside targeted action. This work does not stop at educating yourself, such as through training or reading books on anti-racism. It must be followed by action.

Anti-racism is an important skill set for **everyone**. Misconceptions about racism and anti-racism in Australia can often distract people from the importance of this approach. Examples of these misunderstandings include:

- Individuals may feel that the diversity they see around them means they do not have more to learn about racism and anti-racism. It is important to note that the diversity of our social circles, including friends and family, does not prevent us from participating in or perpetuating racism, whether consciously or not. We all have more to learn, and more action we need to take.

- In Australia, we often hear about multiculturalism, social harmony, diversity and inclusion, and social cohesion. These concepts do not by default align with an anti-racist approach. While these concepts often hold a positive message such as living in "harmony" or having a successfully diverse society, they can discourage people from speaking up about racism because speaking out can be seen as opposing a harmonious Australian society. This causes harm to our collective anti-racism journey, by undermining efforts to identify and address the harm experienced by communities because of racism.
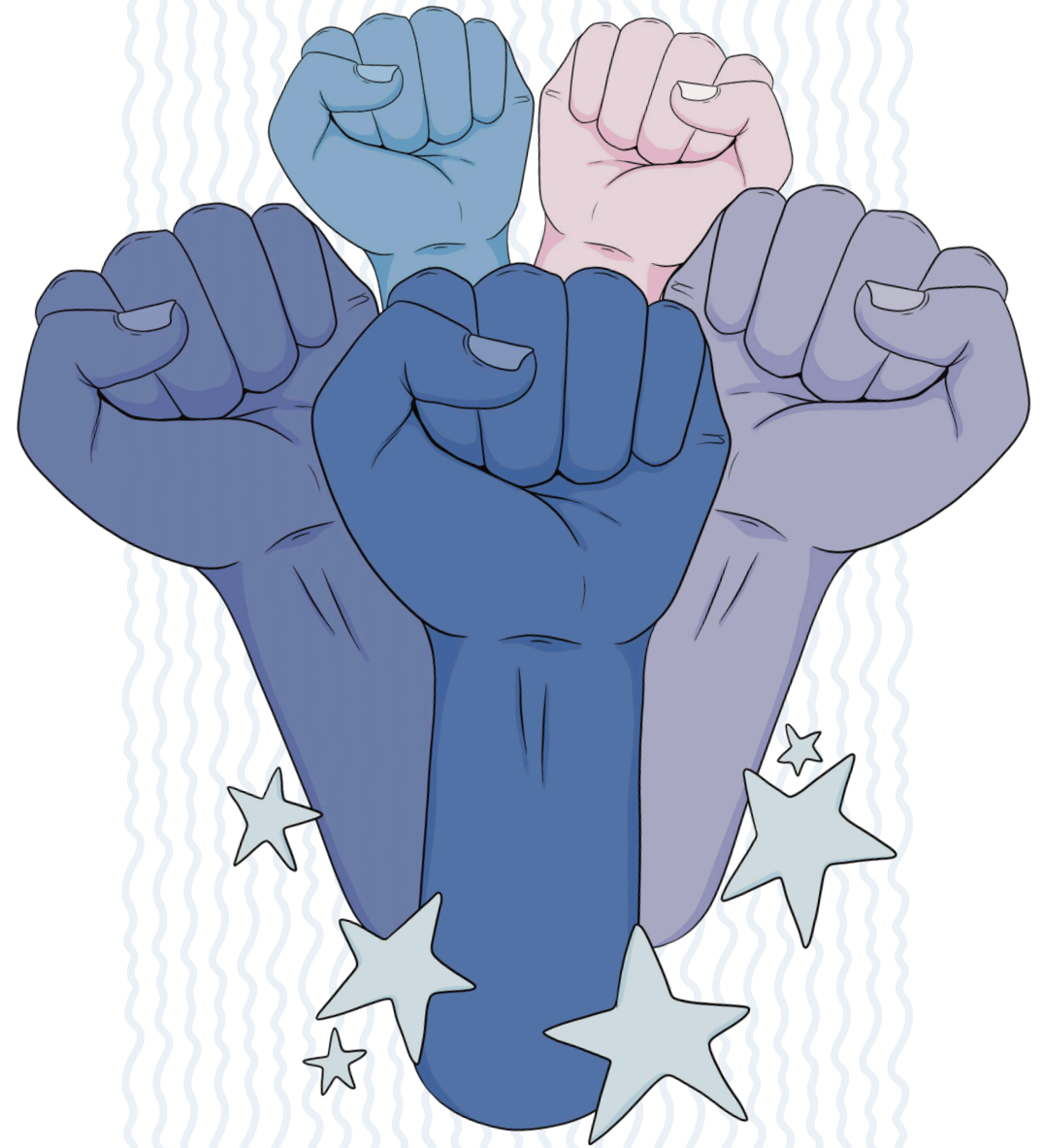
OUR ROLE IN CHALLENGING THESE MISCONCEPTIONS:

Developing our own anti-racist skillset and practice is critically important in meaningfully acknowledging Australia's deep-seated issues with race and racism.

As we all live and participate in a racist system, the primary focus of anti-racism is not about 'never being racist'. Rather, it is about committing ourselves to identifying and rejecting racism of all forms, including within our worldview, biases, and prejudices, but also within our interpersonal interactions, relationships, institutions, and our society more broadly.

A well-developed anti-racism skillset allows us to question and challenge the various ways racism shapes our society. Anti-racism requires a consistent commitment to learning, listening, and collective action, through which we can start to build a society that is truly fair and equal, and one that recognises the fundamental rights and freedoms of all people.

BUILD YOUR UNDERSTANDING

→ The Racism. It Stops With Me Conversation Guide provides support for those who want to talk to their colleagues, friends and family about racism.

→ The Let's Talk Race Conversation Guide can help us with challenging conversations about racism in the workplace.

→ Definitions related to race and racism can be found on the Key Terms page of the *Racism. It Stops With Me* Website.

→ Fact Sheet – International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

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