



As I have loved you – Addressing racism against First Peoples

February 2026

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

John 13:34

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Gal 3:26-28

Covenanting is the theologically informed Walking Together and healing of First and Second Peoples in the life of the Uniting Church. This Walking Together, or journey, is lived out in how we, as the People of God, express our faithful witness to the gospel. It is an intentional response to our missional call to discern how to be a just and uniquely Australian church on colonised land. An outworking of Covenanting is to support measures to address racism against First Peoples.

In September 2025, the University of Technology Sydney and the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) released a report, *“Health Inequalities in Australia. A Scoping Review on the Impact of Racism on Indigenous and Other Negatively Racialised Communities’ Health Outcomes and Healthcare Access.”* The report states that racism is a pervasive determinant of health that undermines the health and well-being of individuals and communities. It contributes to the onset and progression of social, emotional, psychological and physical ill-health. The persistent nature of racism within society prevents individuals from achieving recovery and optimal health outcomes.

Recommendations from the report included:

- Continue to encourage health programs led by First Peoples, as the evidence supports that community-led initiatives better address the unique health needs of these populations;
- Develop and enforce national standards that mandate culturally safe environments within healthcare, promoting respect and understanding of Indigenous health perspectives;
- Establish guidelines and toolkits to assist health and social services to ensure non-discriminatory treatment, addressing racial biases in service delivery;
- Facilitate co-design in public health and social services, giving meaningful input from First Peoples to the design of services they need to access;
- Conduct research into how racism deters First Peoples from accessing social services; and,
- Research into what works in anti-racism practices in schools.

In June 2025, the Commonwealth Government's Australian Institute for Health and Welfare (AIHW) released a report, *“Relationship between systemic anti-Indigenous racism and social and emotional wellbeing and mental health: recent national and international evidence, policy and programs.”* The report found that systemic racism against First Peoples is culturally and historically unique and not the same as other forms of systemic racism in Australia. Exposure to such racism has negative impacts on the social and emotional well-being, health and mental health of First Peoples. The strategies that governments in Australia have adopted to address racism against First Peoples are ad hoc and contain silos, lack accountability and rigorous evaluation and are poorly resourced. Systemic racism against First Peoples seems to be concentrated in rural and remote areas and correlates with higher levels of mental health challenges and suicide.

The report found that what worked to address systemic racism against First Peoples was:



- Ensuring self-determination;
- First Nations leadership over the design and delivery of strategies combating systemic racism;
- Long-term local interventions that are led by First Peoples and use participatory research methods; and,
- Policies and laws that promote inclusion and dismantle systemic injustice.

It recommended the following areas for improvement in curbing systemic racism against First Peoples:

- Truth-telling about local colonial history and ongoing colonial impacts of systemic racism against First Peoples;
- First Nations governance over the measurement of systemic racism against First Peoples;
- Rigorous and ongoing evaluation of the institutional impacts of Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs) developed by corporations. The RAPs should include authentic social responsibility towards all First Nations people and communities impacted by organisations and not just those who work for them. The RAPs should also be locally designed with strong First Peoples governance;
- A coherent First Peoples-led and designed national anti-racism policy; and,
- Implementing the UN Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The work of the AIHW contrasted with the report by the University of Technology Sydney and the AHRC in finding that cultural safety training in workplaces was usually ineffective in addressing systemic racism against First Peoples, as it is often poorly designed and rarely sustained. The AIHW also disagreed with the AHRC in that it argued that including First Peoples in strategies to address racism against culturally and linguistically diverse people or racially marginalised groups will fail to adequately address the specific kinds of systemic racism First Peoples endure across generations and in their own country.

What You Can Do

Write polite and respectful letters to:

Senator The Hon Malarndirri McCarthy

Minister for Indigenous Australians
PO Box 6100
Senate
Parliament House
Canberra, ACT, 2600

Salutation: Dear Minister

The Hon Rebecca White MP

Assistant Minister for Indigenous Health
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra, ACT, 2600

Salutation: Dear Assistant Minister

Points to make in your letters:

- Express deep concern at ongoing racism against First Peoples.
- Note that such racism negatively impacts the mental health and social and emotional well-being of First Peoples.
- Ask what actions the Australian Government has taken to implement the recommendations of the University of Technology Sydney and the Australian Human Rights Commission report, *“Health Inequalities in Australia. A Scoping Review on the Impact of Racism on Indigenous and Other Negatively Racialised Communities’ Health Outcomes and Healthcare Access”* and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report, *“Relationship between systemic anti-Indigenous racism and social and emotional wellbeing and mental health: recent national and international evidence, policy and programs.”*
- You might want to urge the implementation of specific recommendations outlined above.