

MEDIA RELEASE

25 October 2012

VICTORIAN PROJECT TARGETS RACISM IN WORKPLACES

The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) will lead a VicHealth workplace project to investigate how to reduce race-based discrimination in Victoria.

The three-year trial project, announced during WorkSafe Week (22 Oct-1 Nov) will take place in two Victorian organisations, which will be supported to develop effective workplace policies and practices to stamp out racism.

It is part of VicHealth's \$3 million Creating Healthy Workplaces Program which examines how stress, gender inequality, alcohol related-harm, race-based discrimination and prolonged sitting at work contribute to chronic disease.

Race-based discrimination in the workplace affects almost one in five Australians. Discrimination is a known risk-factor for poor mental health.

Acting Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commissioner Karen Toohey said the Commission would work with AMES and Insight SRC, together with the two organisations, to explore how reducing and eliminating race-based discrimination in the workplace can improve the wellbeing of employees.

"The business benefits of a diverse workforce and the health benefits of feeling valued and included are well documented, but these benefits can't be realised while racism is a feature of workplaces.

"We look forward to learning from these organisations about how to combat racism and ensure organisations are both valuing and optimising the potential of all employees," Ms Toohey said.

VicHealth CEO Jerril Rechter said the majority of race-based discrimination complaints relate to employment, with some evidence that race-based discrimination at work is on the rise in Australia.

She said the proportion of people reporting 'not being promoted or treated fairly at work' due to race-based discrimination rose from around 12 per cent to 20 per cent between 2007 and 2009.

"We know that race-based discrimination is an issue in many workplaces around Victoria, but this pilot project will set out to prove that it can be prevented. Organisations have a critical role to play in curbing this behaviour by actively supporting cultural diversity," Ms Rechter said.

"The health problems of individual staff resound throughout the workplace, affecting co-workers, managers and businesses as a whole, not to mention families and communities. There are also direct impacts of race-based discrimination on businesses, including lost productivity and low workplace morale.

"With most working-age Australians spending around one-third of their waking lives at work there are real opportunities to create a healthier society by trialling these types of workplace interventions.

"It makes business sense to invest in cultural diversity in the workplace, it's good for productivity, workplace morale and ultimately the businesses' bottom line."

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Research shows those most at risk of race-based discrimination are Indigenous Australians and people born overseas who speak a language other than English. Australians from Asian, Middle Eastern and African backgrounds appear to be more vulnerable than those from European backgrounds.

Key figures on the benefits of addressing race-based discrimination in workplaces from VicHealth's [*Preventing race-based discrimination and supporting cultural diversity in the workplace*](#) evidence review:

- responding to grievances through formal complaints mechanisms, estimated to be an average of \$55,000 per case
- reduced productivity and absenteeism, with an estimated 70 per cent of employees exposed to discrimination, violence or harassment taking time off work as a result
- staff turnover and recruiting and inducting replacement staff
- healthcare and social service costs associated with the long- and short-term consequences of discrimination (e.g. treatment and rehabilitation, income support payments).

For more information on VicHealth's Creating Healthy Workplaces Program visit www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/workplace