

# *FACING UP TO IT* RACISM IN HEALTH CARE

# Right to Health declared as an international right for all human beings

This includes access to timely, acceptable, and affordable health care of appropriate quality



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# Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care

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# Australian Healthcare Rights

## Guiding Principles

1. Everyone has the right to be able to access health care and this right is essential for the Charter to be meaningful.
2. The Australian Government commits to international agreements about human rights which recognise everyone's right to have the highest possible standard of physical and mental health.
3. Australia is a society made up of people with different cultures and ways of life, and the Charter acknowledges and respects these differences.



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# What can I expect from the Australian health system?

## My Rights

### Access

I have a right to health care.

### Safety

I have a right to receive safe and high quality care.

### Respect

I have a right to be shown respect, dignity and consideration.

### Communication

I have a right to be included in decisions and choices about my care.

### Participation

I have a right to privacy and confidentiality of my personal information.

### Privacy

I have a right to privacy and confidentiality of my personal information.

### Comment

I have a right to comment on my care and to have my concerns addressed.

# Facing up to racism

Racism: A belief that one race is superior to the other *or* the practice of treating a person or group of people differently on the basis of their race.

Institutional racism: structural order of an institute such as through policies or procedures and governance of service delivery.  
Produces barriers to accessing healthcare.



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# Effect of racism on health outcomes

*Personal cultural beliefs of health professionals influence the outcome of the encounter for the person seeking healthcare and there is evidence that Indigenous people are subjected to delayed or inadequate medical intervention when compared to non-Indigenous people*

*Racism is associated with poorer health outcomes and reduces access to healthcare and necessary health resources*

Source: Theunissen 2011: cited in Zambas & Right 2016



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# Effect of racism on health outcomes

## Acute coronary syndromes

- Despite higher of cardio-vascular disease, Aboriginal people less likely to receive invasive or surgical intervention such as coronary bypass graphs
- Less likely to receive best practice-practice pharmaceutical intervention for cardiac events such as heparin
- Less likely to be enrolled in cardiac rehabilitation programs

Source: Brown 2010: Acute coronary syndromes in Indigenous Australians



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# Experiences of racism

Qualitative study of ten Aboriginal patients treated cardiology unit

Engagement with staff was generally positive – ‘fantastic’, ‘like family’.

However, Two of ten participants had experienced racism in the hospital:

*....they treated me as if I wasn't there, you know? Well, they were bloody ignorant to me for a starter. And they just didn't service me as well as they did all the non-Aboriginal, non-coloured skin people who came in there.*

*One of my specialists actually made the comment ‘Well, an Aboriginal person, what would she know?’*

**Source: Worrall-Carter 2015**



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# Experiences of racism

Qualitative study of three talking circles of Aboriginal Canadians using illicit drugs

Only one participant provided a positive experience.

The other participants experience revealed adverse care experiences. Eg feelings of being *'treated differently'*, *'being treated like crap'*, *'being involuntarily discharged from hospital'*.

A number of stories of being treated badly.

Source: Goodman A. 2017



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# Strategies to address racism

Cultural Awareness Training

Cultural Safety

Cultural Competence

Cultural Empathy

Frameworks

- Cultural inclusion Framework SA
- Indigenous Cultural Competency Framework – universities Australia
- Cultural responsiveness Framework – Victorian Health
- Cultural respect Framework – A national approach



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# Strategies to address racism

## Australian Indigenous Doctors Association

- Cultural Safety position paper
- Cultural Safety fact sheet
- Cultural Safety Toolkit

## Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA)

- Cultural Responsiveness in Action: An IAHA Framework



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# Strategies to address racism

However, terms such as ‘cultural insensitivity’ and ‘cultural barriers’ and often used to describe poor healthcare delivery for ethnic minority groups.

Johnson and Kanitsaki state that these terms minimize the behaviours exhibited by the perpetrator and avoid realization that it is racial discriminatory beliefs that fuel the behavior.

Source: Zambas and Wright 2016



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# Strategies to address racism

Can we educate out of racism? Question posed by an Aboriginal academic

From his experience, one medical student commented that he and his peers were concrete thinkers, and could we simply offer them the 'solutions'?

An academic colleague of his in nursing education noted that nurse needed more 'task people' and 'fewer thinkers'.

When an Indigenous health curriculum includes analyses of the health consequences of racism, it struggles against non-recognition of racists acts and systemic discrimination.

The challenge then is twofold: to make the invisible visible, and a facilitate a 'manageable' disquiet.

Source: McDemott. 2012



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# Recent case

An Aboriginal woman, 22, had been taken into custody for unpaid fines, and had already been discharged from hospital twice and declared fit to return to her cell.

The young woman had suffered two broken ribs after her partner threw her to the ground in April 2014, but one rib never healed properly and became infected. She complained of rib pain and was taken to the Hedland Health Campus.

She dies on her 3<sup>rd</sup> visit within 48 hours to Hedland Health Campus after complaining of feeling unwell at South Hedland Police Station.

But she displayed no signs of infection and was discharged back into police custody, with a doctor diagnosing her as having "behavioural issues".



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# Recent case

WA coroner said when the young woman was taken to the hospital again the next day, her temperature was not taken, a chest X-ray was not performed and "errors were made and there was a missed opportunity to treat her for her infection".

"On this presentation, antibiotics would have been potentially life saving for this young woman," the coroner said.

The coroner has recommended the law be changed so people could no longer be imprisoned for the non-payment of fines

Her mother said she was not happy with the coroner's recommendations, because no-one had been held accountable for her daughter's death.



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# Recent case

The coroner made a series of recommendations, including that dedicated lock-up keepers be introduced at every WA police station where detainees were held, and mandatory training for those duties.

The coroner has recommended the law be changed so people could no longer be imprisoned for the non-payment of fines

She also said there should be cultural competency training across the WA Police force to better understand the health concerns of Aboriginal people

*Source: ABC News*



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# Moving Forward

*It is not enough to have knowledge, one must also apply it. It is not enough to have wishes, one must also accomplish.*

*Source: Johann von Goethe*



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# Moving Forward

*What does this mean for HOT NORTH?*



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