



Discrimination against Indigenous Australians: A snapshot of the views of non-Indigenous people aged 25–44



Background

From July 2014 *beyondblue* is rolling out a national campaign that highlights the impact of racial discrimination on the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. *beyondblue* commissioned TNS Social Research to evaluate the reach and impact of the campaign on the target audience, which is non-Indigenous people aged 25–44 years. To establish a benchmark for measuring the success of the campaign, TNS Social Research conducted an online survey of over 1,000 people across Australia to gain insight into attitudes, beliefs and behaviours in relation to discrimination against Indigenous Australians.¹

Key findings

Discrimination against Indigenous Australians is considered common

Discrimination against Indigenous Australians is considered one of the most prevalent forms of discrimination in Australia.²

- Witnessing acts of discrimination is widespread, with more than half of non-Indigenous Australians claiming that they have witnessed acts of discrimination towards Indigenous Australians.

One in five admit they would discriminate in some situations

As many as one in five admit they would discriminate when sitting near an Indigenous Australian, or in a retail environment. One in 10 would tell jokes about Indigenous Australians, avoid Indigenous Australians on public transport or not hire an Indigenous Australian for a job.

- One in five (21 per cent) admit they would move away if an Indigenous Australian sat near them.
- One in five (21 per cent) admit they would watch the actions of an Indigenous Australian in a retail environment.
- One in 10 (12 per cent) would tell jokes about Indigenous Australians.
- One in 10 (10 per cent) would avoid sitting next to an Indigenous Australian on public transport.
- One in 10 (9 per cent) would not hire an Indigenous Australian for a job.

Negative views and stereotypes towards Indigenous Australians are widespread and motivation to modify behaviours is low for some.

Negative views and stereotypes function as an impediment to reducing discrimination against Indigenous Australians.

- Almost half (42 per cent) believe Indigenous Australians are given unfair advantages by government.
- More than one third (37 per cent) believe Indigenous Australians are sometimes a bit lazy.
- Almost one third (31 per cent) believe Indigenous Australians should behave more like 'other Australians'.

- One in five (20 per cent) believe that terms used to describe Indigenous Australians that are now considered racist are not that bad.

Males and those living in Western Australia are more likely to describe Indigenous Australians as sometimes being a bit lazy and to believe that Indigenous Australians should behave more like other Australians.

Motivation to modify behaviours is low for some.

- One in five (21 per cent) believe it is hard to treat Indigenous Australians in the same way as everyone else.
- Almost one in five (18 per cent) believe their treatment of Indigenous Australians is irrelevant due to infrequency of interactions.

Many do not recognise examples of discriminatory behaviour as forms of discrimination

Many people do not recognise subtly discriminatory acts as forms of discrimination.

- Almost half (46 per cent) do not recognise moving away from an Indigenous Australian when they sit near them as an act of discrimination and even one in 10 (9 per cent) do not recognise direct examples of discrimination in the form of verbal abuse as an act of discrimination.

Discrimination against Indigenous Australians is understood to be an automatic response

Discriminatory behaviours are perceived to be undertaken automatically without consideration of impact.

- One-third (31 per cent) believe that telling jokes about Indigenous Australians is an automatic or unconscious action on the part of the discriminator.
- One-quarter (24 per cent) believe that not hiring an Indigenous Australian would be an automatic or unconscious action on the part of the discriminator.

Likelihood to intervene and motivation to reduce discrimination is limited

If encountering an act of discrimination, just over half (57 per cent) would say something or intervene.

Understanding of the impact of discrimination is limited

Similarly, understanding of the impacts of discrimination and motivation to reduce levels of discrimination against Indigenous Australians is limited.

- One in five (19 per cent) do not recognise that discrimination impacts on mental health.
- One in four (25 per cent) do not agree that experiencing discrimination has a negative personal impact.
- More than one in four (28 per cent) do not see a reduction in discrimination as a priority.

¹ For ease of reference, throughout this report Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are referred to as 'Indigenous Australians'. The authors recognise that there are differences of opinion with regard to this terminology and no disrespect is meant should this language be considered inappropriate.

² Discrimination refers to behaviours or practices that result in unequal power, resources or opportunities across different groups (Paradies et al, 2009, VicHealth).

Research methodology

This study of 25–44 year old non-Indigenous Australians conducted by TNS Social Research, an independent research agency, provides a snapshot of the awareness, attitudes, intentions and behaviours in relation to discrimination against Indigenous Australians. A total of 1,003 participants took part in the research. This sample is representative of gender, state/territory and metropolitan/regional locations. There were intentionally more interviews with 25–34 year olds compared to 35–44 year olds, the data has therefore been weighted to ensure representativeness of the sample.

In measuring discriminatory attitudes and behaviours, participants were exposed to six hypothetical situations depicting discrimination and asked a series of questions to understand their attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. These covered a spectrum of discrimination from more subtle forms, such as avoiding sitting next to or moving away from an Indigenous Australian, through to direct and explicit racism in the form of verbal abuse using racially offensive language. Hypothetical situations and an online data collection method were used to minimise a social desirability bias that would likely occur in direct questioning.

The hypothetical scenarios presented were:

- Moving away from an Indigenous Australian when sat on a bench
- Watching the movements of an Indigenous Australian when in a store
- Declining a seat on a bus next to an Indigenous Australian
- Not hiring an Indigenous Australian for a job, despite appearing to otherwise be a good candidate
- Telling a joke about Indigenous Australians in a bar
- Yelling racially offensive names at an Indigenous Australian.

Participants were also asked a series of other questions in relation to attitudes and behaviours towards Indigenous Australians and the impact of discrimination on Indigenous Australians.

Detailed findings

Discrimination against Indigenous Australians is considered one of the most prevalent forms of discrimination in Australia... and, more than half of Australians have witnessed specific discriminatory behaviours.

Discrimination against Indigenous Australians is considered to be higher than it is for those experiencing mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression and schizophrenia. It is also considered that discrimination against Indigenous Australians would be greater than discrimination against people who are gay, lesbian or bisexual.

Ranking – Top 4 groups of people discriminated against	Strongly agree (8–10)
People who don't speak English	43%
Indigenous Australians	39%
People who are overweight or obese	37%
People who are gay, lesbian or bisexual	32%

Discrimination on the basis of mental illness	
People who are suffering from schizophrenia	29%
People who are suffering from depression	18%
People who are suffering from anxiety	32%

Examples of discrimination witnessed include:

- more than half (57 per cent) claim they have witnessed people telling jokes about Indigenous Australians
- half (48 per cent) have witnessed people watching Indigenous Australians in a retail environment
- two in five have witnessed:
 - people avoiding Indigenous Australians on public transport (40 per cent)
 - verbal abuse of Indigenous Australians (38 per cent).

One third (31 per cent) have witnessed employment discrimination against Indigenous Australians, and more than half of Australians (56 per cent) believe that being an Indigenous Australian makes it harder to succeed.

One in four (24 per cent) think that those discriminating against an Indigenous Australian in an employment situation would do so without being aware of what they are doing. While one in 10 (9 per cent) agree that they would do the same thing if they were in a similar situation.

% agree in relation to interview with Indigenous Australian scenario	Total (6–10)
Witnessed: have seen things like this happen	31%
Unconscious: the discriminator would not have realised	24%
Also discriminate: I would also do this	9%

Despite this relatively high perceived prevalence and claimed witnessing of specific discriminatory behaviours... almost half (46 per cent) are not aware of some of the behaviours that constitute discrimination.

There is a lack of awareness in terms of what constitutes discrimination:

- almost half (46 per cent) do not consider moving away when an Indigenous Australian sits near them as an act of discrimination
- telling jokes about Indigenous Australians is not considered discrimination by 40 per cent
- one-third (35 per cent) do not see avoiding an Indigenous Australian on public transport as discrimination
- and, even one in 10 Australians (9 per cent) do not identify verbally abusing an Indigenous Australian as discriminatory behaviour.

Males are significantly more likely not to identify several of these specific behaviours as examples of discrimination.

% who do not describe the act as 'discrimination'	Total (0-5)	Males (0-5)	Females (0-5)
Moving away from an Indigenous Australian when they sit nearby	46%	51%*	40%
Telling jokes about Indigenous Australians	40%	44%*	36%
Purposely not sitting next to an Indigenous Australian on a bus	35%	39%*	32%
Watching an Indigenous Australian's actions when shopping	30%	35%*	25%
Not hiring a person because they are an Indigenous Australian	22%	24%	20%
Overt discrimination: verbally abusing an Indigenous Australian	9%	11%	8%

*denotes males significantly higher than females to not identify these scenarios as acts of discrimination.

Up to one-third of non-Indigenous Australians indicate that discriminatory behaviours are undertaken automatically without consideration of impact. There is also a lack of awareness of what discrimination is and an evident lack of motivation to modify behaviour for others

For one in three, telling jokes about Indigenous Australians (31 per cent agree) or moving away from an Indigenous Australian who sits near them (35 per cent agree) is seen to be an unconscious or automatic act on the part of the discriminator.

Those living in Australian metropolitan areas are more likely to describe these as unconscious reactions compared to those living in regional areas, with the exception of discrimination in an employment context.

% who agree that acts of discrimination are undertaken unconsciously	Total (6-10)	Metro	Regional
Moving away from an Indigenous Australian when they sit nearby	35%	38%*	30%
Telling jokes about Indigenous Australians	31%	32%	30%
Purposely not sitting next to an Indigenous Australian on a bus	19%	20%*	15%
Watching an Indigenous Australian's actions when shopping	16%	18%*	12%
Not hiring a person because they are an Indigenous Australian	24%	22%	29%^
Overt discrimination: verbally abusing an Indigenous Australian	9%	10%*	5%

*denotes metropolitan significantly higher than regional.

^denotes regional significantly higher than metropolitan.

There is low motivation to modify behaviour toward Indigenous Australians for some:

- 21 per cent believe that it is hard to treat Indigenous Australians in the same way as everyone else.
 - This is significantly higher for males (26 per cent) than females (17 per cent).
 - It is also significantly higher for those living in WA (30 per cent) compared to those living in VIC (20 per cent) and SA/NT (13 per cent).
- 18 per cent believe that their treatment of Indigenous Australians is irrelevant due to infrequency of interactions.
 - This is significantly higher for males (21 per cent) than females (15 per cent).
 - Younger people aged 25-39 (21 per cent) are significantly more likely to hold this view compared to those aged 40-44 years (10 per cent).
 - Those living in metropolitan areas (20 per cent) are significantly more likely to hold this view than those living in regional areas (14 per cent).

As a consequence of the perceived unconsciousness of discrimination and low awareness of what constitutes discrimination, up to one in five would personally discriminate, if in the same situation

One in five agree that they also would move away from an Indigenous Australian who sat next to them. The same number would watch the actions of an Indigenous person in a retail environment.

Males are more likely than females to state that they would also discriminate in some of these situations, with the number who would move away from, or watch the actions of an Indigenous Australian, rising to one in four.

% who would 'do the same thing' in the situation	Agree (6-10)	Males (6-10)	Females (6-10)
Moving away from an Indigenous Australian when they sit nearby	21%	27%*	14%
Telling jokes about Indigenous Australians	12%	14%	10%
Purposely not sitting next to an Indigenous Australian on a bus	10%	14%*	6%
Watching an Indigenous Australian's actions when shopping	21%	26%*	17%
Not hiring a person because they are an Indigenous Australian	9%	11%	8%
Overt discrimination: verbally abusing an Indigenous Australian	6%	7%	5%

*denotes males are significantly more likely than females.

Additionally, only half (57 per cent) would say something or intervene if they were to witness an act of intolerance or discrimination toward an Indigenous Australian. However, those who have Indigenous Australian family or friends would be more likely to say something or intervene (67 per cent). Those who personally have experienced discrimination are also more likely to intervene (62 per cent would say something or intervene).

This propensity to discriminate is underpinned by discriminatory attitudes. Males and those aged 25-39 years are more likely to hold these discriminatory attitudes relative to females and those aged 40-44 years.

% agree	Total (6-10)	Males (6-10)	Females (6-10)	35-39 years (6-10)	40-44 years (6-10)
Indigenous Australians are given unfair advantages by government	42%	46%*	39%	42%	43%
Indigenous Australians are sometimes a bit lazy	37%	40%*	33%	38%	32%
Indigenous Australians should behave more like other Australians	31%	36%*	27%	34%^	24%
Terms used to describe Indigenous Australians now considered racist are not that bad	20%	22%	18%	21%	16%

*denotes males significantly more likely than females
^denotes 25-39 year olds significantly more likely than 40-44 year olds.

Several discriminatory attitudes appear higher in Western Australia when compared to other states and territories.

% agree ³	Total (6-10)	NSW/ACT (6-10)	VIC (6-10)	QLD (6-10)	SA/NT (6-10)	WA (6-10)
Indigenous Australians are given unfair advantages by government	42%	41%	40%	46%	37%	49%
Indigenous Australians are sometimes a bit lazy	37%	31%	36%	36%	38%	61%*
Indigenous Australians should behave more like other Australians	31%	29%	27%	30%	33%	52%
Terms used to describe Indigenous Australians now considered racist are not that bad	20%	19%	22%	21%	17%	21%

*denotes WA significantly higher than the other states and territories.

³ Note: Tasmania is not reported separately due to small sample size.

There is also a sense that to be a racist is a common experience with 70 per cent agreeing that almost everyone is a racist at some point in their lives. Younger non-Indigenous Australians aged 25–39 are significantly more likely to hold this view (73 per cent) compared to those aged 40–44 years (61 per cent).

Motivation to reduce discrimination and understanding of the impacts of discrimination on Indigenous Australians is limited, including impacts on mental health.

One in four (25 per cent) do not agree that experiencing discrimination has a negative personal impact for Indigenous Australians. And more than one in four (28 per cent) do not think that reducing discrimination against Indigenous Australians is a priority.

In responding to hypothetical examples of discrimination, for up to one in three there is an assumption that those who are subjected to discrimination would not care that they were discriminated against.

% who would think the person subjected to discrimination 'would not care'	Agree (6–10)
Moving away from an Indigenous Australian when they sit nearby	31%
Telling jokes about Indigenous Australians	18%
Purposely not sitting next to an Indigenous Australian on a bus	28%
Watching an Indigenous Australian's actions when shopping	22%
Not hiring a person because they are an Indigenous Australian	20%
Overt discrimination: verbally abusing an Indigenous Australian	14%

Four in five (81 per cent⁴) recognise that discrimination causes depression, anxiety and/or distress for Indigenous Australians. This is similar to awareness of consequences such as exclusion, isolation and anger.

% who agree that discrimination against Indigenous Australians causes Indigenous Australians to feel the following mental health and other health impacts...	Agree (6–10)
Depressed	73%
Anxious	72%
Distressed	73%
Lower self-esteem	76%
Less confident	76%
Humiliated	76%
Is bad for Indigenous Australians' health	68%

% who agree that discrimination against Indigenous Australians causes Indigenous Australians to feel...	Agree (6–10)
Angry	80%
That they are not valued by society	80%
Disengaged and alienated from society	80%
Excluded	79%
Isolated from others	78%
Mistrustful of others	77%
Limits employment and education opportunities	74%

Conclusions

The research with non-Indigenous Australians aged 25–44 shows that awareness of discrimination against Indigenous Australians needs to be improved. While there is a high level of general awareness about discrimination, non-Indigenous Australians continue to discriminate. Recognition of some behaviours as forms of discrimination is low.

Awareness of the impact that discrimination has on Indigenous Australians needs to be improved. One in four (25 per cent) non-Indigenous Australians do not agree that experiencing discrimination has a negative personal impact for Indigenous Australians, and almost one in five (19 per cent) do not recognise that discrimination affects Indigenous Australians' mental health. In addition, more than one in four (28 per cent) do not think that reducing discrimination against Indigenous Australians is a priority. Motivation to modify behaviour needs to be improved with regard to treating Indigenous Australians as equals.

Racist attitudes and stereotypical beliefs such as the perception that Indigenous Australians receive unfair advantages from government also needs to be addressed to improve attitudes towards Indigenous Australians and ultimately reduce discrimination.

⁴ This is a composite figure and includes all who agree that discrimination caused anxiety, depression or distress for Indigenous Australians.

References

Paradies, Y, Chandrakumar, L, Klocker, N, Frere, M, Webster, K, Burrell, M and McLean, P (2009) *Building on our strengths: a framework to reduce race-based discrimination and support diversity in Victoria. Full report*, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne.



About *beyondblue*

Most people in Australia have some experience with depression and anxiety, whether it is personal or via family, friends or work colleagues. *beyondblue*'s work is aimed at achieving an Australian community that understands anxiety and depression, empowering every person in Australia, at any life-stage, to seek help. *beyondblue* raises awareness, reduces stigma and ensures that people have access to the information they need to support recovery, management and resilience.

beyondblue works in partnership with health services, schools, workplaces, universities, media and community organisations, as well as people living with anxiety and depression, their friends and family, to bring together expertise and provide tools and resources.

Further information regarding *beyondblue*, please visit: www.beyondblue.org.au



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TNS Social Research has more than 500 dedicated social researchers working across 40+ countries. We are recognised as the research partner inspiring the world's leading policy makers by providing action-oriented analysis and recommendations based on evidence. Each year we conduct millions of interviews through a range of quantitative and qualitative methodologies to help our clients understanding and track public opinion on a local and international level. We assist decision makers across public sector and government bodies; the media, non-government organisation and major international and national institutions; with specialist expertise in disadvantage, education, health, social services, environment, workforce, family, public transport, justice, immigration and community integration.

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