

# Submission to the Commission on Racism

## Institutional Racism, Inequality and Systemic Discrimination Affecting Aboriginal People in Australia

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### Executive Summary

This submission outlines concerns regarding racism, discrimination, and systemic inequality affecting Aboriginal people across Australian society.

Racism is often discussed as individual behaviour, but it is also shaped by institutional systems, public narratives, and social conditions that influence how Aboriginal people are perceived and treated.

This submission highlights a number of contributing factors, including:

- institutional discrimination within government and organisational systems
- inequality within the justice, parole and corrective services systems
- housing shortages and overcrowding in Aboriginal communities
- media narratives that influence public perception and reinforce stereotypes
- barriers to genuine Aboriginal employment participation
- limited accountability in organisations receiving Aboriginal funding
- tokenistic representation in some leadership or advisory roles
- geographic differences between metropolitan, regional and remote communities

The submission also proposes practical approaches that focus on accountability, transparency, community-led solutions, and updated strategies that move beyond repeating the same discussions and limited reforms.

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### 1. Purpose of this Submission

This submission is provided to contribute to the Commission's examination of racism affecting Aboriginal people in Australia.

The observations presented reflect practical experience, community discussions, and ongoing concerns regarding the social, institutional, and structural factors that contribute to discrimination and inequality.

While racism is often discussed as individual behaviour, this submission focuses on how institutional systems, public narratives, and social conditions can contribute to the development and persistence of racism within Australian society.

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## 2. About the Author

George M. Blair has experience working in community services, governance, and Aboriginal community engagement.

He has held leadership and governance responsibilities within Aboriginal organisations and has been involved in matters relating to community development, cultural heritage, and community representation.

His professional background also includes work within mental health services, community services, and employment case management, where he has worked directly with individuals experiencing social disadvantage and barriers to opportunity.

Through these roles, he has gained practical insight into how institutional systems such as government services, justice processes, housing systems, and employment structures affect Aboriginal people and communities.

The observations in this submission are informed not only by community discussions but also by lived experience interacting with institutions and organisations involved in Indigenous affairs.

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## 3. Understanding the Causes of Racism

Racism rarely arises from a single event or action. It often develops through the interaction of discrimination, inequality, biased thinking, and institutional practices that influence how groups within society are treated.

Factors contributing to racism can include:

- unequal treatment within institutional systems
- social and economic inequality
- stereotypes and biased thinking
- media narratives that influence public perception
- policies that produce unequal outcomes

When these conditions persist over time they can create patterns that reinforce inequality and contribute to racism within society.

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## 4. Institutional Racism and Systemic Inequality

Systemic racism occurs when institutional systems produce outcomes that disproportionately disadvantage particular groups.

Concerns raised within Aboriginal communities include:

- barriers to employment participation
- limited participation in decision-making processes
- delays in addressing concerns raised with institutions
- misunderstanding of the purpose of targeted Aboriginal initiatives

In some cases issues raised by Aboriginal people remain unresolved for several years, which contributes to frustration and loss of confidence in institutional systems.

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## **5. Justice System, Parole and Corrective Services**

Aboriginal people remain significantly overrepresented within the justice system.

Addressing this issue requires ongoing examination of policing practices, court decisions, parole systems, and corrective services policies to ensure fairness and equality before the law.

Implementation of recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody remains essential to addressing structural inequality within the justice system.

It is also important to recognise that racism can exist within positions of authority. Individuals working within legal systems, government departments, or public administration may hold biases that influence decision-making.

Ensuring accountability and oversight within these institutions is essential for maintaining fairness within the justice system.

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## **6. Housing, Overcrowding and Social Conditions**

Housing shortages remain a significant issue in many Aboriginal communities.

In some communities multiple families are required to live within a single dwelling due to limited housing availability.

Overcrowding can contribute to:

- family stress
- health risks
- reduced privacy and safety
- social instability

Housing shortages may also contribute to homelessness, which can increase the likelihood of interaction with the justice system.

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## **7. Geographic Differences and Public Perception**

The experiences of Aboriginal people vary significantly between metropolitan, regional, and remote communities.

Visible social issues, including alcohol-related behaviour in some public areas, can sometimes reinforce negative stereotypes portraying Aboriginal people as a whole in damaging ways.

Many Aboriginal Elders strongly oppose such behaviour and emphasise the importance of cultural responsibility, dignity, and respect.

Public narratives should recognise that these visible social challenges are often connected to broader social and economic conditions rather than cultural identity.

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## **8. Media Narratives and Public Perception**

The media plays a powerful role in shaping public attitudes.

When stories involving Aboriginal people focus primarily on negative incidents without broader context, this can reinforce stereotypes and influence public perceptions.

Sensationalised reporting may attract public attention and increase profits, but it can also contribute to racism within society.

Balanced reporting that recognises broader social realities is important in preventing harmful narratives from influencing public attitudes.

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## **9. Corporate Responsibility and Employment Participation**

Large corporations operate across Australia and benefit economically from communities nationwide.

Major retailers such as:

- Coles Group
- Woolworths Group
- Bunnings Warehouse

have adopted reconciliation initiatives, however genuine Aboriginal participation within leadership and management roles remains limited.

Reconciliation initiatives should include measurable employment outcomes and genuine pathways for Aboriginal people into leadership and decision-making roles.

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## **10. Accountability for Aboriginal Funding**

Government agencies, non-government organisations, and mainstream service providers receive funding intended to support Aboriginal communities.

There should be stronger transparency and auditing of organisations receiving Aboriginal-targeted funding to ensure that programs deliver meaningful outcomes for Aboriginal people.

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## **11. Community Leadership, Cultural Authority and Responsibility**

While community-led solutions are important, leadership within Aboriginal communities must also operate with accountability, transparency, and responsibility.

Cultural authority carries responsibilities to represent the interests of the broader community and maintain trust.

Strong governance within communities strengthens the effectiveness of programs designed to support Aboriginal people.

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## **12. Lived Experience of Discrimination**

Discrimination may also occur within Indigenous contexts, including between different Indigenous groups or organisations.

Acknowledging these experiences is not about criticism but about recognising the realities faced by Aboriginal people.

Fairness, transparency, and accountability should apply across all organisations and institutions that operate within Indigenous affairs.

Recognising these realities strengthens efforts to address racism and discrimination in all environments.

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## **13. The Need for Updated Solutions**

Many of the issues discussed in this submission have been raised repeatedly through past reports and consultations.

Australia does not lack awareness of these problems.

What has often been lacking is consistent implementation of solutions and accountability for outcomes.

Moving forward requires new strategies that prioritise:

- community-led solutions
- practical implementation
- transparent governance
- measurable outcomes

Solutions must involve Aboriginal communities themselves, recognising the knowledge, cultural authority, and lived experience that exist within those communities.

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## 14. Reflection on the Meaning of Racism

While this submission discusses racism as it exists within society, it is important to recognise that racism itself is not a natural condition.

Human beings all belong to one human family.

Differences in culture, language, and history should never be used as a basis for division or unequal treatment.

Racism emerges when societies place negative meaning on those differences and allow discrimination or inequality to become embedded within institutions and social attitudes.

Recognising our shared humanity can help guide efforts to reduce racism and build stronger relationships within society.

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## Closing Statement

This submission is offered in the spirit of constructive reform and honest reflection.

It seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the factors that influence racism in Australia and to encourage practical solutions that strengthen fairness, accountability, transparency, and mutual respect across society.

Ultimately, while people may come from different cultures, histories, and communities, we remain part of one human family.

When societies recognise this shared humanity, the divisions that create racism begin to lose their power.

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