



Beyond Blue submission to the Inquiry into racism, hate and violence directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

1 June 2026

Racism, discrimination, hate and violence are significant drivers of distress and impact the mental health and social and emotional wellbeing of First Nations Peoples in complex and intersecting ways. For over a decade, Beyond Blue has been working with First Nations Peoples to tackle racism and promote wellbeing through our campaigns, Reconciliation Action Plans, and our advocacy for system and social change. This is in addition to our ongoing work – as the national depression and anxiety initiative – to improve the mental health and wellbeing of people, and to prevent suicide.

This submission is a collaboration between the Beyond Blue [Board of Directors](#) and the Beyond Blue First Nations Council. It has also been informed by the voices of First Nations members of Beyond Blue's lived experience program, Blue Voices, who generously shared their stories, perspectives and hope to drive change.

This submission addresses the Inquiry's terms of reference with a focus on the impact of racism and racialised harm on the mental health and social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) of First Nations Peoples. It aims to centre and amplify First Nations voices and perspectives, and to propose solutions grounded in First Nations knowledge and leadership.

About the Beyond Blue First Nations Council

The First Nations Council provides enterprise level strategic and operational advice about how to best support First Nations Peoples, families, and communities through Beyond Blue's work.

- Facilitator: Rod Little, Co-owner and Chair, Burbungana Group
- Patricia (Trish) Adjei, Torres Strait Islander Community Representative
- Charleene Mundine, Founder and Director, DLCM
- David Edwards, Director, WellMob Website, eMental health in practice, University of Sydney
- Rachel Fishlock, CEO, Gayaa Dhuwi Proud Spirit Australia
- Nareen Young, Associate Dean, Indigenous Leadership and Engagement; Professor Indigenous Policy, UTS Business School; Jumbunna Institute
- Tania Dalton, Managing Director and Founder, Tiiamanno Consultants

About Blue Voices

Blue Voices is Beyond Blue's national lived experience advisory community, bringing together people with personal experience of mental health challenges, along with carers and supporters, to ensure its work reflects community needs. For over 20 years, members have contributed through structured engagement activities—including focus groups, workshops, surveys and co-design sessions—informing the design, improvement and evaluation of programs, services and strategic initiatives. There are currently 2,650 Blue Voices members nationally, including 48 who identify as First Nations. Members played a central role in shaping this submission, with four contributing insights through one-on-one interviews that informed its priorities and messaging

Beyond Blue acknowledges that the Land on which our head office is based, has deep connections to peoples and cultures across the Eastern Kulin Nation. As such, we acknowledge the Traditional Owners of this area, the Wurundjeri Peoples, and pay our respect to their Elders past and present. As an organisation with national reach, we extend our respect to all Elders and First Nations Peoples across Australia

A note on terminology: we use the term First Nations Peoples in recognition of the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and cultures, and as a reminder that these communities are the first peoples of the land, having lived and cared for country for tens of thousands of years. We acknowledge that terminology is powerful and personal, and that respectful language use depends on what different individuals and communities find appropriate.

Introduction

- Beyond Blue welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the inquiry into racism, hate and violence directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.
- Racism and violence have no place in Australia. Beyond Blue condemns the attempted terror attack in Boorloo/Perth on 26 January 2026 and all acts of racialised harm. Our Support Service is here to support any individuals, families and communities impacted.
- We commend the steadfast commitment of First Nations leaders, advocates and community members who shine light on these issues and call for change and stand with them.
- Racism, hate and violence are perpetrated against First Nations Peoples at alarming rates, and these experiences are strongly linked with poor mental health and wellbeing outcomes. Reducing racism and discrimination is a shared responsibility across governments, health and community services, workplaces, education settings and community organisations, and benefits the whole of society.

Recommendations

The Inquiry's final report should recommend that the Australian Government:

1. Recognise and act on racism as an urgent public health priority, adopting a whole-of-government approach to tackling racism across a range of policy settings.
2. Acknowledge that truth-telling is foundational to all national efforts to address racism against First Nations Peoples in Australia and prioritise work with First Nations Peoples to establish national truth-telling processes.
3. Commit to the National Anti-Racism Framework, with adequate funding and clear accountability for implementation. Prioritise legal protections and actions that address harm and ensure safe settings online, in the media, and where people live, work and learn.
4. Prioritise work with First Nations leaders to embed cultural safety and social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) approaches across the mental health system to promote wellbeing and support those impacted by racism. This should include full funding of the Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Declaration Implementation Plan and National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Plan through the SEWB Policy Partnership in line with the Priority Reforms under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

First Nations Blue Voices members recounted experiences of racism in workplaces and schools and described the racist stereotypes and assumptions they face:

"Experiences of racism are very high."

"It's very prevalent... just repeating over and over."

"I think it's quite systemic. It's there pretty much every day, especially where I work."

"A lot of my life, because I'm Indigenous, people assume I am illiterate...I'm highly educated."

"Actually, I think it's getting worse."

Prevalence, experiences and impacts of racism, hate and violence against First Nations Peoples

- Before Australia was colonised, First Nations Peoples thrived for thousands of generations, living in close relationship with Country and enjoying high levels of health and wellbeing¹.
- Experiences of racism directed at First Nations Peoples are unique and rooted in colonisation. They occur in the context of intergenerational experiences of state-sanctioned racial violence, genocideⁱ and forced removal from family, kin, Country and culture. These harms are not confined to the past. They are intergenerational, ongoing and continue to entrench injustice and inequity.
- **The evidence is clear: experiences of racism are pervasive for First Nations Peoples – and getting worse.**
 - Data from the Mayi Kuwayu Study showed that between October 2023 and October 2024, nearly three-quarters (74.1%) of First Nations adults reported that they had experienced everyday discrimination, up 10% since 2018–2021².
 - The Australian Reconciliation Barometer found that between 2014 to 2024, reports of racism made by First Nations People increased by 15%, from 39% to 54%, and that over half (56%) of First Nations Peoples believe Australia is a racist country³.
- Experiences of racism can be interpersonal, structural and institutional, and impact people in compounding and intersecting ways. Of the reports to the *Call It Out* Racism Register in 2024-25:
 - one third of incidents were experienced as interpersonal racism (34%)
 - one third were experienced as both interpersonal and systemic/institutional racism (33%)
 - one in five were experienced as solely systemic/institutional (21%)⁴.
- Experiences of racism also occur across settings and locations. In 2024–25, social media or other online platforms were the most common reported locations for incidents of racism to *Call it Out* (22%), followed by workplaces (11%) and educational settings (10%)⁵.
- The Centre for Indigenous People and Work found that 58% of First Nations Peoples experience racism at work, with only 40% of First Nations employees reporting that their workplaces are culturally safe⁶.
- Racism is also widely experienced within systems, including the health, justice and child protection systems. In 2024–25, over half (52.7%) of First Nations adults reported experiences of healthcare discrimination (up from 40.4% in 2018–2021)⁷.
- The Australian Human Rights Commission has stated that **systemic racism has profound implications for public health**, and often results in delayed care, substandard treatment and unmet health needs⁸.

Recommendation 1: Recognise and act on racism as an urgent public health priority, adopting a whole-of-government approach to tackling racism across a range of policy settings.

First Nations Blue Voices members spoke of the lack of culturally safe mental health supports:

“I see there's quite a distinct lack of support for the mental health wellbeing for Indigenous Australians.”

“Comments are made by mental health clinicians that are uncalled for.”

“A lot of clinicians have a lack of education.”

“Clinicians don't often take culture on board.”

“If I'm Indigenous, I'm getting harassed by or getting hard done by non-Indigenous people.”

ⁱ The use of the term genocide here reflects the systematic nature of the violence, dispossession, cultural erasure and other harms committed against First Nations Australians that shape how First Nations Peoples experience racism today. For more information, see Yoorrook Justice Commission, *Yoorrook for Transformation: Third Interim Report* (2025), p.g. 32; and Commissioner Wilson, *Bringing them home: report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families*, (1997) Sydney, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, p.g. 231

Impact on the social and emotional wellbeing and mental health of First Nations Peoples

- First Nations concepts of SEWB (see **Figure 1**) are holistic and collectivist, viewing the self within the context of family, community and kinship connections⁹. Mental health is a component of SEWB that is viewed as inextricably linked to the social, emotional, physical, cultural and spiritual dimensions of wellbeing¹⁰.
- Racism impacts First Nations Peoples' SEWB and mental health in complex and compounding ways, threatening cultural survival, eroding sovereignty and constraining self-determination¹¹. It is considered **one of the most impactful social determinants of health for First Nations Peoples**, with cross-sectional analysis finding that everyday/structural racial discrimination could explain up to 47.4% of the overall gap in psychological distress First Nations Peoples and non-Indigenous people¹².
- Data from the Mayi Kuwayu Study shows that any experiences of racism were associated with negative outcomes including poor general health, **high levels of psychological distress and mental ill-health**¹³.
- Support-seeking trends demonstrate the impact of the upward trend in experiences of racism reported in recent years. For example, a record number of First Nations support seekers contacted 13YARN in the lead up to the Voice to Parliament Referendum, with approximately 3,500 calls to the service in the six weeks leading up to September 2023, citing abuse and racism relating to the Referendum¹⁴.



Figure 1: SEWB Diagram, adapted from Gee et al (2014)

First Nations Blue Voices members shared how this impact is felt across communities

Racism was described as having deep, cumulative and intergenerational impacts on mental health, including depression, hopelessness and diminished self-worth. Experiences of racism, stigma and culturally unsafe services can undermine help-seeking:

"It defeats their self-confidence to be able to get some assistance, to get some support."

"Should I comment? What's likely to come back at me?"

"Mental health is still seen by a number of people as a bit of a taboo."

"If someone... is not heard... it could be enough for them to take their life."

Online platforms and the rise of extremism

- Noting that for many First Nations Peoples, online platforms are an important tool for connection, communication and creation, data shows that **online environments also pose significant risks of exposure to racialised harm.**
- The eSafety Commissioner found that more than one in three First Nations adults experienced online hate in the 12 months to November 2022, compared with 17% of non-Indigenous adults¹⁵. eSafety research also found that 57% of First Nations adults had seen online hate in the past 12 months, compared to 33% of non-Indigenous adults.

First Nations Blue Voices members expressed significant concern about the risks posed by online platforms:

“It is unsafe now.”

“Content can be atrocious, so negative, so angry.”

“I’ve worked with Indigenous young people that have [considered] suicide after seeing racism online.”

“Before social media, home felt safe... that just doesn’t happen anymore.”

- First Nations children are three times more likely to experience online hate speech than the national average, with negative online experiences causing significant harm, including mental health challenges (31%), perceived reputation damage (27%) and lower grades (23%)¹⁶.
- Evidence submitted to the 2024 *Inquiry into Right Wing Extremist Movements in Australia* indicates that First Nations Peoples are “overt targets of far-right violence, abuse, and disenfranchisement”¹⁷ and that social media platforms are critical spaces for right-wing extremists to gather and organise¹⁸.
- A growing body of international evidence demonstrates that racism can act as a precursor to violent extremism, both as an ideology in its own right and as a driver of grievance, with the United Nations identifying racism and intolerance as key motivators of extremist violence, and research showing that discrimination and prejudice can contribute to radicalisation pathways^{19, 20, 21, 22}.

Beyond Blue’s experience moderating social media

Beyond Blue has also observed a consistent pattern of racist commentary on its social or traditional media content that speaks about First Nations Peoples’ mental health, wellbeing, racism or justice.

This reflects the lived experience that leaders of First Nations organisations have shared with Beyond Blue, reporting that staff responsible for moderating their online channels are exposed to relentless, orchestrated racist behaviour that takes a toll on their wellbeing.

What works, and what is needed to combat racism and support those impacted?

Combating racism

- Tackling racism cannot be separated from the events that have contributed to this moment, including the long-term, intergenerational impacts of colonisation, genocidal violence and historical denialism. Truth-telling is a critical foundation for anti-racism efforts.
- As Ngampromwongse, Gall, Garvey, Howard and Anderson state, *“truth-telling about Australia’s histories is critical to securing justice and healing and to address the trauma and racism experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples”*²³.
- Similarly, the Close the Gap Campaign notes in its submission to the Inquiry that truth-telling and structural reform are “necessary components of effective anti-racism policy because they address the narratives and power imbalances that enable hate and violence”²⁴.

Recommendation 2: Acknowledge that truth-telling is foundational to all national efforts to address racism against First Nations Peoples in Australia and prioritise work with First Nations Peoples to establish national truth-telling processes.

- **Commitment and action are needed at every level of society and government if we are to effectively combat racism in all its forms.** First Nations Peoples and organisations continue to demonstrate leadership in advocacy, research and action to combat racism and progress First Nations justice and self-determination. Many non-Indigenous people and organisations are committed to this work.
- In 2025, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare outlined key features of anti-racism efforts that work, including:
 - First Nations models of cultural continuity, like that expressed through the SEWB framework’s seven cultural domains of wellbeing
 - First Nations leadership over the design and delivery of strategies combating systemic racism
 - First Nations-led longitudinal, multi-level, place-based interventions that use First Nations participatory research methods and data governance²⁵.
- There is also evidence to support the effectiveness of anti-racism initiatives that are designed by First Nations Peoples, disseminate information on racism and its impacts, challenges false stereotypes and deliver accurate information about First Nations cultures²⁶.
- The National Anti-Racism Framework (NARF) was presented to the Commonwealth Government in 2024 but has not been adopted or funded since it was published.
- Under the NARF, a number of clear opportunities stand out:
 - the establishment of national truth telling processes that prioritise First Nations self-determination
 - legislative reform, that could include:
 - amendments to the Racial Discrimination Act 1975
 - introduction of a new national Human Rights Act that embeds a rights-based approach to protection from racism aligned with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
 - a new positive duty for employers to prevent racism (see the [submission to the Inquiry by the Centre for Indigenous People and Work](#) for more information)
 - meaningful avenues for reporting and redress
 - regulation of online platform providers to deliver safer online experiences, for example through the recently announced digital duty of care reforms to the Online Safety Act 2021 and regulatory action to promote Safety by Design principles that support designers to take action to eliminate online harms before they occur²⁷.
 - significant work to combat racism in the health, justice and child protection systems, including minimum standards for cultural safety that cut across these sectors
 - racism prevention in learning environments and workplaces, including through anti-racism training and programs
 - action to address racism in media reporting on First Nations issues.

- Governments should place greater emphasis on the funding and implementation of recommendations of inquiries, Royal Commissions, frameworks and strategies they commission, to avoid delays that can undermine community trust.

Recommendation 3: Commit to the National Anti-Racism Framework, with adequate funding and clear accountability for implementation. Prioritise legal protections and actions that address harm and ensure safe settings online, in the media, and where people live, work and learn.

Invisible Discriminator Campaign

Since 2014, Beyond Blue has been increasing awareness of the impact of racism on the social and emotional wellbeing of First Nations Peoples, and calling on people to take action, through the [Invisible Discriminator](#) Campaign. These video resources have had significant national reach, and are used in leading anti-racism and cultural competency training resources.

Recognising strength in culture, community and identity

“Community makes you thrive, not just survive”, First Nations Blue Voices member

- A common theme across research and community accounts is the **powerful protection that connection to culture, community and Country offers**, amidst these incredible challenges. *“This pride was seen as a protective force, one that resisted the damage of externally imposed stereotypes and affirmed the inherent value of being an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person”²⁸.*

First Nations Blue Voices members emphasised the need for greater access to culturally safe and appropriate support.

People “need somebody who will sit with them and listen”

“We need more psychologists that are Indigenous”

- Cultural healing can support social and emotional wellbeing through connection to these protective factors, as well as responding to intergenerational impacts of colonisation and dispossession. Cultural healing restores strength through connection to community and belonging, drawing on practices such as ceremony and storytelling, which are central to healing and recovery²⁹.
- Despite its incredible value, cultural healing remains structurally excluded from mental health systems and supports in Australia.

Recommendation 4: Prioritise work with First Nations leaders to embed cultural safety and social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) approaches across the mental health system to promote wellbeing and support those impacted by racism. This should include full funding of the Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Declaration Implementation Plan and National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Plan through the SEWB Policy Partnership in line with the Priority Reforms under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

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