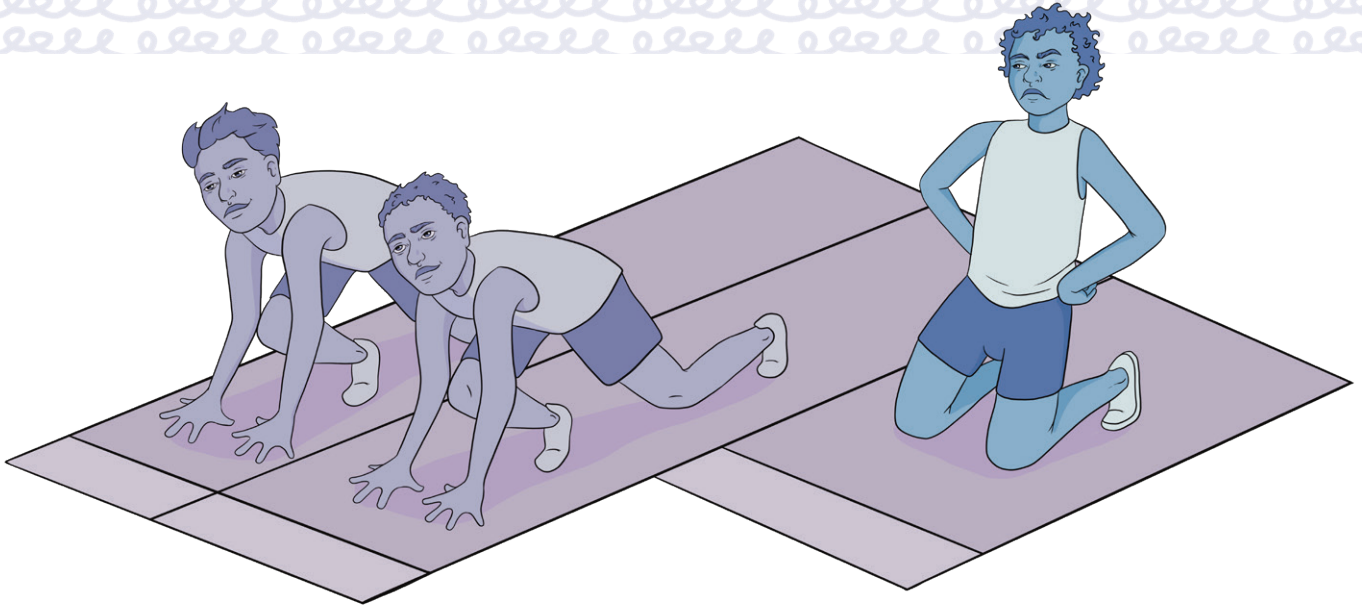


FACT SHEET TWO

THE MYTH OF MERITOCRACY



What's the myth?

Many people believe that Australia is a meritocracy. In a meritocracy, success is the result of individual talent, effort and abilities, with everyone having the same opportunities to achieve success regardless of their starting point. The myth can be comforting because it means that success is only a matter of working hard enough. Meritocracy creates the appearance of a fair and level playing field, while hiding the systems that hold many people back.

What's the reality?

Meritocracy is an ideal, not a reality. Talent, effort and abilities can contribute to success. However, systemic barriers tied to race, class, gender, disability and other forms of discrimination can limit access to education, jobs and resources, and make it harder for people to succeed. Systems and policies that privilege the racial groups who hold power continue to create an uneven playing field.

Privilege offers unseen advantages to some while placing systemic barriers in the way of others. Hard work alone cannot overcome these obstacles. The myth of meritocracy masks these realities, including how social and economic systems create and support these inequalities.

Why is this myth harmful?

It hides systemic barriers: The myth of meritocracy creates the illusion of equal access to education, healthcare, housing and employment.

It blames individuals: This myth shifts the blame for unfair outcomes onto people who experience racism, ignoring the systems that create barriers. This can lead to harmful stereotypes that wrongly hold people responsible for circumstances they can't control.

It reinforces hierarchies: This myth keeps things the way they are, allowing those with power and privilege to justify the unfair reasons as to why some people succeed and others don't.



How can we challenge this myth?

- Recognise how privilege shapes access to opportunities while systemic barriers limit opportunities for communities that experience racism.
- Support initiatives and policies that prioritise equity so that everyone has a fair chance to succeed.