**Beware of myth-busting: how to maximise impact and address misinformation**

**ZOOM Webinar**

**30 June 2025**

**CATHERINE HUNTER:**As Sue mentioned, on the pitfalls of myth-busting and how diversity and inclusion change agents and practitioners can achieve more positive impact without reinforcing divisive misinformation about D&I. My name is Catherine Hunter and I have the great pleasure of being the CEO of Diversity Council Australia and my pronouns are she, her. It's now my great pleasure to hand over to Aunty Donna Ingram, a proud Wiradjuri woman, grandmother, and respected leader of the Redfern and Sydney community and a friend of DCA's to welcome us to country. Aunty Donna, over to you.

**AUNTY DONNA INGRAM:**Thank you. Good afternoon, everyone. It's my great pleasure to be here with permission from my elders to offer you welcome to country for DCA's webinar, Beware of Myth-Busting, How to Maximise Impact and Address Misinformation. It gives me pride to represent my community in this important cultural protocol. It shows respect for and recognition to the unique position of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australian culture and history. We are presenting from the traditional land of the Gadigal, who are one of 29 clans of the Eora Nation which is bordered by the Hawkesbury, the Georges, and the Nepean rivers. I'm an Aboriginal woman who proudly identifies with the Wiradjuri Nation from Central West, New South Wales. I was born on Gadigal land, and I've had the privilege to live, work, and raise my four children on this land for most of my life. My family has grown and I'm now a proud grandmother to Aaliyah, Elijah, Kalilah, Lakota, Jake Jr, Aki, and baby Kane. My wish for my grandchildren is to grow up happy and healthy in a safe and inclusive society where they believe that their dreams can come true.

I acknowledge the Gadigal, their spirits, and ancestors who will always remain with the Earth, and I thank them for their ongoing custodianship. I pay my respects to our Elders, both past and present, and we must never forget the sacrifices made by our leaders to create a better future for Aboriginal people. I do this as a reminder and as a tribute to elders and those who have gone before us to fight for land rights, justice, and equity for our communities. I extend my respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from all clans and nations who are present today. I also recognise our non-Aboriginal sisters and brothers from all backgrounds who walk beside us to create a positive impact. At this point I would normally say I now offer you a warm and sincere welcome to the land of the Gadigal of the Eora Nation and wish you safe stay on the land and safe travel from the land. I have the same wish for you all whichever country you may be viewing from. On behalf of my community and the Gadigal, I wish you an interesting and informative afternoon exploring the risks of myth-busting and why it often doesn't work.

I'm sure you'll enjoy... Getting tongue-tied and am so sorry. I'm sure you'll enjoy hearing from guest speaker Gemma Pitcher, who will share research insights and strategies to help navigate the pitfalls of myth-busting. In closing, we remember that this is, was and always will be Aboriginal land. Thanks everyone, have a beautiful afternoon.

**CATHERINE HUNTER:**Thank you so much, Aunty Donna. Your welcomes are always so beautiful and warm and always learn something and so appreciate you being here with us again today, so thank you. Can I also acknowledge that I'm on Wongulla land today and pay my respects to Elders past and present? Thank them for caring for this country for millennia and their continuing culture as the world's oldest continuous living people on the planet. And also to wherever you are, acknowledge the Elders of the respective lands and countries on which you're joining us from today. We've had some, again there's always plenty happening in the diversity and inclusion space, and we've had some pride month finishes today, and I have to say there's been some wonderful things and activities that I've had the good fortune to be a part of. And then coming up in the next few days is a very very important event during the week which is NAIDOC week from the 6th of July to 13th of July and the theme this year is the next generation strength with vision and legacy and celebrates not only the achievements of the past but also looks towards the bright future ahead.

And then we've also got international non-binary people's day on July 14th. So, I hope that you'll all be acknowledging and celebrating those days in whatever way is meaningful for you within your organisations. Just for some tips and housekeeping for today's event, we'd love you to join the conversation. You can follow us at @divcouncilaus. To view the captions on your smart device or PC, just go to www.ai-live.com and enter the session ID on screen, which is AUDCAB3006A, or on your Zoom window. You can select hide or show captions via the icon at the bottom of your screen. This event is being recorded as always and will be available on the DCA website in the within the next few days. And I know that I'm going to be jumping on and having a look at it because although we've had a great catch up last week, there's an awful amount that we're going to get through today. And I have to say for anyone who has ever done their own myth busting, do not fear. I know that in previous roles in organisations I've often thought you know we need to get out there and bust some myths, and in fact DCA ourselves have done some sessions on myth busting.

So, I think today is going to be fascinating from our three wonderful speakers in terms of some more insights into the psychology and thinking as to why this isn't always a great thing, and sometimes we can be reinforcing negative stereotypes. I know you're going to have lots of questions, so to ask a question, just select Q&A at the bottom of your screen. Submit your question to the panel and you can also upload. If there's an existing question that's already gone there that you like, just pop a thumbs up on it and what we'll do is we'll typically go to those questions that have the most interest and work through them there. And we'll be going to audience questions at the end of the panel conversation. So, if you can just hold your questions, you can pop them in though in the interim, and we'll get to those just as soon as we get through the panel presentation. And so now let's jump straight in. It's my great pleasure to introduce our keynote speaker today. Gemma Pitcher and Gemma is an Associate at Common Cause Australia.

Gemma began her career as a travel writer in Africa, something which I'm very envious of before moving to the non-profit sector holding senior communications roles at organisations, including ActionAid and Red Cross. She entered the campaigning sphere as Communications Manager for a New South Wales State MP, alongside her freelance career as an in-demand copywriter. Gemma is now a communications and messaging consultant helping organisations tell new and fresh campaign stories in strategic ways. Gemma, welcome and over to you.

**GEMMA PITCHER:**Gosh thank you so much Catherine, thank you very much. Let me just quickly share my screen. There we go. So, before I start I would also like to acknowledge the country that I'm on which is the land of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation also here in Redfern in Sydney and pay my respects to their elders past present and emerging and any First Nations people who might be here on the call with us today. So, yes I'm Gemma, I'm from Common Cause Australia. Common Cause Australia is a consultancy and our mission is to shift cultural values to create a more equitable, sustainable and democratic society. So, just a mini goal there like should have that sorted out by next Tuesday, obviously. But yeah, we help social and environmental organisations change systems at the core by strengthening the intrinsic values that underpin our care for one another and the planet. We use scientific methods to find narrative strategies that deepen people's thinking about these issues. So, that's what I want to talk to you about today, some of the science behind misinformation and what to do about it.

So, misinformation as nobody needs telling is you know, it's a common problem that we have today. We've also got disinformation, which is misinformation, which is deliberately spread. So, for the purposes of this session, misinformation disinformation. I'm talking about them as just one thing together, even though there are slight differences between them. Just for brevity, I'll just treat them as one thing. The good news is that research on misinformation has flourished in recent years. You know, things like COVID things like Trump has really renewed interest and boosted interest in the science of correcting misinformation. So, we've got loads of great science to work with where we work out ourselves as practitioners what to do about it. And we've also Common Cause since 2012 been looking into how to frame progressive issues like diversity. So, we've got our own original Australian research that we can draw on to, which is pretty great. So, let's get into it. What is the story with misinformation?

It can be overwhelming when you encounter it right. It can really feel like you're playing whack-a-mole, and it sucks up so much energy right across our organisations and our advocacy movements. So, let me just before we really get into the detail, make one thing clear. In most cases, myth-busting or directly debunking misinformation, it works against us. So, I'm going to give you a couple of reasons why trying to do that can work against us in most cases. The first, most important reason is that it's a wasted opportunity to tell your own story. So, repeating your opponent's framing, repeating the stuff your opponents like to talk about in your central campaigning communications in order to debunk it is usually a strategically bad idea. So, campaigns that win do so by telling a values-based story. So, think about the marriage equality campaign there. The story they were telling was that love is love. That was their story, and they concentrated on telling it. A million of their opponents had plenty to do, plenty of disinformation, but they stuck to their story, and we see this across the world.

When you stick to your story, and you make a compelling values-based story the centre of your campaign, that's when you win. Where audiences aren't already familiar with the misinformation that saves us doing our opponent's work by repeating it and inadvertently bringing it to their minds when it wasn't there already. So, the process you want to go through when you're thinking about what to do about this when you're talking to your colleagues about it when you're discussing it internally is how far has this spread? Has someone organised you know a huge real-world event based on this myth or this misinformation? Are there significant numbers of people sharing it online? Is it appearing at the head you know as a headline in broad mainstream media or is that just your own perception that it's everywhere because you're looking for it everywhere? Are there public figures with high profiles repeating it often? So, if the answer is at this time well not really, then you probably just want to spend your time and energy making your own messaging about your own story about telling the truth about what is true about what really matters as good as engaging as possible.

And goodness knows, that's a hard enough task without us starting to try and think about all the other stuff everybody else is saying and try and run around to play whack-a-mole with every stupid thing that someone's writing online or saying anywhere. So, strategically, I would say the best thing to do is stick to your story. Why is that the best thing to do? Well then, we start thinking about something called frames and to talk about frames I also need to tell you another thing which is that facts do not change people's minds on their own. So, we know that facts don't change people's minds, and that goes for false statements of fact as well. So, when I say facts, these are not real facts because they're lies, but they also don't change people's minds. So, getting into a fact off game of ping-pong with your opponents pinging you know fact fact fact fact fact back and forth across some net is not a helpful activity. It's not pleasing, and it's also not helpful, and it's not going to change people's minds.

Even if you might change in changing some, even if you might succeed in changing someone's specific belief that actually rarely changes their real life attitudes or behaviours. People are very capable of adjusting their beliefs but carrying on with their behaviour is the same. If only people were like a computer motherboard, we could just feed in the data and out would come their opinions and attitudes and their behaviours. But in fact a lot of the time some of our brains are not much further on than a lizard, and we're not computers. We do not carry computers around in our heads. Much of our reasoning is not accessible to us consciously. So, our decisions are driven by how we feel the vast majority of the time and that comes from a whole soup of things inside our brains, from our memories to our upbringing to who our friends are. So, rationality is really hard work, and our brains aren't particularly inclined to do it if they don't have to. Instead, we use something called neural networks, which are mental shortcuts, and how we make up our minds about things.

So, acting as if people have computers in their brains as if we are fully rational data analysing conscious beings, we're doing ourselves a disservice there. We think we're logical beings. We think we're logical. Everyone else is irrational, sure, but we're logical. We're not logical. Human beings are not logical at all and if you think logic comes from computers data processing fact, fact, fact, fact, fact. The conscious brain tends to kick in when we're wondering why we did things afterwards, a bit like the PR machine of the organism rather than making up its mind using facts. So, the so what of this is that when we engage with our audiences when we engage with people, we treat them as though they're a computer and try and get them to care about something like diversity by telling them the facts. But unless we are engaging with them at the level of emotions at the level of these cognitive frames, we're basically wasting our time which is why we get really frustrated because we're putting out all these facts that debunk all this misinformation and that it's just not working.

So, people are what we would call bi-conceptual and to illustrate this point, I would invite you to have a look at this little picture here and tell me or don't tell me inside your minds what you can see. You can write it in the chat if you really want to but just have a think what are you seeing there. So, some of you are probably seeing some bird first with its beak poking up to the left and some of you are probably seeing a rabbit with its little nose pointing off to the right. But if you start to look at it, you can probably see the duck and the rabbit. What you can't do is see the duck and the rabbit simultaneously. It might feel quite quick, but you're actually toggling very rapidly between seeing a duck and seeing a rabbit. So, this is a metaphor essentially for the way our brains deal with different issues. When we haven't made up our minds about an issue, we are definitely capable of toggling between two different ways of looking at it. So, it's like I went to a party and two people were having a debate about diversity and I hadn't made up my mind, and I'm going oh that's a good point but wait that's a good point as well and that is happening very rapidly in the brains of people who are still to be persuaded which is the majority of people on progressive issues like diversity.

So, this illustrates bi-conceptualism people able to toggle very rapidly between different viewpoints. And framing is about putting a lens in front of the issue, putting a frame around the issue that help people toggle into our way of thinking and help them not be susceptible to our opponent's way of thinking. So, if we don't frame our issue correctly with our own frames, then our opponents will come along with their frames and people will toggle into their frames. If we spend our whole time going on about how the opponents are and the way they think about it is completely wrong, then we're just reinforcing their frames. So, our job as consultants is we essentially look at the frames that are out there talking about a subject like diversity, and we're trying to figure out which ones are helpful or which ones are unhelpful. We're not just asking people what they think and then parroting back what they think because if what people think is not helpful, then why would we say it? So, we're looking at everything that's out there, we're selecting useful frames, and we're going with those frames.

We are not repeating our opponent's frames. We will decide what this issue is about, and we will speak about it from our own position, from our own values, from what we believe and from our convictions and that is how we persuade people not coming up with lists of statistics and facts on their own. You can use facts, but they need to be a character in your story and not really even the major character, if I'm honest. So, a great example I heard the other day was from someone whose job it was to get more bike lanes and pavements and sidewalks in his local council area, but there were also opponents who liked to whinge about how it would cut down on car parking and make it too difficult for people to drive around. So, he got invited on local radio station to talk about this and the host said, "oh great to have you know Jay Bloggs here from the council to talk about this whole issue with car parking and bike lanes." And the person said, "Oh it's fantastic to be here to talk about youth mental health." And then proceeded to frame the issue and to say yeah because you know what we're really doing here is we're trying to make it easier for young people to connect with each other so when they get home from school they can go down the park with their mates around to their friends houses not stuck at home on a digital device because we all know that's really bad for their mental health.

He wasn't going to talk about parking. Parking was not his frame. The frame was mental health, and that was the frame he chose to speak in. So, that would be my first piece of advice. Do not jump into your opponent's frames. Think about the lens across the issue. What lens do you want in front of the issue? You make your opponent see that. Make them see the duck. Don't talk about the rabbit if you don't want them to see a rabbit. We have to spell out why things are important. We can't just drop a fact and then assume OK, well that's that's it now, everyone's got it. Often if you do drop a fact with no frame around it, with no story, with no context, with no explanation of why this fact is important, persuadable people can interpret it in a completely different way. An example would be if you're a First Nations advocate, and you want to point to the large number, disproportionate number of First Nations people in prison, you might just drop a statistic about that and think well that's it, I've made my point.

But if you don't situate that fact within your own frame, which is a story about systemic injustice, racist policing, then people are just going to take two associations, First Nations people in prison away from that and think well somewhere in my mental suit prison is a place for criminals. So, people will interpret your fact completely the wrong way if you do not tell the story behind the fact. So, just to recap that last little bit before we get on to myth busting itself, this is my favourite slide, by the way. You can't counter mindsets just by rationality. People come to an issue, so you put an issue in front of them, you frame it as we have just said, you decide to talk about what you're going to talk about, about what it's about, you activate, and you prime helpful values and once people's helpful values are primed, they will feel some way, could be any emotion, could be anger, could be outrage, could be inspiration and from that emotion will come a decision about what they think about your issue, and after they have made their decision they might use facts and logic to justify it, which is why our supporters love facts.

But the arrows don't go in the opposite direction, they only go one way, so you can't come from the outside with logic if you're not doing that work on people's emotions, on people's frames to make them think about the issue the way that you want them to see it. It's not our job to say what's popular, it's our job to make popular what needs to be said. We're not just taking the temperature, we're actually changing the weather, if you want to put it that way. We can't use facts to engage people in our communications on their own. So, what does that mean for specifically talking about misinformation when it comes to diversity? Well, I would say we want to avoid repeating our opponent's frames. So, there's a phrase called don't think of an elephant, right? If I said to you don't think of an elephant, we're going to talk about African animals today, everyone, but I don't want you thinking about an elephant at all. It's really really more about giraffes, so no elephants, not elephants, not in any way, it's about giraffes today, we're talking about not elephants.

Now, there is a majestic elephant like trumpeting through your brain right now. I have put that idea into your head by saying that it's not about that, because the word not isn't really something that lands with people. We're busy, our brains work very fast, a lot of it's not accessible to us consciously, and if you use little words, like isn't and doesn't, diversity is not about this, or it isn't that, or this isn't the case, then unfortunately those little negating words like not and isn't and doesn't, they get lost, and instead you're just reinforcing concepts. You're reinforcing misinformation if it is misinformation, or at least bad framing from your opponents. So, do not repeat your opponent's messages, even to debunk them. If you want to debunk some misinformation, go out and tell the truth about it, and tell it really well. Stop repeating what your opponents say, and just thinking that if you put the word not in the middle of the sentence that that will work. It doesn't work. So, we've all seen these things, and I think as Catherine said at the beginning, we've all done them too, and it's not obvious, but it is fairly counterintuitive, but it is very much the case that repeating your opponent's frames or your opponent's misinformation is not a good idea, directly repeating it.

We've got a whole herd of elephants here, very well-meaning, but this is actually just increasing the saliency. We call it the saliency or the fluency of that false information of those statements. So, most of the time, if you want to do a blog post called ten myths about diversity, you'd be far better off just doing a blog post called ten facts about diversity, or ten great stories about diversity, or ten truths.

GEMMA PITCHER:
...making sure that you've created that frame yourself. You don't need to put the opponent's stuff in there. It does not help at all. As I said before, you might be introducing people to things they'd never even heard about. So, you're doing your opponent's job for them. You don't tear the headlines out of the Daily Mail and spread them all around Facebook with some sort of fact-based comment saying, well, that's actually not true because of the statistic that I found. This is not compelling. It's not the way to do it. So, in rare, on rare occasions, you might be forced to directly address misinformation 'cause you're probably thinking, well, that's all very well, Gemma. But sometimes people come to me with this misinformation and ask me if it's true, or bring it up to me in a way that I can't get out of, and I shouldn't get out of 'cause I need to answer. I need to give people answers. I need to give them attention. In that case, there's a few different ways to make your truth more sort of compelling and more truthy, which we can get into, but this is one that I think is really quite useful.

And we call it the truth sandwich. So, this is, as I say, when you are directly confronted with some misinformation, maybe you went and did some media or someone in your organisation or someone in the community has come to you and said, well, isn't it true that X, Y, Z, whatever that misinformation might be. So, if you are put on the spot, again, try to avoid repeating the inaccurate or misleading information. You can allude to it, but don't actually say it because the more times it's said, the more salience it gets and the more those people will come away from that, you know, experience, slightly remembering it and perhaps believing it. So, start with the truth. Say what you want to say through the frame, you want to say it through a bit like the guy on the radio saying, "I'm here to talk about how great these pavements are going to be for mental health." That is what you're here to talk about. Start with that. You can then flag that misinformation is on the way. You can say, look, we're hearing other things being talked about.

I'm not sure why, maybe people want us to think about anything apart from the fact that, you know, in our town, the kids have got nowhere to go, because to me, that's the most important thing. Maybe they're trying to distract attention. Who knows? Maybe they, you know, they've got vested interests. We're not sure. There's all sorts of reasons. Maybe it's just a misunderstanding about what we're saying. So, you're not repeating it, but you're putting it into context, and then you go back to your truth again. So, the bottom of the sandwich is the truth again. So, that is a technique to address misinformation that you can use when put on the spot. The reason there's a little flag in that burger, in that sandwich called value, is because it really helps to state a value that you think everybody shares before you start talking about the issue. You say, well, yeah, I mean, of course, what we can all agree on, of course, you know, is that the people of this town need to be able to, like, walk around and enjoy their lives and visit each other without worrying about road safety.

That's something you can bring up at the beginning, but move to your truth, address the misinformation, expose the strategy, if there's a strategy behind it. Sometimes it's a mistake. Its people are misinformed, and sometimes it's disinformation, and somebody's deliberately spreading it. Another example would be if you were doing a campaign to have a health warning sticker on alcohol bottles. So, there was a camp, a quite successful campaign a few years ago, wanted to put a warning sticker on alcohol bottles that says, "Don't drink while pregnant." And a lot of alcohol industry pushed back and said, oh, no, this will cost us far too much money. Now, they didn't, the advocates didn't believe it would. They could have spent the whole conversation creating more and more financial models about how much it would cost the alcohol industry and how it wouldn't really cost too much money at all. And really, look, here's another graph. But instead, they choose to talk about babies being born healthy.

That's their frame. That's what they're there to talk about. And they could say, well, maybe the alcohol industry wants us to think about anything apart from the fact that babies are born healthily, which is what we all want. And on they went. And they had plenty of allies in the alcohol industry, by the way. There were plenty of people in the alcohol industry who also wanted those stickers to be added, which they were. So, that's an example of the truth sandwich. That's probably my time. I just wanted to leave you before we go to questions in discussions with a little bit of further reading 'cause, of course, I've only touched the surface of this, and we'll talk about it a little bit more in a minute. But if you are interested in this and you would like to do some more reading of your own, then "The Debunking Handbook" is like a terrific resource, a really comprehensive resource with heaps of science behind it. "Don't Think of an Elephant" by George Lakoff, a very entertaining read from the States.

And then closer to home, a really excellent book by Jess Berentson-Shaw from New Zealand called "A Matter of Fact." So, we'll send these resources rounds as links afterwards and I highly recommend you having a look at them. You can also chat to us at Common Cause. We'd love to hear about what your challenges are and your misinformation. We do trainings and things like that, consultancy. So, if you're interested in that. Again, we'll send that link around and we'd really like to hear from you. So, that's great. Let's hear what everybody thinks. I'll stop my share so we can all see each other.

**CATHERINE HUNTER:**Thank you, Gemma. Fascinating. I think if I can just share some of my key takeouts and there's a lot of grit and stick to your story. I mean, spot on. It's easy to remember that just stick to your story as you say, and using a values based story as well, which I love. Facts don't change people's minds on their own, which is another great one. And maybe it kind of occurred to me that when we talk about changing people's hearts and minds, that actually that emotional piece is so important to coming in there and the emotional response that we feel. It really made me think of that hearts and minds sort of concept by conceptualism, which is something I didn't know about, ability to toggle into two different viewpoints, but the real importance to frame things so well. And don't jump into your opponent's frame. I just think it's fantastic. You know, really that, yeah, again, don't repeat the opponent's message or you might reinforcement, enforce it, and then a very helpful concept, the truth sandwich.

But also, I love that that piece around stating a value that everyone shares. I think if we can think about the story we want to tell, link it to values. I think they're really, really practical and helpful tools for how we can actually start to communicate and frame our message. So, really wonderful. Thank you so much. I know we're going to have heaps more questions, but I now would love to bring in our other panellists. So, Eryn Newman. Eryn is the Associate Director, Education in Psychology and Associate Professor in Psychology at ANU. Eryn is also a cognitive psychologist with expertise in human memory and truth perception, and how these cognitive processes can go awry. And also Tash Freeburn, Senior Advisor, the Behavioural Insights Team. Tash is a behavioural science consultant with ten years' experience in HR and management consulting, specialising in evidence-based behaviour change in work organisations and careers. So, welcome, Eryn and Tash, to the conversation as well. Eryn, I want to start with you.

Why are people prone to believe misinformation?

**ERYN NEWMAN:**Thanks, Catherine. Just in joining the panel, I want to acknowledge the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people from the Canberra region, and just reflect on that beautiful welcome from Aunty Donna at the beginning. Gemma, great presentation. Really enjoyed that. So, when it comes to, you know, why are people prone to misinformation? There are several reasons. So, I'm just going to highlight a few here today. The first is that sort of surprisingly in most context, people have a default to believe information that they encounter. And this cognitive tendency has a kind of social function, and that it helps us support trust and contributes to social cohesion. But this tendency can also lead us to quite easily accept false narratives and questions and claims that are rather questionable without much scrutiny. Another factor that we need to think about is that when we're scrolling through our digital environments, our goals aren't necessarily accuracy. So, we're there to be entertained, we want to be amused, and especially when it comes to social context and platforms, we want to connect and share.

So, this means that we're not engaging in a kind of reflective analytical processing which would otherwise help us to identify flaws or logical errors and argument. So, all of that makes us particularly vulnerable to misinformation. And then from an information consumption perspective, when we start to think about our information diets, we are not always drawing on high quality sources or high trusted information. And so, while in the moment, we might clock or think, OK, this page isn't particularly reliable, we're not very good at remembering that later on. So, when you look at human memory, we tend to remember the gist. We remember the general message, but we're not very good at tracking where or in what context we encountered it. So, that that can make us vulnerable to misinformation. And just a last couple of points, and it gets back to that idea around emotional appeals and the power of that. So, from the misinformation research perspective, we know that one of the features of misinformation is an emotion, is an emotional appeal.

We know that captures people's attention. So, that increases the chances that people actually engage with and remember that content later. And then I think the last point I'd make is that when people are thinking about truth or making decisions about whether they trust information they encounter, they're not always gauging, engaging with that content or that decision in an analytical way. They're often trying to establish whether they trust or think something is true by making an assessment that I think Gemma referenced as well in her talk, a kind of gut reaction, or what we in psychology would kind of talk about as an intuitive assessment about whether something seems correct. However, that's speedy. It helps us sort information quickly. But the problem with that is that that experience of easy processing or a sense of familiarity and trust can be really easily moved around and manipulated by factors that have absolutely nothing to do with truth. So, I think Gemma referenced repetition, which is one of the most powerful factors that can move around people's perceptions of truth and has no diagnostic value, especially in information environments where you get strategic bots increasing your exposure to information.

So, I flagged a few. And that's just a bit of a highlights reel there.

**CATHERINE HUNTER:**Eryn, thank you. Gosh, how often, yes, do we rely upon gut reaction? As you say, it's easy to do. But that's, it's just so fascinating. Thank you. And we are getting some fantastic questions, so I can't wait to jump to those. Tash over to you. Can you give us some examples of misinformation that you've seen come up in the diversity and inclusion space? And are there any topics in the space that seem to particularly attract to misinformation?

**TASH FREEBURN:**Yeah, sure. Thanks, Catherine. And just wanted to also acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands that I'm dialling in from here in the Sutherland Shire is the Dharawal people. And also, echo what Eryn was saying, that Gemma, that was a great presentation, so thank you for sharing your insights and for having me along today. In terms of examples of misinformation, I think Gemma did a pretty good job of putting some up on her slide in her presentation as well. So, I guess some common myths are things like diversity is the enemy of merit, merit is objective, and these two things are in conflict, or that DNI can lower standards and performance, particularly if we're relying on things like quotas or that it's only for minority groups and no one else benefits. So, I'm sure that our audience here today, being HR practitioners, you probably hear even more of these myths than we do. But I think the key thing to highlight here is the types of topics that are particularly prone to misinformation are those that are repeated, like Eryn was saying, and also that feel threatening.

So, if we're saying that diversity is the enemy of merit and merit is objective, then I might personally feel threatened by that if I don't identify with one of those minority groups, because I feel that I might be disadvantaged if we're taking a more diverse and inclusive approach. So, when our identity, it feels threatened and we're in this hot state or in this emotionally aroused state, state, like Eryn was saying, we become a lot more prone to misinformation and relying on that gut intuition, again, like Eryn was saying and things that are familiar and repeated particularly because of a concept known as the mere exposure effect. So, the more times that we see something and hear something, it feels more familiar, we're more likely to believe that it's true. So, even me just giving those examples of misinformation was probably a bit of a faux pas, because I've now just added to the mere exposure effect of those examples. But particularly, when we feel threatened and particularly when we are under high cognitive load, we're more likely to believe pieces of misinformation.

Thinking about an organisational context in particular, we are all absolutely bombarded with information and we know that our cognitive resources and our cognitive capacity is finite. So, when we are bombarded with information, we've got slack messages and teams messages and emails and texts and WhatsApp’s and you know, great articles coming out from researchers like us. There's a lot of information coming at people. And so, when they're under this high cognitive load, they're more likely to default to these gut intuition, these mental heuristics that can lead us astray. And perhaps we're more likely to believe in misinformation, particularly when we're under those high hot states where we're emotionally aroused when we're under high cognitive load and things are repeated. So, there's a number of reasons why we see this misinformation perpetuating. And yeah, really looking forward to chatting later today about what you can do instead.

**CATHERINE HUNTER:**Tash, thank you. I mean, gosh, you're so spot on with that high cognitive load. I feel like there, it's just we're to your point, we're bombarded with information all the time. So, how do you sift through? And actually, there's a bit of a question on that. How can we get better at picking up misinformation? And also, I just want to call out that, Gemma, someone says, you are incredible. So, yes, you are. You all are. So, that's nice to see. And just on that note, Gemma, what you've given us the sandwich, but are there other effective models for addressing misinformation? And perhaps you've got a real life example of an effective campaign, which is something you could share, Gemma, on that.

**GEMMA PITCHER:**Yeah, so I touched briefly on the alcohol labelling campaign. That's one really great way of addressing misinformation. Active transport is doing a great job of it as well. I think social housing advocates in certain local governments down in Victoria that I've worked with are really smashing it as well. They're really not engaging with the lens of their opponents, including in like big face-to-face meetings where they'll be proposing, say, a public or social or affordable housing development. And they'll have face-to-face meetings, where a lot of quite loud opponents will turn up saying, this is going to turn our neighbourhood into blah, blah, blah. So, you could get into this whole discussion about crime and antisocial behaviour, but they're just really holding the line and they're saying, let's think about the effect that stigma can have on people. If you grow up in public housing, if you're living in public housing now, let's just think, let's just reflect everyone on how it might feel to hear some of the things that we're hearing in the room today.

Like, you know, how can you be a human being that thrives and bring up your kids when you are surrounded by these kinds of really harmful myths? Not repeating the myths, but making sure that we understand that those myths are landing on human beings and how that affect, and talking about the effects of stigma. And I think this might be something that I chose that example 'cause I think, although of course I've never tested it might be quite useful if you're talking about workplaces as well. So, just to remind people that having these kinds of conversations has an effect on real people who might be your colleagues sitting next to you right now, or people who've done really well but happen to not come from a majority group. Like, how do they feel? 'Cause when we reflect on other human beings' feelings, that puts us into that state of mind to receive a more open-minded kind of a discussion. So, discussing that social housing thing, the other advice that I gave them that they're finding useful, they say is that if you are being shouted at by opponents, sometimes literally, don't worry about having the argument with the opponent because by definition, a real rusted on opponent, they're not going to change their minds.

So, you don't want to waste your time arguing with people who aren't going to change their minds, which is a percentage of the audience every time. You want to do two things instead. You want to inspire your supporters because everybody needs champions for their cause, right? Might be internal champions, might be external champions, but your messages need to inspire those people. Don't forget about them, don't take them for granted. And then you've got the persuadables, the by conceptual people who are toggling. So, if you are in a group of people and you are being confronted by loud opponents, speak to the audience as though you're speaking to persuadables and supporters because there will be some kind of "eavesdropping" and they will hear the messages just the same. So, getting dragged by your opponents is very unpleasant, but you're not going to change your opponent's minds. And in fact, if your opponents are getting in a massive froth about what you're saying, your message is really cutting through.

So, sometimes loud noise and finger waving and pulpit thumping by our opponents is a sign of success. And it means your message is going somewhere because there's no such thing as free cake. You can't just come up with a message that says something that everybody will like. That message does not exist unless you're literally saying like, free cake, right? Like everyone gets free cake and even then someone would have a problem with it. So, by trying to reduce the effect on our opponents of our messages, we usually just make them really vanilla and really boring. And no one remind, no one remembers them and no one repeats them. So, that's why I'm saying stick to your guns, inspire your supporters, come up with messages that speak to their values, that speak to why they support you, and give them the tools to go out there and talk about it. And like I said, it's working quite well with that idea of people in social housing, giving those people who feel like they're in the minority, something to say.

**CATHERINE HUNTER:**Yeah, thank you. And that's understandably, we rightly so have the love hearts around also thinking about impact of messaging on others, particularly as from marginalised communities. So, thank you. And I've just noticed too, because I have been thinking about elephants and you have giraffes on your shirt, so the subliminal...

**GEMMA PITCHER:**(CROSSTALK) don't think about.

**CATHERINE HUNTER:**(CROSSTALK) Zebras. I beg your pardon.

**GEMMA PITCHER:**(CROSSTALK) everyone. (CATHERINE HUNTER LAUGHS) Zebras.

**CATHERINE HUNTER:**Zebras, giraffes. See, now, I'm off the elephant. So, that's subliminal messaging.

**GEMMA PITCHER:**It used to be an African travel writer, maybe that's (CROSSTALK)

**CATHERINE HUNTER:**That's right, that's right. I like the theme. Eryn, over to you. What should people know about cognitive bias if they're looking to address misinformation? A good psychology question. (LAUGHS)

**ERYN NEWMAN:**Yeah, that's a good one. Well, it's a curious one because what seems to sort of make sense is, well, you could simply tell people about the cognitive bias, and then hopefully they can avoid it. But unfortunately, this is not the case. There are many demonstrations of how simply informing people about a bias doesn't address the underlying information processing that's occurring and thus does not address the bias at all. So, for example, when it comes to repetition, which we've all talked about today we, there's research showing that we can tell people, hey, by the way, repetition increases people's perceptions of truth. Your job is to try and override that. Don't let that happen in this particular case. And when researchers have looked at that question, people have a really hard time overriding the impact of familiarity on their judgements. And that happens even when people are incentivised to do it. So, when you say, we'll give you some money, we'll do other things, we don't see a shift in people's vulnerability to the increase in truth that comes with repetition.

And I think notably when we're talking about things like repetition and how they impact people's perceptions of truth, this is not about cognitive sophistication. In fact, when you think about repetition, people who are most impacted by repetition are people who are paying careful attention to the initial encoding of the message. So, people who have higher things like need for cognition and higher elaboration may experience a kind of backfire where they, where we see a larger effect. And I think there are emerging examples with AI and things like microtargeting. So, for example, when we tell people, hey, by the way, there are both AIs and humans in this list of faces, your job is to detect which of the faces are the AIs, and which are humans. What you see is that people are even more likely to classify AI faces as human than they are human faces as human. So, you see this kind of hyperrealism effect and people have this tricky time overriding this sort of basic information processing.

And in that case, we're talking about people's preferences for prototypes. So, when you think about this broader picture... Addressing the information processing tendencies are really hard to overcome. And we've even looked at this with providing people other forms of information they could rely on. So when we give people a context where they're asked to evaluate, would they hand their credit card details over to this particular eBay seller? And we give people their previous ratings from consumers and we give them information about the person's name. We find that people rely on the pronunciation ease of the name at the same time, even when they have diagnostic information that they could otherwise draw on. So these biases are really tricky to override. And for that reason, we've spent a lot of time thinking about how can you, and it connects very nicely with what Gemma has been talking about. How can you increase the chances that the truth sticks and the myths fade? We've spent time thinking about how you can leverage understanding of cognitive psychology to increase the chances that people remember what is true, rather than trying to unwind, address, and do all these other things, which are actually quite challenging.

**CATHERINE HUNTER:**Wow, that is really fascinating. Yeah, I'm thinking so many things, but I think we could have a whole, well, we have had conversations around AI, but certainly could be the great democratiser, but until we really use it with care and ethical considerations and the like, also can obviously continue to back in bias and that sense that we kind of attracted to symmetry and faces and things too. But that's all a perfect segue, Tash, which is, and it's also come up on the questions, is how can organisations ensure that the information they rely on is reliable? So if you're an individual and you come across information that you're not sure about, what are some of the things you can do to help that fact-checking? Although, Eryn, it sounds like we don't always want to go to the facts when they're there, but Tash, have you got views on that?

**TASH FREEBURN:**Yes, absolutely. So I think there are two steps here, particularly for our HR and D&I practitioners on the call. So the first is some tips for making sure that the information itself is reliable and doing that fact-checking when we're in that more analytical frame of mind, where maybe it can be effective there. And the second is how do you, in your roles, help create an environment where that quality information is the default for the people you're communicating to, so for the employees in your organisation? So when it comes to fact-checking, really simple things like checking the source, not just the story, even if a particular article or blog post references research, we know that not all research is created equal. So you really want to look for things like large representative sample sizes. So did that study use hundreds and thousands of people rather than two or five people, for example? If there is the opportunity for randomised control trials where one group receives the particular diversity and inclusion strategy and one group doesn't, you have a comparison group that can increase our confidence in what that study is telling us about, as well as peer-reviewed journal articles.

And I can see Eryn nodding. We're definitely in that psychology space, and I'm sure Gemma as well, with the evidence lens that you use, it's definitely something that we value. I do know in the D&I space, organisational behaviour, there's a lot of case studies in grey literature, and peer-reviewed journal articles can be a bit thin, and usually it's because doing really rigorous scientific research in organisations is extremely difficult. So it is hard to find those. And so I'm not saying that case studies or policy documents or grey literature is not important. It's just how do you be a critical consumer of that information? So if you're looking at case studies, asking questions like, who produced this? For what purpose? What's their stake? Is it a PR exercise, for example? Is it a reputable author? What sort of method did they use? Are they making sweeping claims based on a handful of examples? Are they highlighting pros and cons of what they spoke about? And can this be independently verified?

So looking at case studies as inspiration and examples, and then looking for patterns of similar results across a range of organisations is really helpful, rather than just taking one case study, applying whatever that organisation did in your own workplace and thinking that it will work. So using some of those tips to fact check is important. And then the second is how do you make quality information the default for your employees? So Eryn was talking about our heuristics and some of the shortcuts that we take. How can you actually use those shortcuts to your advantage? So for example, we know that people rely on information that is easy to access. If you're rolling out a new diversity initiative, how do you provide instant links to reputable sources of information, so people aren't going away doing their own research or relying on what they think is familiar and accurate? We're sort of sending them to the information that we want to is one example. How do we leverage messengers because we're more likely to trust information from people we already see as credible.

So how do we use people in your organisation that are more influential to perpetuate a particular message and how do we try to slow down and normalise curiosity? So encouraging people to say, I'm not sure, let me check that. Asking where people got their information from like Eryn was saying, rather than just expecting people to make decisions on the fly or be really confident in their convictions on the fly. So yeah, just a few tips for your organisation.

**CATHERINE HUNTER:**No, that's great. Thank you. And it's so hard, isn't it? Because we don't always have the time to fact check at that level, but you know, that's why DCA is so dedicated to doing research and using evidence-based data so people can make those, yeah, evidence-based informed decisions. So thank you. Gemma, are there sort of common mistakes that people make when addressing misinformation? We sort of, Tasha sort of touched on this a little bit, but are there any others?

**GEMMA PITCHER:**I think the big ones are just assuming that it's a majority view or that loads of people are saying it and therefore devoting loads of energy. I'm reiterating what I said before, but like devoting loads of energy and time to worrying about it because we assume it's massively widespread often is a mistake, not always, but probably. Assuming that we can cite evidence and facts then win the conversation is also a mistake. So personal lived experience always trumps statistics. So if you are dealing with a piece of, you know, disobvious information that's reeling off all these statistics, I'm looking at research about violence against women at the moment and the number of people in the comments who just dropping huge comments filled with percentages and all this type of thing. Personal lived experience, this can go against us, or it can go for us. So if your opponents are throwing out heaps and heaps of numbers, then personal lived experience will always, well, not always, but it's, I'm sure there's exceptions, but it's more likely to work on people than reams of statistics.

Although people are experts and rightly so, what we found in our research is saying, well, experts believe this. Experts have found that this will work. This approach is correct. It doesn't really seem to make much difference to persuadables. The best way would be to talk about the community wanting it, or most people want to get applying some of that kind of social norming stuff, making sure that if you are an expert, if you're an academic, you're not putting yourself in an ivory tower and saying, I know better because I'm an expert. The public that we found that they're fairly culled by these kinds of like expert views, experts agree. It's much better to say, look, mothers are calling for this, you know, or graduates want that, something like that, yeah.

**CATHERINE HUNTER:**No, that's great, thank you. Eryn, I've now become aware of the concept of truthiness. Can you explain it to us and also how can it be helpful for D&I practitioners when communicating D&I?

**ERYN NEWMAN:**Yeah, sure, thank you, Catherine. OK, so truthiness. This is a word that we have borrowed from Stephen Colbert, who first defined it as truth that comes from the gut and not books. And so in our own research, we've used it to describe the ways in which people can be biased by factors that are non-probative and non-diagnostic to whether something is accurate. So relying on the addition of a stock photo, for instance, and making a judgment about whether a given headline is true or false. So that's when we first really looked at this concept of truthiness, where the simple addition of a photo of someone like Donald Bradman or a stock picture of someone like Trump can move around people's perceptions of an accompanying piece of text. We suspected that that operates because the photograph helps to support imagery of the idea, which we know can be quite powerful in people's memories and perceptions of truth. But we've since found that a range of different factors can do the same sort of thing.

So you've heard about repetition, we've spent a bit of time looking at that. But we also know that simply manipulating the audio quality of speakers in a forum like this can move around people's perceptions of expertise, the quality of evidence and the impact of the messaging. So people are very sensitive to what we call the ongoing metacognitive experience. So their ability to perceive, listen to, imagine. And so, when we talk about truthiness, that we're talking about this highly sensitive monitoring of ongoing information experience. And so that's one thing we should be thinking about targeting, but I think it's a bit more broader when you look at the cognitive literature across the board. So when you start thinking about things like, how do you make information more memorable? We're thinking about things like using language that's concrete and very easy for people to imagine. It's using stories like Gemma flagged. We know that anecdotes are particularly powerful. That's also why they're problematic when it comes to misinformation, because we know people like stories, they retain stories better.

So part of the response here in terms of making information stick is around also thinking about attention capture. So you're not just competing with people on their digital devices, you're competing with things like mind wandering. What am I going to have for dinner later today? I've gotta remember to do this after work. So we're often even in the university setting, dealing with distracted learners. So it's how can you bring people into this space where you would like to focus your messaging? And then I guess the other thing I wanted to note is that many people would have heard the sort of comparison to memory being very much like a video recorder. I think most of us understand that memory is not like a video recorder. And a researcher who does a lot of work in human memory refers to it as being much more like a Wikipedia page. So in talking about events or our knowledge and sharing stories with others, we can share incorrect information and others will update their own memories and include it with what they remember themselves.

So the fragility of human memory is a really important part of this conversation. And it has been where a lot of the research has been focused when it comes to debunking. So debunking can be effective like you heard about with the truth sandwich, but we have to be cautious in thinking about how we target that so it's highly memorable for people in the long run.

**CATHERINE HUNTER:**Yeah, that's fantastic. And in fact, you've just said so beautifully into my next question, or last question to you as a panel and then we'll jump to questions from our audience. Are there situations where debunking is appropriate and therefore can be effective? And that's really a question for all of you, whoever would like to jump in.

**TASH FREEBURN:**I'm happy to kick us off if you like and then Gemma and Eryn, please. To this, because I'd really just like to highlight some of the great work of one of my colleagues, Saul Wodak from BIT who co-authored an excellent framework with UNSW Kaldor Centre on misinformation. And in this framework, it's got a decision tree and really easy to follow examples to equip you to respond across a range of situations. And in there, they actually speak specifically talk about when debunking should be used. So I think it's a really good response to thinking about when we can use debunking effectively. So the two things I would say, one is something that they highlight is that if misinformation is expected, but not yet present, you can pre-bunk. So let's say we're about to roll out a diversity initiative. None of this misinformation is pervasive yet. So similarly to the way that a vaccine works to boost our immunity against disease, you can pre-bunk. And I did see someone in the chat talked about this idea of inoculation and how that kind of goes against some of the advice that we've been talking about.

So I think in that specific situation where it's expected, not yet present, that's where you can do some pre-bunking and there's some great advice on how to do that, such as providing a motivational warning, preemptively refuting what these bad actors might say, or the potential misinformation. And it's better to do something called active inoculation where you get audiences to actively participate in identifying and refuting that misinformation. So I just wanted to highlight that 'cause I did see that in the chat. And then in terms of debunking, like Gemma was saying, most of the time it's better to not waste your time, effort, energy, and resources on addressing misinformation, but there are times when you do need to address it. And in this framework, the authors talk about these three P's questions that you can ask to identify when to debunk. So you ask, is it prominent? Is this particular piece of misinformation gaining traction or visibility, or is it just your perception that it's everywhere, like Gemma was saying?

Is it persuasive? So does it have the potential to change beliefs or behaviour? And is it proximate? Is it really relevant to your audience or your cause, particularly if the misinformation is external to your organisation and tangentially related, you might question if it's worth addressing. But if you tick off those three P's, then yes, you should debunk. And the fact sandwich is such a great way of explaining it. In the framework, they talk about the FMFF method, but I think fact sandwich is much better. So thinking about identifying when to debunk and repetition, use that consistency. I think we have accidentally all repeated repetition in this webinar. So hopefully everyone walks away with that as the headline. So yeah, I just wanted to highlight that. And Gemma, Eryn, please do jump in.

**CATHERINE HUNTER:**And Tash, thank you. And look, someone has just shared the resource that you mentioned, and we will, as I said, we'll follow up as much as we can with the various resources that have been mentioned in today's webinar to everyone here as well. So yeah, Eryn or Gemma, did you want to add anything?

**GEMMA PITCHER:**I'll jump in just to say that that Kaldor Centre report is fantastic. I share it all the time. I think it's really amazing. And I tend to do this when I talk about truthiness, I always tell people to Google Nick Cave Dead. So I was like, oh, I'm going to Google that thing about truthiness. And who did that research? It was Eryn. So there you go. So if you want to look up how to make your information more truthy, just Google Nick Cave Dead truth or something, and you will find an excellent article by Tabitha Carvan about it, which is very accessible and helpful. But it's quite funny that two of my favourite resources and then two panellists I hadn't met before. So the only other thing I guess I wanted to share about when you should debunk or not is that even if you think you should debunk, that doesn't necessarily mean jumping into your opponent's frame and repeating their information. So, you can do this thing which Tash touched on called pre-bunking or inoculation. So, I thought I'd just give you two examples 'cause examples are how I learned.

So, one example is Joe Biden. Joe Biden back in the day when he was a bit more sprightly running for president the first time. And he, some Fox News rumour started about how he was going to say that all Americans could only eat hamburgers once a month 'cause he'd just been taken over by crazed woke vegans or something, right? Who knows? So, this accusation started flying around conservative news channels. He's going to ban our burgers. Biden's going to ban the burger. He's going to stop us all eating our good American barbecues, OK? So, they had a choice at this point that week, his team, they could have jumped all over that story and they could have gone out on the news, and they could have said, that's not true at all. Joe Biden is not banning meat. He's not banning burgers. Joe Biden doesn't want Americans to eat less meat. Two effects would have happened. Firstly, no one's going to remember whether he does or he doesn't because people are just saying stuff about Biden and banning meat all over the show.

And secondly, people who hadn't even heard that rumour or heard that accusation were suddenly going to have to think about, oh, is he a bit too woke? Are the vegans got hold of him? Is he really that kind of guy? So, they didn't want to do that and they didn't do it quite cleverly. But what they did do instead was they made sure he was photographed that week at some democratic fair, flipping the burgers, putting the steaks on the barbecue like an all-American good old boy. And so, if you then subsequently heard that accusation that Biden hates meat, and then you think, that's pretty funny 'cause I'm sure I switched on the telly yesterday and there he was making steaks for a lot of his supporters. So that's like an inoculation that doesn't repeat the lie. And we tried it with a local government campaign I was involved in a couple of years ago where a load of people, strangely, local government campaigns get really toxic. People actually have nothing better to do than like literally photocopy accusations and stuff them through letterboxes.

And the accusation was that our mayor who was running for re-election had gone on holiday during the bushfires. So, the bushfire affected region. This was potentially a damaging rumour. There's widespread panic. People in the team are like, we need to get the mayor on the radio to debunk this, to deny it, she needs to put something out immediately saying I was not on holiday during the bushfires. I didn't go on holiday at that time. And I was like, absolutely not. We're not doing anything of the kind. What we're doing is nothing. And that was really hard for people to take because everyone's aroused, right? Everyone's in a bit of a state of defence and panic. And the last thing you want to do is nothing. So, the only thing that we did is we used one of those throwback Thursday Facebook posts that she had going. And we just made that Thursday's Facebook post a picture of her in a helicopter with the SES, distributing water to remote communities and saying throwback to when those fantastic lads gave me a ride in the helicopter so we could reach out to people during Black Summer.

So, if you then got one of these photocopied things through your door saying she'd gone on holiday, you'd be like, no, she didn't, I saw that picture. But if you never got it, it was just a picture of her doing a thing. So those are just a couple of examples of pre-bunking I thought I would share to show kind of how you might do it in real life.

**CATHERINE HUNTER:**Yeah, thank you, that's really great. Eryn, did you want to add anything?

**ERYN NEWMAN:**I mean, I think Tash and Gemma have covered some brilliant examples. The only thing extra that I'd add is that sometimes we don't know what the misinformation is going to be and we can't anticipate the particular topic area. So, a little bit of work that's been done in that space was John Cook has got some wonderful resources. He's got a game called Cranky Uncle. And what his approach has been in the inoculation space has been to give people mild doses, if you like, of misinformation, but at the same time teaching them about some of the standard tactics that are used. So, we're talking things like cherry picking, the use of anecdotes and other logical fallacies. So, people actually get a bit of a practice in how those techniques are usually delivered and increases their chances of detecting them later. So that's definitely a resource worth checking out. I'll send it along so we can add it to our links. And then the final piece is sort of this interesting counterintuitive finding that sometimes we've been taught when we're thinking critically to dig deeper.

So, the tendency is if you've got a source and you're trying to establish how credible it is, we spend more time on it and we look more closely. And actually, some of the research suggests that we should quickly depart. So, what's more informative is to engage in something called lateral reading. So, we find a source online, we start having a look at it, and we should very quickly depart and look across at different websites and different sources to see if you've got coherence and consistency across those sources, rather than consistency within a particular source. So, I think that's an interesting approach to think about when we're thinking about dealing with this bigger issue.

**CATHERINE HUNTER:**Yeah, thank you. Some great resources there, which we'll share. I'm going to go to our most upvoted question at the moment. And look, please, I want to preface this with saying, I don't expect any of you to have the answer to this 'cause I think 6 million Australians who voted yes would love to know the answer, but maybe there's some insights you can share. So, the question is, how do you explain the failures of the referendum? And I think people are still looking for that answer. And Roland's take is he, I'm assuming Roland, well, my take on it is that a significant part of its failure is that racism in this country towards certain groups is just too culturally ingrained to enable the development of trust for that group to become more self-determining after centuries of legal and social controls. So, the question, I guess, is how do you overcome the perverse combination of institutionally systemic and culturally ingrained racism directed towards certain groups when trying to argue for even the most modest of social and or economic transformations?

Does anyone want to? Share?

**GEMMA PITCHER:**Yeah, I can share because we've had this conversation. We work exclusively with the not-for-profit sector, so the conversation has been going on for a while. There's not one answer, and I haven't got it, so I'll tell you that now. But as a messaging person, I can answer it only, which is that it is really hard to do some of this stuff in practice. And one of the hardest things to do when you're put on the back foot quickly is to build a strong enough coalition who can all sing from the same hymn sheet, who can all say the same thing. And this is a real discipline, not being sucked into your opponent's frames, not falling into the trap of going where they want you to go, not repeating their misinformation to debunk it. It's not something you can expect to do overnight. And when you've got a really big, complicated issue like this and you've got absolutely hundreds and hundreds of groups and organisations, the people who tried to build a coalition between those organisations did that absolute damnedest, and they work themselves to the bone to do it, and they did it.

But that kind of level of messaging discipline takes a very long time to build up. And with opponents as well-funded as those opponents were, unfortunately, its chances of success were a bit lower in the messaging framework. There are all sorts of other factors that I'm not qualified to speak to, but that's what I would say about the messaging. If you look at marriage equality, they change their messaging from a kind of bureaucratic argument to a love is love argument. And then it took kind of almost a whole, like, couple of decades of having everyone saying the same thing all at the same time across a whole load of different countries to start to getting some of this legislation moving. So, there are all sorts of factors, but that would just be one thing that I would mention. Yeah.

**CATHERINE HUNTER:**Yeah. Great, thank you. And I want to get through some more of these questions, but whoever takes the first answer, if Eryn and Tash want to jump in, just let me know and pop your hand up, and then we can go to you. But I'll try and move through a few more. Another great question. Is there any difference between neurotypical and neuro... Oops, I've just lost my... Sorry, something else has jumped up. "Is there any difference between neurotypical and neurodivergent audiences readdressing misinformation and changing minds? As neurodivergent person, I've noticed I tend to consider issues from a more logical and less emotional viewpoint. Does research indicate this difference?" Anyone want to take that one?

**ERYN NEWMAN:**Look, actually, it's probably not a very satisfying response. I'm not confident that research has fully addressed that question. So, I think it's an important one that needs to be considered. And I can imagine some different questions that could be attached to that going forward around sort of thinking about how to tailor messages and make them accessible and making information available across a range of different sources and in different modalities. I think some people are already working in that space, but I don't think there's strong evidence that I could give you a decisive response right now. Sorry. I do think it's really important.

**GEMMA PITCHER:**Yeah, I've had this question asked before, and I went looking for research, and I didn't find any. So, I really hope that it is done soon because without that, it's hard to say. Yeah.

**TASH FREEBURN:**The only other thing I just want to add to that answer, other than I'm not sure that's interesting, would love to see research on it, as the other two have said, is I think when we're crafting messages, we do tend to include a few different elements. So, for example, and I think this kind of goes to the emotions question that might come up next, we've talked about narratives and appealing to emotions, we wouldn't do that with absolutely no facts and no information. I think what we're saying here is facts alone are insufficient, but you really want to have a whole smorgasbord of effects and techniques and concepts that you're using in your messaging. So then hopefully if someone isn't resonating or aligning to a particular narrative and they do align with facts more strongly, that's also included in your message. So by having a range of different techniques, you're more likely to appeal to a larger group of people, would be my hypothesis.

**CATHERINE HUNTER:**Yeah. Maybe an opportunity for DCA with some research as well. And also, thank you to those in the chat who are also adding their own views on this. There are big questions that we don't all have the answers to. So I think this community is a great space for us to try and work through some of those. I have to say this next question. This is something that sprang to mind for me when we first started. This is, you often see politicians take the approach of not answering the question, not repeating the message, but rather sticking closely to their own message, but it can be very frustrating for those trying to understand the nuance. How does this approach differ, and how do we tackle the false claims without joining the opposing views' frame?

**GEMMA PITCHER:**The truth sandwich is meant to address that, because you can't just walk away from being asked a question that would be wrong. So exposing like how that question is maybe not a good faith question is absolutely reasonable. So, simply trying to go back to your talking points is not going to make you any friends. And it's not the right thing to do because people have genuine questions. But I think there is a fine line and it takes a bit of practice, but the true sandwich kind of gives you that framework and it gives you that structure to do that, to address it, make sure the truth is said in the conversation, but ideally, like, put it in a sandwich and then be able to talk about it. And that's why having that shared value. And when you see really good politicians, which you tend to see where I'm from in the UK, because journalists are really, really hard on politicians in the UK compared to here. And so, they get thrown extremely hostile questioning. And the best ones of all sides, they tend to root their answer in a shared value.

So, we could all agree. I think what we're all saying, what we're saying here, is we could all agree. And if we do that from a helpful values perspective, it really helps to bring the subject back to a bit of a moral high ground where you can't really disagree. Well, I think we all agree that every kid deserves to thrive and be able to do anything they would want for a career. I think we can all agree on that. And then off you go. So you can still address what's being said, but you've created like a moral kind of arena to speak in, which is very much harder for people to come back at you at, and then you can talk about what you want. But again, never repeat. You can debunk, you can talk about how this is being made up by our enemies for some reason, or it's a complete misunderstanding of whatever, but you don't have to repeat it. You don't ever have to do that.

**CATHERINE HUNTER:**Thank you. There's a question here that actually that is very close to my heart. If you're appealing to people's emotions, you're likely to often express yourself, your own emotions and be emotional, especially when it's something you really care about. Or sometimes people will be very passionate when they're talking about something. Some people see this as a weakness when debating a point. Of course, I don't. What is the best way to deal with being accused of bringing emotions to a debate? And I do think this is often something that's particularly spoken about of women. It can be gender specific, too, and people being too emotional in the way they express a point. Any tips there?

**GEMMA PITCHER:**Well, I'll start us off while Eryn and Tash are thinking. Yeah, I have seen this happen. That idea that when you're speaking so... When you're speaking and your opponents are coming up with a lot of quite damaging misinformation, then imagining you're speaking to persuadables, which is someone who's persuadable of your argument, it might help, like, de-arouse your amygdala, bring your kind of level of emotion down to the point where... because it's not helpful to start crying halfway through a sentence. It might be justified, but it is not. None of us really want to do that. What we would prefer is to be able to put our points across, at least while sounding calm on the surface. So, I think that what I try to do in those circumstances is imagine myself speaking to a quite neutral audience, even if I'm speaking to somebody who's being really hostile to me. Do you think, well, is there someone eavesdropping on this conversation who's like, I kind of actually really want to hear what they've got to say.

And, like, I think they could maybe be right. And if you imagine yourself speaking to that person, it could help you to put a better argument across or to remember what you're supposed to be talking about and thinking, yeah, there actually is someone in this room who wants to hear my truth. Let me just talk to them instead, because opponents are the ones who usually raise up that kind of defensive mechanism. So that would be my kind of one of my tips, anyway.

**TASH FREEBURN:**Yeah, something I wanted to add to that as you were speaking, Gemma, is it got me thinking about the persuadables or the movable middle that we see. And my assumption would be that the types of people who are attending to say using emotions is a weakness when debating a point are probably in that small minority that are never going to change their minds anyway. And it's likely that the reason why they're raising that is due to things like confirmation bias, right? You're putting a point in front of them. They don't want to engage with it, or it doesn't fit within their existing values or their existing frame. The way that they're engaging with the information you're putting forward is to say, well, you're bringing emotions to the case, and therefore I'm not going to believe what you're saying. And maybe they're in that immovable section of our sort of distribution. So, if someone is accusing you of bringing emotions to a debate and using that as a weakness, my assumption is they're sort of in that group that are probably not going to be persuaded anyway.

And kind of ping ponging back and forth about whether emotions are effective or not is probably a waste of your time, energy and resources as well. And the last thing I would say is, when appealing to emotions, I think, Eryn, you put it really nicely around narrative and anecdotes and stories, and maybe highlighting more that side of things rather than emotion, sort of on their own, could be more effective. So that would just be my sort of guess.

**CATHERINE HUNTER:**Yeah. Thank you. I think you're right. Sometimes we just need to walk away as well and disengage, right? We're never going to change people's minds. So, it's just put our energy into other things and other people. A really important question here, and I've been trying to avoid, certainly, the T word from the US and other wonderful people around the president. But this is a really important question. If you've got thoughts you can share, how do we deal with systemic misinformation, particularly in regards to anti-trans legislation and the trans community, which sadly continues to kind of come up and be spread with mistruths and misinformation and disinformation?

**GEMMA PITCHER:**One organisation I just really want to recommend engaging with is the Trans Justice Project. Trans Justice Project is one of the best strategic campaigning organisations in Australia, and it's well worth engaging with their materials even if you do not campaign on that issue. But I'm sure if you do, you may be familiar with them. They have created a fantastic resource about addressing disinformation, specifically about transphobic disinformation, which I think is one of the best-written, most strategic documents that's going around at the moment. So, we can add that to the links. But I would suggest that that's a really good one. And they've been unbelievably strategic. I heard them speak a while ago, and one of the things they said they do is they work out what their capacity to engage with at the moment is and what isn't. So, they said, well, Murdoch's going to Murdoch, you know. So yeah, we know we've got this segment of the media that's probably in cahoots with segments of politics.

At this time, we're not able to address that, but we think we can talk about that, have a more productive conversation with the health community. The health community is prepared to listen to what we've got to say. So, they'll be framing this debate around health, and they'll be talking to the health community, and they'll be identifying any of this structural misinformation and disinformation that's being brought into the health community. And they'll be making sure that they've got allies. So, they've just been really strategic in what they're doing. And I think that could really help, because when you have this kind of systemic disinformation, it can feel really overwhelming. So that would just be one snippet. But yeah, I would definitely get involved with their work if you're interested in that subject matter.

**CATHERINE HUNTER:**Thank you. And Sue just shared that link as well. So, I'm going to start racing through because there's so many great questions here and we're getting lots of interest on them. And this is the old chestnut that diversity undermines merit. What's a winning frame for actually responding to that one?

**GEMMA PITCHER:**Well, I'm going to say straight away that I have no idea. I tend to frame quite scientifically, and I have never tested that frame, so I do not know. But there was one element of the question that I wanted to address, which is how do you deal with the conservative or the... So, there are different values that you can prime in different people, but you should always prime helpful values. So, whether someone's conservative or not doesn't necessarily make any difference as to how you speak to them about the subject matter based on our core values. So, I guess what I'm saying is just because they're conservative, don't think you have to say more conservative things to them to get them across the line. That's a general principle. But in terms of what works best with conservatives, that's the kind of thing that I would test. And I haven't done it yet, but I'd be delighted to. If anyone wants to get that project going, I'll be very happy to get involved.

**CATHERINE HUNTER:**Well, my response is always, actually, diversity pushes merit to the top because it forces us to think outside our usual group of people that we typically go to. So, it's actually... Yeah. Tash, Eryn, did you want to jump in on that one just because it's been a big one? Otherwise, I can jump to another question as well. We've got plenty more here.

**ERYN NEWMAN:**I mean, one response to that is finding... I don't know what the right frame is or the right claim is to make familiar, because I think that's an easy go-to for people. Unfortunately, it's shared broadly. And one way to look at addressing that is find something that is compelling and memorable. I think that's where this question is coming from, so I'm sorry I can't be more helpful. One of the things I thought Gemma did really well earlier on, Gemma, when you were talking about finding a common frame, a shared sense of identity, a shared sense of understanding as a starting point for a conversation, can be really helpful in getting people to take the same lens as they move forward. So maybe that's even about positioning the important statement in a way where their shared understanding first.

**TASH FREEBURN:**Yeah, I don't have the answer, but would be really interested to know what it is. The thing that sort of came up in my mind is, I guess if we were developing that frame, I would want to sort of understand why people put so much emphasis on the idea of merit when we think it's objective. But we know that merit is actually subject to a lot of cognitive biases. And so, it actually isn't that objective. So, I don't have the answer, but I think if we were trying to develop a frame, perhaps an interesting first step would be understanding why the idea of merit is so pervasive. And then how do we apply a similar logic or similar values to the frame that we develop for diversity?

**GEMMA PITCHER:**I would probably, until we know the answer, avoid using the word merit or meritocracy at all, because that is a trigger that is going to bring people into our opponents' mindset. So instead of saying it's not about merit, merit is not something da-da-da or merit is actually this or that, or diversity brings merit. Just stay away from the N word for now, because it's a trigger for unhelpful frames. Yeah.

**CATHERINE HUNTER:**That's a really, really good point. Thank you. We've got a lot of interest in the question, considering fear-based emotions tend to be very powerful and what misinformation can tap into, how do we combat that in framing our messages and relying on tapping into different, more positive emotions?

**GEMMA PITCHER:**Fear is definitely very unhelpful. So, I would stay away from fear on any issue. There's a whole psychological thing we could get into around fear and insecurity, but I won't for time. Hope is much more powerful in combating opponent frames than fear. So, if you can possibly provide a vision of the future about how the world's going to look when we've sorted all of this out, and workplaces are diverse and everyone feels included and has great opportunities to build beautiful things, that is far more compelling than waving our finger and saying, "Yeah, doom is coming." So yeah, that would just be my top tip because I haven't got time to get into the whole fear thing. But quite correct, the questioner, fear is not helpful and hope and vision are much more helpful. And we do tend to concentrate on problems too much in our messaging about most things. So, stay away from the problem and concentrate on putting a vision in front of your audience instead would be my hot take on that one.

**CATHERINE HUNTER:**Eryn, you're nodding. Did you want to add anything or...

**ERYN NEWMAN:**No, that was just a thumbs up, nailed it. Absolutely agree.

**CATHERINE HUNTER:**I have to say that that gives me hope in hearing that, too, right, because we all want to talk about a more positive future. And I think, actually, the theme, as I mentioned earlier, is very much about celebrating achievements from the past, but also really focusing on the bright future ahead.

**GEMMA PITCHER:**I think psychological truth is that people don't need to agree with you about the problem to be persuaded by your solutions. So, you can talk about your solutions without talking about the problem. And even though that shouldn't make any logical sense, you'll often get agreement from people who disagreed with you that there was a problem in the first place. So yeah, no need to convince people of the problem to get them on board with your solutions.

**CATHERINE HUNTER:**Yeah, no, I think the comment here, we do need a bit of hope right now. Look, the world is a heavy place, and I want to acknowledge that. And I want to acknowledge all of our D&I practitioners and all people who identify with marginalised communities as well. We know it's impossible not to be affected by what's going on in the world. And I'm hoping that the community of 600 odd people on this call and our wonderful panellists today are giving us all some really practical and helpful tips, but it's a wonderful conversation. I'm going to go to one. I think we've probably got time for one more question. And/or as well, panellists, if there's one, perhaps if you jump in and sort of answer this, if there's any one thing you'd like to leave our audience with today. I think we've got plenty in there. An hour and a half has gone quickly. I must admit, my daughter, who's 15, wants to study psychology, so I'm going to be sharing this with her because such a fascinating field of expertise. We've talked about inoculation.

There was another one here that had sparked my interest. And I've just missed it now. My apologies for that. Where are we? Look, I think we've actually pretty much covered them all now. As I said, we're going to link to more information. We've covered a lot of the things in here. So, look, what I might do now, I might just actually maybe pass to each of you just if there's one key point you'd like to leave our audience with today on the topic.

**GEMMA PITCHER:**OK, I'll do it to give the others time to think. My key point is that we sometimes feel that we need to be really dry and academic in our arguments, and that we think that that makes us sound grown up and not like weird hippies, but in fact, we own these values. We own love. Love is our value as progressives, right? The idea that it's just the right thing to do to treat people properly and make sure they can have the best lives possible, even if they're nothing like you, that is our argument. And if we don't make it, no-one else is going to make it. So, I would just really encourage you to lean into the values that you personally feel in your communications. Don't be afraid of expressing them. You'll find that it's very, very effective. The majority of the population agrees with you. I can tell you that because all the research tells us so. So don't lose heart.

**ERYN NEWMAN:**I think I would add to that that there's a strong body of evidence that supports that approach and that we should be building stories and making things memorable, drawing on facts, but building stories that resonate with people. And I think that most of the conversation today has been about dealing with issues that are here and we're managing and we're thinking about how we take this forward. But I also think it's important to think about how we can address this at earlier ages and in our education system, because I think we need advocacy in that space to thinking about how we can build information literacy and broader literacies so that maybe your job is a little bit easier going forward. So that's my message of hope and sort of call to action.

**TASH FREEBURN:**Yeah. And I guess the last thing I would say is we've spoken a lot today about what the evidence shows us is effective when we're trying to address misinformation and how to effectively communicate. And so, I just think it's excellent that you're all here today thinking about what are the best ways that I can communicate my message, how do I address misinformation, and how can I leverage the evidence? So, using the resources that will get sent around later today would be my call to action when you are addressing misinformation in this space because the evidence is there, so you might as well use it.

**CATHERINE HUNTER:**Tash, Gemma and Eryn, thank you so much. And I know someone said, how do we keep this community connected? We're very keen to look at how we develop communities of practice. So we'll come back to you on that one. And of course, the recording will be available afterwards. So please, when we send that note around with all the various links, we'll be sending you the link as well. And just before I close, we want to let you know that tickets are going to be going on sale very soon for our oration, which is coming up on the 22nd of August in Melbourne. And Her Excellency, the Honourable Sam Mostyn, Governor General of Commonwealth of Australia and DCA, is wonderful patron will be delivering the oration, and we'll also be having a panel conversation after that. So, we really hope to see you there and join us for the oration. And perhaps if I can just leave you on that beautiful note, Gemma, that you shared with us, love is our value as progressives. I really, really do like that. Love is what makes the world go round.

Let's hope we can have more of it. So, thank you all for joining us today. Really appreciate you joining us for this fantastic conversation. Take care. Look after yourselves this week, and we'll see you next time. Thanks very much, everyone.