



Inquiry into racism, hate and violence directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

**COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER
AFFAIRS**

**Submission by Community Restorative Centre
(CRC)**

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

CRC acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work and live. We recognise their continuing connection to land, water, and community. The offices of CRC stand on the lands of the Gadigal, Wangal, Bidjigal, Wiljkali, Barkindji, Darug, Wiradjuri, Dharawal, Awabakal, and Worimi peoples. We recognise their continuing connection to land, water, and community, and pay respects to Elders, past and present.

ACKNOWLEDGING PARLIAMENT AS PART OF COLONISATION

The CRC acknowledges that the establishment of the federal Parliament is part of the histories and structures of colonisation. By engaging with this submission procedure, we remain mindful of how parliamentary processes perpetuate inequitable power relations. Consequently, we approach this process with a critical awareness of the colonial origins of parliamentary inquiries, striving to foster practices that centre Indigenous rights, experiences, and voices as we pursue meaningful healing.

ABOUT COMMUNITY RESTORATIVE CENTRE

Community Restorative Centre (CRC) is the lead NGO in New South Wales (NSW) providing specialist support to people affected by the criminal legal system, with a particular emphasis on the provision of post-release and reintegration programs for people with multiple and intersecting needs. Recognising First Nations communities are overrepresented in the prison system, CRC supports a large number of First Nations community members in our everyday work.

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for the opportunity to submit to the Inquiry into Hate, Racism and Violence



Directed Towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People. In this submission, we touch on the experiences of First Nations staff, in addition to First Nations community members we support in our service delivery. We first set out the context of racism explored in this submission, then move on to the experiences of First Nations staff members Kelly Parker and Tory Paasi, who separately provide their responses to the terms of reference.

CONTEXT

As the oldest continuing living peoples on earth, First Nations communities in Australia continue to survive, thrive and prevail in spite of the racism manifest through systems like the prison system. We recognise the tireless advocacy of First Nations people to reduce the criminalisation of their communities. Ultimately, incarceration is not part of First Nations cultures, and First Nations peoples have had, and continue to have, systems of accountability outside of the colonial carceral system.

In this section, we set out the context of systemic and interpersonal racism which impacts First Nations staff and people CRC supports, and the work of First Nations led initiatives in intervening in this context. We explore drivers of the hyperincarceration of First Nations people. We then explore the effects of the government failing to implement key policy documents relevant to First Nations people involved with the criminal legal system. We highlight instances of racism against First Nations people reported to CRC in our advocacy work, then explore examples of excellence with respect to First Nations led interventions in keeping First Nations communities safe from the racism of the criminal legal system.

Hyperincarceration and the social drivers of this

The impacts of racism, colonisation and intersecting oppression contextualise the hyperincarceration of First Nations people across the continent. First Nations adults are 14 times more likely to be incarcerated than non-First Nations people (AIHW, 2025), and First Nations young people are 21 times more likely to be incarcerated than non-First Nations young people (AIHW, 2025a). First Nations women are the fastest growing prison



population in Australia (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2024a; Australian Law Reform Commission, 2018), and the number of First Nations people in prison rose 10% from 2024 to 2025 (ABS, 2025). The overrepresentation of First Nations people in the criminal legal system speaks to the ongoing effects of colonisation, dispossession, trauma and the impacts of laws and policy which discriminate against, and impact, First Nations communities through generations (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2024, p. 22). Structural racism and the operation of the criminal legal system itself (for example, through police targeting) drive First Nations overrepresentation in the criminal legal system (McCausland and Baldry, 2023, p.45). So too do unmet mental health needs, poverty, experiences of domestic and family violence, homelessness, queerphobia, transphobia, the unmet need for alcohol and other drugs support and more (McCausland and Baldry, 2023, p.45; Critical Resistance, 2011, p.346).

A lack of implementation of key documents and recommendations in Australia

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)

We note that despite endorsing the UNDRIP in 2009, the government has yet to implement it (Thorpe, n.d.; Australian Human Rights Commission, 2021). This is despite calls from First Nations led organisations and community members to do so (Thorpe, n.d.; *Re: Implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Australia*, n.d.; Lowitja Institute, 2026, p.25). UNDRIP sets out crucial rights such as the right of First Nations people to be free and equal (article 2), the right to self-determination (article 3), the right to liberty (article 8) and the right to not be forcibly removed from Country (article 10). The Lowitja Institute has described the failure to implement the UNDRIP as perpetuating colonisation and putting Australia's ability to meet its Closing the Gap obligations in jeopardy (Lowitja Institute, 2026, p. 3).

National Anti-Racism Framework

The National Anti-Racism Framework, released by the Australian Human Rights Commission in 2024 has not yet been implemented by government, or received funding to facilitate its implementation, despite calls to do so (Brennan, 2026a; Australian Indigenous Doctors'



Association, n.d.; The Greens, n.d.). This document, consisting of 63 recommendations to combat racism across a range of sectors, has a focus on First Nations truth telling and self-determination (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2024, p.10). It suggests a separate implementation plan for addressing racism against First Nations peoples, recognising the unique effects of this racism in Australia's settler colonial context.

Government not meeting Closing the gap targets

The federal government is not on track to meet its Closing the Gaps targets for First Nations people who have prison system involvement (Productivity Commission, 2025, pp.104, 108). This includes Target 10- reducing the number of First Nations adults in prison by at least 15%, and Target 11- reducing the number of First Nations children in custody by 30% by 2031.

We highlight how legislative landscapes across Australia actively inhibit the capacity of government to meet Closing the Gap targets. These include:

- the Northern Territory government lowering the age of criminal responsibility from 12 to 10 in 2024, after a hard-fought campaign to raise it.
- Despite broad-scale calls to alter it, the criminal age of responsibility in NSW remains 10 years old. CRC is a member of the Raise the Age Campaign NSW, which aims to raise the age of criminal responsibility to at least 14.
- The NSW government introducing legislation in 2024 to make it harder for children to access bail for specific offences (Department of Communities and Justice, 2024).
- The Queensland Government introducing a policy to try young people as adults for specific crimes (Maxwell, 2024).

While The Closing the Gap Agreement states the aim of lowering the representation of First Nations people in prison, if governmental and political approaches continue to focus on tough-on-crime and pro-carceral policies, they will continue to thwart Australia's ability to meet Targets 10 and 11 of the Agreement.



Recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody

Notably, governments have not fully implemented recommendations from the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, despite calls to do so (Thorpe, 2025). The failure to fully implement the recommendations occurs in a context where 2024-2025 marked the highest number of First Nations deaths in custody on record (Brennan, 2026). The federal Government's own review found that only 64% of recommendations have been fully implemented, and a report by Aboriginal academics found this figure was markedly lower (Anthony et al., 2021; VALS, 2022). Examples of recommendations that have not been fully implemented include imprisonment being used as a last resort (recommendation 92), that healthcare should be equivalent to that in the community (recommendation 150), and that there should be independent and transparent investigations into First Nations deaths in custody.

Examples of racism against First Nations people reported to CRC

People pleading guilty to offences they didn't commit

Staff have reported some First Nations people we support pleading guilty to offences they didn't commit to minimise harms associated with the operation of the criminal legal system. For instance, due to lengthy delays in court processes, some First Nations people have pleaded guilty to charges they did not commit to reduce time in custody on remand, and to reduce the impacts of imprisonment on themselves, their families, and their communities. Some First Nations people reported needing to weigh up the benefits of waiting to have a matter go to a hearing, or to plead guilty to reduce the court process times and increase their chance of returning to the community sooner. Additionally, a First Nations staff member reported concern about the racial implications of sentencing discounts in NSW for First Nations people that CRC supports. If people plead guilty to an offence prior to the committal of a matter, they can receive a 25% reduction in their sentence in NSW (known as a Sentencing Discount). The staff member shared her concern that this can pressure some First Nations people to plead guilty to offences they did not commit- something that is particularly worrisome in the context of First Nations people dying in police custody, and the overrepresentation of First Nations in the criminal legal system. The staff member said she wished time-pressed community legal services, such as Legal Aid and the Aboriginal Legal



Service, had more resourcing and time to adequately support and advocate for the person. This included by supporting the person to make a police statement about the events, so the police's version of events did not set the narrative for the case. Concerningly, First Nations people are acquiring inaccurate convictions to minimise harms associated with the operation of the criminal legal system, and to navigate the under-resourcing of legal supports.

Inadequate cultural support and engagement in prison

During a workshop with incarcerated people at one prison in NSW, First Nations participants expressed concern about a lack of cultural supports and engagement. These individuals raised concerns, including:

- they rarely see the Aboriginal Liaison Officer, so they cannot speak to them about issues, and sometimes reported not feeling safe or comfortable to do so.
- Not having access to an Aboriginal advocate and someone who could support them to attend funerals. Some people reported this was particularly difficult, as being in prison made them feel disconnected from Culture, family and community.
- There is a room for Aboriginal people, but it is not available or accessible.
- Participants had not been able to plan, practice and prepare for some First Nations specific celebrations due to constant lock ins in the prison. Participants gave an example of a First Nations celebration that was arranged, but due to a fight between two people, the event was cancelled and not rescheduled. This was an example of collective punishment wherein Aboriginal people broadly were punished for the actions of others.
- Not having sufficient access to interactions with Elders in the prison.
- Not having sufficient access to cultural practices, wellbeing and healing programs.

Other instances of racism

Further instances of racism reported by service delivery staff and people we support include:

- A CRC caseworker reported that the Department of Communities and Justice (NSW) was not implementing the Aboriginal child placement policy.



- A First Nations staff member reported an inappropriate interaction with a parole officer during an appointment with a First Nations client they were supporting. The parole officer was dismissive of the First Nations staff member's job title and qualifications. The officer also shared details about the client's convictions and personal information about the client, without seeking consent. After the appointment, the parole officer took the CRC staff member aside and indicated that they did not like the First Nations staff member's body language during the appointment. The staff member walked out, feeling unsafe. The staff member reported feeling disrespected, dismissed and criticised, and was reluctant to attend future appointments at that parole office. This had a flow-on effect for the First Nations client. After complaining to the parole officer's manager, an apology was received, and the manager identified that the training of staff, especially in cultural competency, needed to be explored.
- A young First Nations man that CRC supported, Clarence,¹ detailed being negatively stereotyped by law enforcement and society due to being an Aboriginal person. Clarence relayed having negative expectations associated with him due to his family name. He also relayed, 'in the court system and within the community, people only know and see me as this violent, dangerous, criminal, Aboriginal man. However, they don't know that under my skin how much pain and trauma I share'. Here, Clarence shares how people's stereotypes about him do not acknowledge his lived experience of trauma and how it, and many other social determinants of prison system involvement, inform his experience.

The work of First Nations led interventions in keeping people safe from the prison system

We highlight some of the First Nations led interventions that are leading the way in keeping First Nations communities safe from the racism of the prison system, which demonstrate excellent results. One example is the Maranguka Justice Reinvestment Project in Bourke, NSW, which has since ended. The project, which was place-based and Aboriginal-led, adopted a 'life course' approach and targeted concerns that were likely to put Aboriginal people at risk of criminal legal system involvement from early years into adulthood (Just

¹ Not his real name.



Reinvest, n.d.). The project had numerous positive results, such as a 27% decrease in bail breaches for young people, year 12 retention increasing by 31% and a 23% reduction in reported domestic violence incidents. A KPMG evaluation also showed the project precipitated \$2.5 million worth of savings to government and society over the course of 1 year in 2017 (KPMG, 2018).

A second example of First Nations led interventions keeping First Nations communities safe from the criminal legal system, and having excellent results, is the Dharriwaa Elders Group. The Group, in partnership with UNSW, do important prevention and diversionary work, particularly for First Nations communities in Walgett, NSW (Dharriwaa Elders Group and Yuwaya Ngarra-li Partnership, 2026). Here, the project delivers group-based recreational and educational activities for children and young people in the area. Activities have included painting, dance workshops, creating frog habitats, recognising native vegetation (facilitated by a local Elder), cooking and weaving. An evaluation of the program showed a significant decrease in Aboriginal children and young people from Walgett appearing in the local Children's Court (Dharriwaa Elders Group and Yuwaya Ngarra-li Partnership, 2026, p.7). Excellent qualitative feedback from participants included participants reporting that they, 'want to come every day', that, '2 hours is too short' and that they, 'want to stay until 7pm' (Dharriwaa Elders Group and Yuwaya Ngarra-li Partnership, 2026, p.7-8).

A third example of excellence in keeping First Nations communities safe from criminal legal system involvement, and from the racism of the system, is the Transitional Indigenous Service by CRC. This is a voluntary, holistic program of intensive casework, which delivers a throughcare model of support for First Nations people with multiple, intersecting needs in the Far West of NSW. The program aims to reduce recidivism while providing support for people to reintegrate into the community after prison, including by drawing on strong local connections. In July-December 2025, the program achieved a 90% rate of clients who were not convicted of, or charged with, a new criminal offence, which was well above their KPI benchmark of 40%.

Michael's story

The success of the Transitional Indigenous Service is also demonstrated through the case of



Michael,² who accessed the service. Michael is a 56-year-old First Nations man living in a regional centre on parole, away from his home community. He had a long history of substance use, prison system involvement, and unstable housing. In 2024, he secured social housing but briefly returned to custody, and during this time accrued rental arrears due to administrative errors. With the support of the service, he successfully resolved this issue at a Tribunal and maintained his tenancy. Following his release from prison, workers from the Transitional Indigenous Service supported Michael through further housing stability. Through ongoing, holistic support, Michael has sustained stable housing and remained out of prison.

RESPONSE TO THE TERMS OF REFERENCE BY STAFF MEMBER KELLY PARKER

1. The nature, prevalence and impact of racism, hate and violence towards First Nations people, including trends over time.

Identity and lateral violence

I am fair skinned and didn't find out I was Aboriginal until I was 21, so often I have been made to feel as though I'm not Aboriginal enough. I have been told I am 'not Blak enough', or that I don't know culture enough. That is not my fault. I didn't ask for what happened to my ancestors to happen. I've also had people say: 'you're either white or Aboriginal'. But I am both. That is part of me. The mix of who I am makes up who I am. I'm not just one part; I am multiple parts that come together.

I have avoided applying for identified roles for two reasons. I don't feel like I know my Culture enough yet. And I also have been successful applying for roles without needing to signal my identity; this means that the other identified roles can go to others who might have a harder time accessing opportunities, which will ultimately lead to more First Nations people in the workforce.

² Not his real name.



There are also subtleties tied to being fair-skinned, which affect how people perceive and treat you in both community and workplace environments. My main experiences and observations relate to lateral violence in the community and in the workplace.

One key incident happened here at CRC. A First Nations staff member made the suggestion that everyone should enter client information about who their mob are and where they come from. However, they were not taking into consideration people who have lost Culture or come from the Stolen Generations. She said, 'everyone knows who their mob is'. That is not true. Some people haven't been afforded that ability. We have been removed from our mob and our communities and have been displaced. Some records have been kept, and some haven't. It can be very hard to make those links and sometimes people simply cannot find their mob.

I found this upsetting and invalidating. It became a more serious situation and we eventually had a mediation that included myself, the team member, and upper management. I was genuinely open to discussion, to explain how I was feeling and to help her better understand why her approach was derogatory. But the other staff member wasn't ready to listen to anything. I was asked if I wanted to make it formal and at that time, I said no, let's just wait and see what happens. It may resolve naturally over time.

Four or five months later, we had an all-staff meeting. Two new team members had started, and they were both First Nations people too. The same staff member asked them the same questions like, 'who's your mob?' as well as other questions and comments that came across as quite invasive and had the potential to embarrass them in front of their colleagues. To me, this was incredibly unsafe, and I decided at that point I had to make a formal complaint. I was able to handle this happening to me, but not to others. CRC followed its process, and the matter was dealt with. At the time, I felt supported by upper management. While they didn't always know what to do, they were trying to be culturally appropriate while acknowledging they were not First Nations themselves. They did their best in a difficult situation.



A friend of mine, a First Nations woman working in a First Nations community organisation also experienced significant lateral violence because she was fair. She was ultimately pushed out. There was this idea that she was 'not Aboriginal enough'. The person directing lateral violence at her had connections with other people in the organisation and in the community. Sometimes, the connections through family and kinship networks can make it unsafe by excluding others. It is even worse in rural and regional locations. For instance, I manage a service in Dubbo. A lot of our clients prefer not to access First Nations services, as a lot of people will know their business. It is a confidentiality issue, and in some ways, a safety one.

Experiences of racism in community and services

There are a range of experiences of racism I've witnessed and experienced across different community contexts.

- My children experience explicit racism, rather than lateral violence. They are part Pacific Islander and have darker skin. As teenagers, they are targeted. For example, my sons are regularly targeted by police.
- There is also a dynamic where fair-skinned Aboriginal people may choose not to identify as Aboriginal in their interactions with police. I recognise that I am in a position where I can pass as non-Aboriginal because of my fair skin. If the police were ever to stop me, I probably wouldn't identify as Aboriginal. I feel it would invite discrimination, abuse and inequality.
- Another experience involved my children's school. A First Nations mother had just gotten her first job. She was a single mum, had to travel to work using public transport, and was struggling financially. So, I let her borrow my card temporarily until she got her first pay. One day at school, once she had been paid and no longer needed my card, she returned it to me in an envelope. A few days later, the school principal approached me and said there had been an allegation that we were dealing drugs. The principal was also a First Nations person with fair skin. The other mother involved was visibly darker-skinned. It was blatant racism, making assumptions about what we were doing based on skin colour. This woman didn't even drink or smoke! It was a disgusting suggestion and based purely on racist ideas.



- I very often see First Nations people who get on buses and trains, and people move seats so they don't have to sit next to them.
- Similarly, I've had clients report that Ubers and taxis we've booked for them drive straight past them and don't pick them up.
- The health system is also racist and discriminatory. One First Nations person I know had to go to the hospital for an injury. They were sent home without proper testing, while a younger white patient received X-rays and appropriate care. Later, they were seen again, and it turned out they were seriously injured. I have witnessed similar treatment of multiple First Nations clients.
- These issues occur across multiple locations I have worked in or managed, including Newcastle, Dubbo, and Broken Hill. In regional areas especially, racism and lateral violence can be more pronounced. I think it is important to acknowledge that in my work in Broken Hill, my team who live and work there are the experts in their community, not me. I can't make decisions unilaterally; they have to be collaborative.

3. Initiatives that are effective in combating racism targeted at First Nations people and reducing individual and collective harm.

Some initiatives are helping reduce harm:

- Cultural competency training is important. People are learning more about Culture, and schools are now teaching a more accurate history, including about the Stolen Generations. This exposure is helping build awareness and understanding, and helping people to be more open and mindful. It is also about finding the right training for cultural competency. Some organisations are really good at this, and others aren't.
- Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs) are also making workplaces more accountable. They help people understand how past policies continue to impact First Nations people today; how the loss of Culture, Country, and language negatively impacts us. However, RAPs can become a 'tick box' exercise if not implemented properly. The key is embedding them into everyday organisational practice. At CRC, work is being



done to integrate this into the culture, but it takes time. It's about finding the right training and sustaining it.

- Another key factor is creating safe spaces for conversation. Asking respectful questions is important. Often, people are not acting out of malice but out of a lack of knowledge. If people don't feel safe to ask questions, those misunderstandings persist. However, I've also experienced and witnessed the burden placed on First Nations staff, that is, a 'cultural load'. Often, you become the token First Nations person in an organisation, carrying responsibility for education and cultural guidance. This can be exhausting and unfair.

5. The effectiveness of avenues for reporting and responding to racism against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including the consistency, timeliness and appropriateness of outcomes across jurisdictions and institutions.

At CRC, there was a complaint mechanism, and it was relatively safe. I was supported and informed throughout the process. However, I know of other workplaces, particularly within First Nations organisations, where reporting might not be so safe. These dynamics can exclude people and discourage reporting. Again, this is often worse in rural and regional areas.

There should be a clear, accessible line or external body where people can report racism if they do not feel safe doing so within their organisation. This is particularly important in environments where internal relationships or kinship ties make reporting unsafe. This should be an accessible and easy-to-use pathway.

RESPONSE TO THE TERMS OF REFERENCE BY STAFF MEMBER TORY PAASI

I make this submission as an Aboriginal man with disability, with both lived and professional experience of how discrimination operates across systems. My perspective is shaped not only by my own life, but by decades of work at frontline, executive and national levels



engaging with Aboriginal communities, including disability reform work, where I have seen race, disability and sexual orientation interact to heighten exclusion, while legal protections remain weakly enforced in practice.

Racism and hate against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is not limited to overt abuse. It is also systemic, routine and embedded in institutional decision-making. It shows up through exclusion, disbelief, over-surveillance, lowered expectations, administrative avoidance and the constant requirement for Aboriginal people to prove their legitimacy, credibility or worthiness of support. In my experience, racism is often most damaging when it is subtle enough to be denied yet consistent enough to shape outcomes. It affects who is heard, who is trusted, who gets access to support, who is treated as a risk and who is expected to carry more burden with less protection.

In regional settings, especially, racism can present in quieter but deeply harmful ways. It may not always come as a slur. It often comes as indifference, dismissal, delay, avoidance or a presumption that an Aboriginal person is difficult, non-compliant or less deserving. The impact of this is cumulative. It affects confidence, trust, wellbeing, and access. It pushes Aboriginal people further away from systems that are supposed to protect them but were never built with them in mind. It also creates a social environment in which exclusion becomes normalised, and the burden of responding is shifted back to those who are already carrying the harm.

Intersectionality: Race, disability and sexual orientation

Racism and hate rarely operate on their own. They often work through intersectional disadvantage, particularly where race overlaps with disability and sexual orientation. As a neurodivergent Aboriginal man, I know that discrimination is not experienced in different categories. Professionally, I have also seen how easily people with intersecting identities fall through gaps because systems operate in silos. A service may acknowledge disability but miss racism. It may speak about cultural safety while failing to understand sexuality or gender diversity. It may focus on behaviour while ignoring trauma. It may talk about inclusion while still excluding the person right in front of them.



This has real consequences. Aboriginal people with disability, LGBTQIA+ Aboriginal people, and Aboriginal people with complex trauma or cognitive impairment are more likely to be misunderstood, over-managed and under-supported, or just plain excluded altogether. The people most in need of a flexible and human response are often the least likely to receive one. I would argue that a gender diverse First Nations person living with a disability is subject to the highest levels of discrimination in the country.

Gaps between legal protection and lived reality

Australia has legislation that prohibits discrimination based on race, disability and sexual orientation. Those protections matter. But in lived reality, legal protection is not the same thing as meaningful enforcement.

Too often, Aboriginal people are still left to identify, name, document and pursue discrimination after the harm is already done. Complaints pathways may exist, but many people experience them as slow, exhausting, inaccessible or ineffective. For Aboriginal people with disability, or for those already dependent on the very systems they may need to complain about, the barriers are even greater.

If protections exist on paper but are not seen in community, then enforcement is not strong enough and perhaps non-existent. The issue is not only whether a complaint can be made. The issue is whether Aboriginal people can reasonably expect to be heard, protected and taken seriously when discrimination occurs.

Online racism and its real-world effects

Online racism matters because it normalises hostility, broadens the reach of abuse and creates permission for behaviour that spills into everyday life. It reinforces stereotypes, emboldens perpetrators and can increase fear and harm for Aboriginal people in public and private spaces.

However, online should not be treated as the whole issue. The same ideas that circulate online often appear in service systems, workplaces, schools, local politics and public



institutions. If governments respond only to visible online abuse while leaving institutional racism untouched, they will miss the deeper problem entirely.

Colonial load and cultural responsibility

Aboriginal families and communities have always carried cultural responsibility. That includes kinship obligations, community care and responsibility grounded in culture, relationship and survival. But too often, what governments and institutions describe as resilience is actually colonial load: the burden placed on Aboriginal people to absorb systemic failure, under-service, racism, hate and policy neglect without proper support.

That distinction matters. Not everything Aboriginal communities carry should be romanticised. Some of it is cultural strength and obligation. Some of it is forced burden. When institutions fail to respond properly, the pressure does not vanish. It is transferred. Too often it is transferred onto Aboriginal families and communities and then misread as proof that they can keep carrying more.

What needs to change

- Anti-racism reform needs to move beyond symbolic commitment and into real accountability.
- Mainstream systems, including housing and justice (the intersection I am currently working in), disability, health, education and community services should be required to examine how racism operates in their own processes, not just in overt incidents.
- Anti-racism work should be intersectional by design, with explicit attention to disability, sexual orientation, trauma and poverty.
- Complaints and reporting mechanisms should be culturally safe, disability-accessible, timely and credible. The burden cannot continue to sit primarily with Aboriginal people to prove harm after the fact.
- There should also be stronger investment in Aboriginal-led and place-based responses, especially in regional communities where racism is shaped by local relationships, local institutions and local histories.



- Training certainly has a role, but only where it is tied to policy review, supervision, leadership accountability and measurable change in behaviour and decision-making.

Conclusion

Racism against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is not only a matter of overt hatred. It is also prevalent in exclusion, disbelief and systems that continue to make Aboriginal people do too much of the work of surviving and proving harm.

I contribute to this submission not only as a professional who has worked across community and reform settings for several decades, but as a neurodivergent Aboriginal man who understands that these issues are lived as well as observed. The law matters. Policy matters. But what truly matters most is whether Aboriginal people are actually safer, heard and respected, and able to access systems on equal terms. After speaking up, is there any consequence for perpetrators of racism, hate and violence towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people? Far too often, we are not listened to or even treated with a minute level of respect when we do speak up, and often see no real consequence to racist behaviour, despite being enshrined in legislation. Thank you for the opportunity to contribute.

CONCLUSION

We thank the Committee for taking the time to consider our submission, which explored racism faced by staff members and people we support who are exiting the prison system in NSW. We welcome any further contact from the Committee if it can be of use.



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