

## Cultural Diversity and Respect – June 2020

Mental Health Australia is committed to working towards a mentally healthy community where every person is able to participate and contribute free from discrimination.

As custodians of one of the oldest continuous cultures on earth, First Nations peoples of this country should be respected and acknowledged accordingly.

Contemporary Australia is extremely culturally diverse, with around half of us either born overseas or have a parent born overseas.

Welcoming people from diverse backgrounds and granting everyone the opportunity to contribute their skills, experience and perspectives, is a core part of our national identity and our strength.

We know that experience of racism in any form can have significant impacts on mental health and wellbeing.

Research continues to show that experience of racism is associated with increased psychological distress and risk of mental illness.<sup>i,ii</sup>

Australian research has highlighted the impact of racism on the mental health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples,<sup>iii,iv</sup> and amongst young people of various backgrounds.<sup>v</sup>

Given the mental health impacts of racism and discrimination, Mental Health Australia has a particular responsibility for promoting equity, inclusion and respect.

The realisation of these rights are fundamental to the mental health and wellbeing of individuals and our broader community.

At Mental Health Australia we commit to being part of the change and holding ourselves to a higher standard.

At Mental Health Australia we undertake to:

- maintain a work culture where there is no place for racism, by calling out any form of racism displayed by staff or our Board, enforced through our Code of Conduct
- pursue deliberate efforts to ensure our organisation is a place where people from all backgrounds are able to participate fully, through implementing the specific actions outlined in our Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy
- seek to partner with and amplify the voices of First Nations peoples and multicultural communities, and align with organisations who do the same



- actively challenge and respond to systemic racism and discrimination in our national policy and advocacy work, and stand in solidarity with those voicing opposition to all forms of racism
- promote First Nations and multicultural perspectives on mental health and wellbeing
- consider carefully the negative impact of racism and discrimination on the mental health of individuals, families and communities.

Mental Health Australia is eager to work with the recently established Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia, who will provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership in social and emotional wellbeing, mental health and suicide prevention.

We are also committed to continuing to develop meaningful relationships, enhancing respect, and promoting sustainable opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within our organisation and beyond. These commitments are formalised in our Reconciliation Action Plan.

We are proud to promote Embrace Multicultural Mental Health (the Embrace Project) Project as a core part of our organisation, promoting mental health literacy and engaging with people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

We will continue to work across the organisation, and with the Embrace Project's CALD Mental Health Consumer and Carer Group, and multicultural community stakeholders to reduce prejudice and stigma and promote mutual learning and respect to improve the mental health and wellbeing of our community.

At a national level we will advocate for and promote mental health services based on respect for people from all cultural backgrounds, inclusive of cultural needs.

We commit to ongoing learning, action, and standing for the long-term with people most impacted by racism, as we strive together for accountability, justice and a mentally healthy community where everyone is accepted and treated with respect.

Ultimately, our vision is for mentally healthy people and mentally healthy communities. For all individuals.

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<sup>i</sup> Priest et al., (2013). *A systematic review of studies examining the relationship between reported racism and health and wellbeing for children and young people*. Social Science & Medicine, Vol 95, pp 115-127

<sup>ii</sup> Pieterse, A. L., Todd, N. R., Neville, H. A., & Carter, R. T. (2012). *Perceived racism and mental health among Black American adults: A meta-analytic review*. Journal of Counseling Psychology, Vol 59(1), pp 1–9

<sup>iii</sup> Ferdinand, A., Paradies, Y. & Kelaher, M. (2012). *Mental Health Impacts of Racial Discrimination in Victorian Aboriginal Communities: The Localities Embracing and Accepting Diversity (LEAD) Experiences of Racism Survey*, The Lowitja Institute, Melbourne.

<sup>iv</sup> Shepherd, C., Li, J., Cooper, M., Hopkins, K. & Farrant, B. (2017). *The impact of racial discrimination on the health of Australian Indigenous children aged 5-10 years: analysis of national longitudinal data*. International Journal for Equity in Health, 16 (Article number 116)

<sup>v</sup> Fethi, M. Louise, J., Les, M. & Mona, T. (2009) *The impact of racism upon the health and wellbeing of young Australians*. Settlement Council of Australia, Surry Hills, NSW.

