

black lives matter, racism is a health issue

cohealth fully supports the Black Lives Matter movement and stands in solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and communities of colour in the resistance and fight to end racism.

The global Black Lives Matter movement has drawn widespread attention to systemic racism and injustice in colonised countries across the world. Here in Australia, First Nations people have long been advocating to end interpersonal and structural discrimination, and the Black Lives Matter movement has heightened national awareness of the structural inequities in place.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and health inequity is well documented, including disproportionately high rates of incarceration and deaths in custody, suicide and chronic health issues resulting in a 10 years shorter life expectancy than non-Indigenous people. Systemic racism in the health system means that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people do not receive the same level of care as other Australians. We also know that racial inequity is entrenched in society in a much deeper way than statistics alone can demonstrate.

People of colour are also impacted by Australia's colonial legacy of racism and this discrimination has been amplified during COVID-19. There are many examples of overt and covert discrimination and xenophobia displayed during the pandemic including racist jokes, slurs and physical assaults. Businesses have been purposefully boycotted. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and people of colour have continued to experience police targeting and racial profiling – exacerbating a history of mistrust and lack of accountability for violence. People on temporary visas have been excluded from financial support forcing some people into hunger, poverty and homelessness.

As a public health issue, COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted people of colour. We acknowledge that the hard lock down of the high-rise towers in Melbourne did not give residents any time to physically or mentally prepare and would have been better supported by culturally safe and trauma-informed communication strategies and with a health led response.

cohealth recognises that racism is a public health issue. There is substantial evidence about the harmful effects of racism on mental and physical health¹, and that's why preventing race-based discrimination is our core business. To remain silent is to be complicit. We recognise our responsibility to be vocally anti-racist.

¹ <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/population-health-systems/health-status-of-victorians/survey-data-and-reports/racism-in-victoria>

Since cohealth released a statement of support for the Black Lives Matter movement on social media, we have been listening and reflecting on what more we can do to tackle racism in all its forms. We have also been focussed on advocating for culturally safe and community led approaches to the COVID-19 response.

We vow to tackle racism, including within our organisation, and commit to the following actions as part of our ongoing anti-racism work:

- cohealth leaders will actively work to unpack cohealth's organisational white privilege and identify and address examples of systemic racism;
- We will work to build trust with cohealth staff who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and people of colour. We will listen and learn what is required to co-build safe mechanisms to share their lived experience with the Board, leadership teams and coworkers;
- We will learn alongside our coworkers to reflect on power, privilege and Australia's colonial history through training, resources and reflective tools;
- We will embed a culture of allyship and bystander action through targeted campaigns;
- We will develop a social procurement policy to increase our support of businesses that are run by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and people of colour;
- We will act to reduce racism in the wider community;
- We will fully implement the actions within our 2020-2023 Stretch Reconciliation Action Plan.

Our work does not end with this statement. We have a long road ahead to decolonise our own thinking and practices. The change we are seeking requires years of unlearning and re-learning, and we are committed to transparency as we go through this vital process.