

Position Paper on Institutional Racism

Institutional racism was first described over fifty years ago and has been the subject of many studies in healthcare. Australian governments acknowledged the deleterious effect of institutional racism in the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013-2023, calling for an 'Australian health system free of racism and inequality'. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), in *Closing the Gap targets - 2017 analysis of progress and key drivers of change*, reports that 53% of the health gap between non-Indigenous Australians and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is related to the social determinants of health and risk factors. The remaining 47% of the health gap includes racism, both interpersonal and institutional, as well as intergenerational trauma.

Definition

Institutional racism is a mechanism by which organisations, such as hospitals and other healthcare providers, deliver poorer outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Institutional racism is independent of the behaviour of individual health system employees; it is produced by the policies, structure, governance, and practices of the organisation. The unseen nature of institutional racism masks its presence from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people during their encounters with the hospital or healthcare service and it exists regardless of the intentions of organisation's leadership or their employees. Fundamentally, organisations that are established, staffed, managed, and held accountable by non-Indigenous Australians inevitably deliver poorer outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Examples

Examples of institutional racism can be found around the world¹⁻¹³. In Australia two recent examples of institutional racism contributing to poorer outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the longer wait times for elective surgery reported in *Elective surgery waiting times 2016-17 Australian Hospital Statistics* from the AIHW; and the finding that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are 20% less likely to receive diagnostic angiography, or a definitive revascularization procedure, when hospitalized for acute coronary syndrome according to the AIHW in *Better Cardiac Care measures for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people - Second national report 2016*.

Monitoring and measurement

A comprehensive measure of institutional racism in healthcare settings has been developed¹⁴. This external assessment tool, using only publicly available information to enhance transparency and verification, is in the form of a matrix built around the key indicators of institutional racism^{5,12,14-18}.

Recommendations

Hospitals and health care services can reduce institutional racism against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and produce better health outcomes, by:

- Including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the governance of the organisation.
- Implementing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health policy.
- Publicly reporting on their outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff at all levels and occupations.
- Enabling accountability, and in particular financial accountability, for the policies and outcomes of the organisation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Using the institutional racism matrix for measuring and monitoring.

References

1. Alio, AP, Richman, AR, Clayton, HB, Jeffers, DF, Wathington, DJ & Salihu, HM 2010, 'An Ecological Approach to Understanding Black–White Disparities in Perinatal Mortality', *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, vol. 14, no. 4, pp. 557-66.
2. Barker, H, Oetzel, JG, Scott, N, Morley, M, Carr, PEA & Oetzel, KB 2017, 'Enablers and barriers to secondary prophylaxis for rheumatic fever among Maori aged 14-21 in New Zealand: a framework method study', *International Journal for Equity in Health*, vol. 16.
3. Came, H, Doole, C, McKenna, B & McCreanor, T 2017, 'Institutional racism in public health contracting: Findings of a nationwide survey from New Zealand', *Social Science & Medicine*.
4. Dickman, SL, Himmelstein, DU & Woolhandler, S 2017, 'Inequality and the health-care system in the USA', *Lancet*, vol. 389, no. 10077, pp. 1431-41.
5. Hill, S, Sarfati, D, Robson, B & Blakely, T 2013, 'Indigenous inequalities in cancer: what role for health care?', *ANZ Journal of Surgery*, vol. 83, no. 1-2, pp. 36-41.
6. Katzenellenbogen, JM, Sanfilippo, FM, Hobbs, MS, Knuiman, MW, Bessarab, D, Durey, A & Thompson, SC 2013, 'Voting with their feet - Predictors of discharge against medical advice in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ischaemic heart disease inpatients in Western Australia: An analytic study using data linkage', *BMC Health Services Research*, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 330.
7. Kenealy, T, Elley, CR, Robinson, E, Bramley, D, Drury, PL, Kerse, NM, Moyes, SA & Arroll, B 2008, 'An association between ethnicity and cardiovascular outcomes for people with Type 2 diabetes in New Zealand', *Diabetic Medicine*, vol. 25, no. 11, pp. 1302-8.
8. Khalafzai, RU 2009, 'Racial Discrimination and Health', *Chisholm Health Ethics Bulletin*, vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 9-12.
9. Moore, SP, Green, AC, Bray, F, Garvey, G, Coory, M, Martin, J & Valery, PC 2014, 'Survival disparities in Australia: an analysis of patterns of care and comorbidities among indigenous and non-indigenous cancer patients', *BMC Cancer*, vol. 14, no. 1, p. 517.
10. Prather, C, Fuller, TR, Marshall, KJ & Jeffries, WL 2016, 'The Impact of Racism on the Sexual and Reproductive Health of African American Women', *Journal of Women's Health*, vol. 25, no. 7, pp. 664-71.
11. Ramaswamy, M & Kelly, PJ 2015, 'Institutional Racism as a Critical Social Determinant of Health', *Public Health Nursing*, vol. 32, no. 4, pp. 285-6.
12. Serbin, JW & Donnelly, E 2016, 'The Impact of Racism and Midwifery's Lack of Racial Diversity: A Literature Review', *Journal of Midwifery & Women's Health*, vol. 61, no. 6, pp. 694-706.
13. Williams, DR & Mohammed, SA 2009, 'Discrimination and racial disparities in health: evidence and needed research', *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, vol. 32, no. 1, pp. 20-47.
14. Marrie, A & Marrie, H 2014, *A Matrix for Identifying, Measuring and Monitoring Institutional Racism within Public Hospitals and Health Services*, Bukal Consultancy Services P/L.
15. Came, H & Humphries, M 2014, 'Mopping up institutional racism: activism on a napkin', *The Journal of Corporate Citizenship*, no. 54, p. 95.
16. Came, H & McCreanor, T 2015, 'Pathways to Transform Institutional (and Everyday) Racism in New Zealand', *Sites*.
17. Holland, C 2014 *Close the Gap: Progress and Priorities Report 2014*, The Close the Gap Steering Committee, Australian Human Rights Commission, Sydney
18. Wise, M 2008, 'Health promotion in Australia: Reviewing the past and looking to the future', *Critica*

National Health Leadership Forum Membership

1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation
2. Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association
3. Australian Indigenous Psychologists' Association
4. Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives
5. Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia (2020)
6. Indigenous Allied Health Australia
7. Indigenous Dentists' Association of Australia
8. The Lowitja Institute
9. National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers' Association
10. National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership in Mental Health
11. National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
12. National Association of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Physiotherapists
13. Torres Strait Regional Authority