

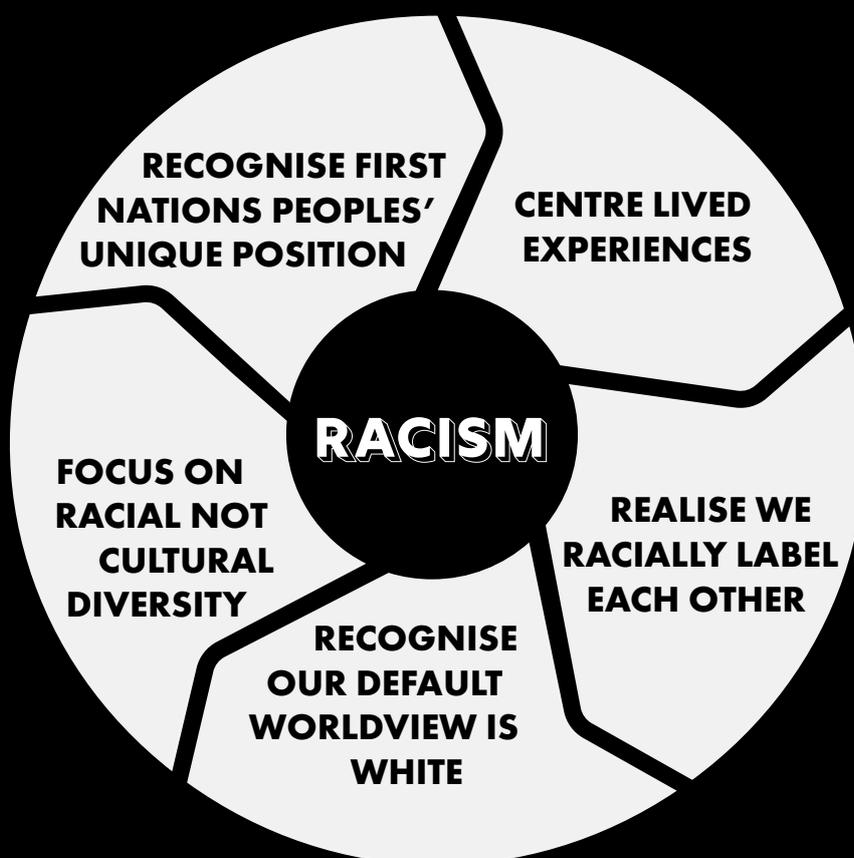
# RACISM AT WORK

## DCA'S DEFINITION OF RACISM

Racism is when an individual or organisation with race-based societal power discriminates, excludes, or disadvantages a racially marginalised person because of their race, colour, descent, nationality, ethnicity, religion and/or immigrant status.

Racism can be systemic or interpersonal, unconscious or conscious, active or passive, obvious or subtle.

## DCA'S FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES FOR UNDERSTANDING RACISM



# WHAT CAN RACISM LOOK LIKE?

## OBVIOUS OR OVERT RACISM

Racism carried out by an identifiable perpetrator, for example racial violence, slurs, or comments.

*"Asking a person who appears Asian whether they eat cat or dog meat - this was asked of me by a senior leader in front of a leadership group."*

## SUBTLE RACISM (EVERYDAY RACISM)

Everyday interactions that often go unnoticed by racially privileged people, such as jokes or statements that highlight (in a negative way) differences in physical appearance, cultural practices, or accents.

*"There are two men of colour at my workplace, and I'm routinely called the other's name even though we look nothing alike and we've both worked there for more than 4 years."*

## SYSTEMIC RACISM

Organisational policies, procedures, and practices that discriminate, exclude, or disadvantage racially marginalised people.

*"Fixed term contracts (which have grown in numbers in the last 2 years) are disproportionately filled by people of colour."*

## INTERPERSONAL RACISM

When an individual is racist towards another person – for example actively ignoring or avoiding them, calling them names, and making stereotypical or other negative comments and jokes.

*"I was constantly teased at work by my colleagues with respect to what they called the "Indian head wobble" and because I didn't pronounce "V" or "W" correctly."*

## RACIAL TOKENISM

When a racially marginalised person is used by an organisation to create the impression of racial equity and avoid accusations of racism.

*"At my work, racial minorities are appointed to positions where they are upheld as contributing to the organisation's diversity statistics whilst in the decision-making and senior roles, all the men and women are visibly white Anglo Saxon."*

## 'BENEVOLENT' RACISM

Behaviours that are meant to be or are presented to be 'beneficial' to racially marginalised people, but in fact perpetuate racial stereotypes and discrimination.

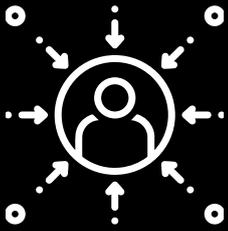
*"I often encounter people's assumptions like 'You are an Asian, you must be good with data'."*

## CULTURAL APPROPRIATION

When racially privileged people use the culture of racially marginalised people for their own personal interest and/or gain.

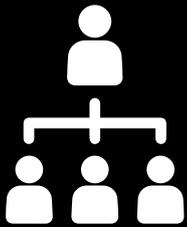
*"Today, up to 85 percent of art sold through tourism markets as First Nations souvenirs is fake and imported. Lost revenue from this major income stream has a harmful effect on everything from self-determination and cultural maintenance to families and communities."*

# KEY ELEMENTS OF RACISM



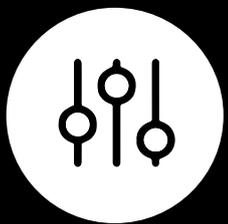
## **RACISM STARTS WITH PREJUDICE BUT ALSO NEEDS POWER**

Racism starts with racial prejudice – forming an unfair negative opinion or feeling about someone because of their racial group. But racism also requires systemic power to embed this racial prejudice into society.



## **RACISM IS ABOUT POWER – IT SHAPES OUR LIFE CHANCES**

Racism is not just when someone mistreats another due to that person's race. *Racism is a powerful system of advantage and disadvantage based on race*, in which some people in Australia are unfairly advantaged (racially privileged) while others are unfairly disadvantaged (racially marginalised).



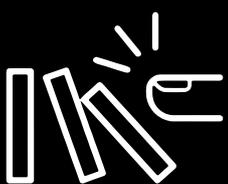
## **RACISM OCCURS AT DIFFERENT LEVELS IN SOCIETY**

The systemic and interpersonal levels of racism are linked. Racist feelings and actions of individual people may lead directly to racially biased organisational policies at the heart of systemic racism, but importantly, they are also sustained by those systems.



## **RACISM CAN BE OBVIOUS OR SUBTLE**

Racism can be obvious, such as racial slurs carried out by an identifiable perpetrator. But it can also be subtle, such as brief common slights in passing conversation, or in the ways it is built into society's systems in ways we often take for granted.



## **RACISM IS ABOUT IMPACT, NOT (ONLY) INTENT**

Racism can occur without conscious awareness or intent. Sometimes well-intended people or organisations can do something racist even though they do not see themselves as racist. The important thing is not whether they meant to be racist but whether it had that impact. While this can be hard to hear, the situation can be greatly helped by acknowledging the negative impact and changing the policy, practice, or behaviour.



## **RACISM HARMS – WHETHER IT IS SYSTEMIC OR INTERPERSONAL, OBVIOUS OR SUBTLE, INTENTIONAL OR NOT**

It doesn't matter whether racism is through unfair organisational policies and practices or interpersonal interactions. The bottom line is that it maintains or worsens the unequal distribution of opportunity between racialised groups – so that certain groups gain unfair opportunities.

**It's not enough to just know about racism, we need to take action (be anti-racist).**

**Below are the key elements of how to be anti-racist.**

# KEY ELEMENTS OF ANTI-RACISM

**“You don’t need to be free of racism to be an anti-racist. Anti-racism is the commitment to fight racism wherever you find it, including in yourself. And it’s the only way forward.”**  
- Ijeoma Oluo (2019) *So You Want to Talk About Race*

DCA surveyed **1547** workers from various sectors and organisations across Australia and found:

**93%** believe that Australian organisations need to take action to address racism

Only **27%** said that their organisations are proactive in preventing workplace racism



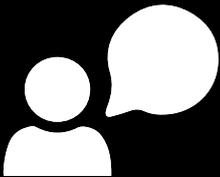
## ANTI-RACISM REQUIRES EVERYDAY DELIBERATE ACTION

Anti-racism recognises that racism exists and takes conscious actions to eliminate it. Only actively standing up to and challenging racism will lead to eradicating it.



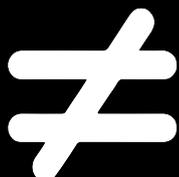
## ANTI-RACISM IS RACIALLY CONSCIOUS AND REFLECTIVE

Anti-racism takes race and racism as the point of entry for addressing racial inequality. Anti-racists reflect on what their own part in racism is, what their gaps in racial literacy are and how to address them, and how they can use their privilege to eradicate racism.



## ANTI-RACISM UNDERSTANDS THE SYSTEMIC NATURE OF RACISM

Anti-racism sees racism as a powerful system of advantage and disadvantage based on race that has been embedded in contemporary society through our history. It does not ignore the racism that occurs on the interpersonal level, but instead emphasises the much less visible and pervasive systemic racism that needs to be addressed.



## ANTI-RACISM IS NOT THE SAME AS NON-RACISM

Often *anti-racism* and *non-racism* are viewed as being the same thing, but they are crucially different. Non-racism refers to the *passive* rejection of behaviours and ideologies that are racist. Being anti-racist, however, means holding oneself accountable for eliminating racism, and knowing that without everyday deliberate action, change will not occur.

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## Find Out More

To access more resources about *Racism at Work: How Organisations Can Stand Up To and End Workplace Racism*, including an anti-racism framework for Australian organisations go to [www.dca.org.au](http://www.dca.org.au).