TOWARDS IMPROVED

ANTI-RACISM SUPPORT

IN CASEY AND GREATER DANDENONG

A multi-stakeholder responsibility

led by community voices

MARIO PEUCKER AND TOM CLARK

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY | City of **Casey** | GREATER DANDENONG *City of Opportunity*

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

In the spirit of reconciliation, we acknowledge and recognise the Traditional Owners of the Kulin Nation lands and the continuation of cultural, spiritual and educational practices of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We pay our respect to Elders, past and present, and future leaders, and we extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the support of the City of Casey and the City of Greater Dandenong. Not only did the two councils jointly fund this work, but they also provided indispensable support throughout the project. Special thanks go to the project team members Peter Johnstone, Marek Krol and Sarah Fowler (City of Greater Dandenong) as well as Courtney Boi, Sadia Ali, Pradeep Peteti and Aboriginal Engagement Diversity and Inclusion Unit staff (City of Casey). We also would like to extend our gratitude to Monica Forson from the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC), Hashwina Vimalarajan, Shout Out speaker at the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY), and Peter Mamer Aguto from the Multicultural Youth Support Services in Victoria (MYSS) for their contributions to our community forums.

We are particularly indebted to the peer facilitators for their fantastic job organising and moderating the community focus groups and to the many community organisations and service providers for their commitment and support. Most importantly, we would like to express our deep appreciation and gratitude to the many people from the local communities who have shared their experiences and knowledge through the survey, the focus groups or the community forums. We never took for granted the trust you have put in us and in this project, and we sincerely hope the outcome will not disappoint you.

This project was a truly collaborative effort.

Readers may find some of the content of this report, in particular accounts of racism, distressing.

STATEMENT FROM THE CITY OF CASEY

The City of Casey is home to a remarkable diversity of cultures, languages, faiths, identities, landscapes, and stories.

From our First Australians to our most recent arrivals and every wave between, the City of Casey welcomes and represents all community members and their respective ambitions to live healthy, rewarding and happy lives.

As one of the fastest growing Council areas in Victoria, the City of Casey is home to an estimated 365,200 residents (ABS 2021), with over 150 different cultures, more than 140 languages spoken and over 120 different faiths represented. We recognise Casey's diversity as our strength and we aim to share, nurture, and celebrate it.

The City of Casey is committed to creating a safe and equal community where everyone regardless of gender, ethnicity and age feels valued, respected and can live free from discrimination and racial abuse.

This research shows that some communities in Casey continue to experience stigmatisation, marginalisation, harassment and abuse because of their ethnicity, cultural or religious background. We know that this behaviour not only affects the individual but also has negative implications for intergroup relationships, trust and the cohesiveness of society at large.

We also know that those who experience racism often do not know where to turn to for support and tend to refrain, for various reasons, from reporting what they have experienced. This can further aggravate their sense of disempowerment and have severe long-term effects on their sense of belonging and mental health.

Underreporting makes it impossible for Councils and community groups to understand the actual scope and specific nature of racist incidents in the community – which makes the development of effective measures and initiatives to counter these forms of exclusion and discrimination difficult.

We recognise the need for adequate support services to be tailored to the specific needs and expectations of the people who live, work or socialise in Casey.

Thanks to this collaboration between the City of Casey, City of Greater Dandenong and Victoria University (VU), the teams have identified the gaps in existing support services and reporting barriers for residents who have experienced racism. As a result, VU have developed a roadmap towards setting up accessible community-led networks that can provide support and referral services for those in Greater Dandenong and Casey who have experienced racism.

We look forward to continuing working with our partners to build on these recommendations to tackle discrimination and racial abuse, while creating a safe and equal community for all.

Noelene Duff PSM,
City of Casey Chair of Administrators

STATEMENT FROM GREATER DANDENONG COUNCIL

The City of Greater Dandenong is the most culturally and linguistically diverse municipality in Australia, with residents from 157 birthplaces and 64 per cent of its population born overseas, representing all faiths and religions practiced in Australia. There are over 200 languages and dialects spoken within the municipality.

Social cohesion, which often refers to the sense of belonging amongst community members, and the relationships that consist between those members, plays an integral role in fostering a culture of respect and harmony in Greater Dandenong.

Council is proud of its multicultural community and takes great efforts to celebrate its diversity. However, it is also sadly aware that racism percolates through to members of our community on a daily basis, often left unreported and dismissed.

One way in which Greater Dandenong Council has taken steps to address racism and discrimination within the community, has been to partner with Victoria University and the City of Casey, so to better understand peoples' experiences of racism and how to improve reporting pathways.

Council is committed to continuing the progress made thus far and will work with community to ensure people can discuss issues of racism openly and challenge all forms of discrimination.

Cr Eden Foster,
Mayor of Greater Dandenong City Council

STATEMENT FROM THE COMMUNITY

I have deep gratitude to those behind the scenes for this much needed and important project to raise awareness and address racism in all its forms.

As a local Muslim woman and Casey and Dandenong resident for much of my life, I have been witness and privy to racist and Islamophobic incidents targeting a wide range of people. These experiences build up over time and cause quite some heartache and difficulty as people are not accepted and valued for who they are. From witnessing young children in hijab attacked in public, to hijabs being torn off and cars with young families driven off the road, these incidents have an undeniable impact on those around us.

Unfortunately, these incidents have also occurred locally, and hate has reared its ugly head many times, particularly when community groups have attempted to build places of worship, with ugly scenes – from abuse and intimidation to physical threats, even arson attempts. I ask you to consider what life would be like for those subjected to racism throughout their lifespan.

The standard you walk past is the standard you accept. Initiatives like this anti-racism projects are essential to setting the standard that all people have the right to live in safety, regardless of who they are. It helps to raise awareness and identify what racism actually is, how it manifests in its various forms across many spheres of our lives and how it can be addressed together. We all have a responsibility to actively shape our culture and its standards by how we respond to what occurs around us. Not responding is also a response. We need leadership to consistently call out and act against hate and discrimination against all people, no matter their unique characteristics.

Thank you to the City of Greater Dandenong and Casey and Victoria University for this much needed project for our communities. We hope that this project and initiative continues across Australia into the future.
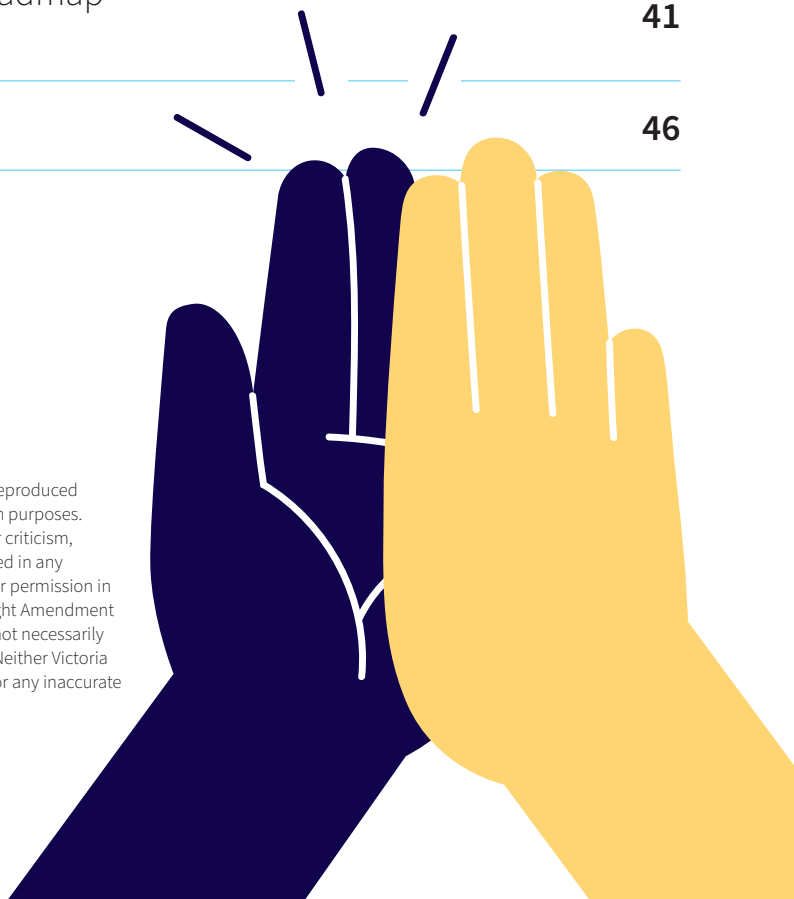
Inaz Janif
Casey resident

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2021, the City of Casey and the City of Greater Dandenong partnered with Victoria University to conduct a place-based project aimed at improving responses to racism in the local community.

More specifically, this research and community engagement project sought to better understand how existing reporting and support services for people who have experienced racism can be strengthened and expanded so that they meet the specific needs and expectation of local communities in the two municipalities.

At the core of this project was the genuine commitment to listening to the voices of those in the local communities affected by racism and learning about:

- their individual experiences with racism;
- their views on reporting or not reporting racism; and
- their suggestions about how reporting and support services can be made more accessible and empowering and better aligned with the specific needs of local communities.

This report summaries the key findings of this project, drawing on a local community survey and 11 peer-facilitated focus groups. Complemented by the input from a series of community forums, these empirical insights guided the development of practical recommendations towards more effective anti-racism work with real-life changes in the local communities. We refer to this set of recommendation as the *Casey and Greater Dandenong Roadmap*.

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THE VOICES OF THOSE IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES AFFECTED BY RACISM... GUIDED THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS TOWARDS MORE EFFECTIVE ANTI-RACISM WORK WITH REAL-LIFE CHANGES IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES.

KEY FINDINGS

Prevalence of racism: Sixty-one percent of survey respondents from local multicultural, multifaith or Aboriginal communities have experienced racism, either themselves or someone from their household, in the previous 12 months. Women and those who have lived in Greater Dandenong or Casey for more than five years are more likely to state they have experienced racism. More generally, only a small minority of 13% of all survey respondents believe that racism happens rarely or not at all in Casey and Greater Dandenong, while more than three-quarters think it occurs sometimes, often or very often; this view is much more common among those who have lived locally for more than two years.

Areas and types of racism: The areas particularly prone to racism, according to the survey respondents' and focus group participants' personal experiences, are employment (58% of survey respondents), shopping centres (47%), education/schools (41%), public transport and social media (both 38%).

Racism manifests in various ways. Many survey respondents (60%) noted they had experienced what can be described as racist microaggressions. Moreover, a significant proportion have faced verbal insult and abuse (54%), discrimination (51%) and other forms of racism, including verbal threats (23%), and some even mentioned physical threats (8%) and abuse (3%). The experiences shared in the focus groups further demonstrate the breadth of racism, from frequent microaggressions, racial profiling and exclusion, subtle or overt discrimination in employment to racist threats and abuse.

Reporting racism: A vast majority of survey respondents (86%) and focus group participants agree that racism is often not reported. Talking about their own personal experiences, only 18% of survey respondents ever reported an incident of racism to an organisation or agencies (formal reporting), while the remainders only told their family or friends (51%) or never told anyone (31%). Of those who have formally reported an incident, the majority reported to a community organisation, which may often not be specialised in providing adequate support; only a minority reported to more specialised agencies such as Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) or the police.

Although most of those who formally reported racism felt better after reporting, there was also widespread dissatisfaction with the reporting process and support they received. Many stated the reporting experience made it less likely for them to report a similar incident again in the future. Similar views were expressed by several focus group participants, particularly in relation to reporting to police.

According to survey participants, the main reasons for reporting was to help raise awareness of the scope of racism (62%), get legal support (59%), access emotional and/or psychological support (49%) or to 'punish' the perpetrator (42%), while only 27% believe people report to 'seek mediation or resolve the conflict.'

Reporting barriers: People refrain from reporting incidents of racism for a range of reasons. Most participants did not speak out because of a combination of not knowing where and how to report, having no confidence in the capacity of the organisation to respond effectively and the view that nothing would change as a result. Additional barriers that deter many from reporting include concerns they may not be taken seriously, language barriers, concerns about negative consequences (secondary victimisation), and lack of trust in existing support services.

Improving services and reporting: Less than one third of all survey respondents agreed that there are enough services and organisations that offer appropriate support for people in Greater Dandenong or Casey who have experienced racism. But participants also shared their views on how to improve support services and, in doing so, encourage more people to speak out and report racism. Almost all survey respondents considered it important or very important that:

- anti-racism support services are offered by organisations they trust;

- services are better qualified to respond and provide adequate support;

- existing services are promoted more within the community;

- services are (more) culturally sensitive and provided in different community languages; and

- services emphasise advocacy for the person who experienced racism.

THE CASEY AND GREATER DANDENONG ROADMAP

Reporting (or not reporting) a personal experience with racism is not a simple decision but a complex process influenced by a range of individual and structural factors. This roadmap seeks to address as many of these factors as possible – trying to reduce barriers and to strengthen those factors that may encourage people to report racism and seek support. Importantly, this roadmap must not create additional burdens for those who face racism. It is the responsibility of other stakeholders to ensure that the reporting process is as accessible, appropriate and empowering as possible and linked to the support that people seek. Based on the community input this roadmap encompasses recommendations in six interconnected areas:

Recommendation 1: Diversity and representation. While celebrating multicultural richness of the local community has many positive effects, it should not be regarded as a primary anti-racism approach. Tackling the persistent lack of representation of diverse communities across all levels of various organisations, however, should form part of a broader anti-racism strategy.

Recommendation 2: Awareness raising. A key element of effective local anti-racism practice is to work with communities to build deeper awareness of what constitutes racism, people's rights to equal treatment and non-discrimination in Victoria, and existing reporting pathways and support services. These awareness raising efforts, for example workshops and info session in schools and workplaces, should be guided by the expertise of those communities impacted by racism.

> **IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF OTHER STAKEHOLDERS TO ENSURE THAT THE REPORTING PROCESS IS AS ACCESSIBLE, APPROPRIATE AND EMPOWERING AS POSSIBLE AND LINKED TO THE SUPPORT THAT PEOPLE SEEK.**

Recommendation 3: Diversifying reporting pathways. A variety of reporting options should be put in place in order to cater as much as possible for the specific circumstances, preferences and support needs of the individual person who experienced racism. This also includes anonymous reporting options, which in part exist already and should be promoted more widely. We also propose exploring the possibility of establishing a dedicated (possibly multilingual) anti-racism report hotline or helpline. Safe and supportive processes of reporting should also be established and promoted within workplaces and schools.

Recommendation 4: Establishing a local community-led anti-racism support network. There are gaps in anti-racism support that cannot easily be filled by existing services for various reasons, including low levels of community trust and lack of confidence in their effectiveness and capacity to offer empathic support and advocacy. We therefore recommend establishing a local community-led anti-racism support network, comprised of local community organisations and service providers that already have relationships of trust with local multicultural and multifaith communities. The primary purpose of participating organisations would be to act as 'first points of contact' for those who experienced racism, offering a culturally safe and emotionally supportive space for people to speak out and to jointly explore further support options (e.g. referral to specialised services). This anti-racism support network may also develop a basic recording template to anonymously record reported cases of racism; this can help build empirical evidence on the locally specific nature and manifestations of racism in Casey and Greater Dandenong.

Recommendation 5: Promotion reporting pathways and support services. Promoting existing reporting pathways and support options as well as, once established, the services of the local anti-racism support network requires concerted, multipronged and continuous efforts by many stakeholders, especially on the local level. The local councils can play a very important supportive role here. As part of these public promotion efforts, we also suggest developing an 'anti-racism support' logo that can be used as a recognisable identifier in any promotion material in relation to local anti-racism measures by the council and the local anti-racism support network. This logo could also be publicly displayed by other local stakeholders, including businesses, GPs, libraries, community centres and security services in shopping centres, to express their support for anti-racism.

Recommendation 6: Commitment of and collaboration between various stakeholders. Comprehensive anti-racism support relies on the commitment of a range of stakeholders, from communities and civil society groups to all tiers of governments, from employers and schools to police and human rights agencies. They all have a role to play in building an environment and structures where more people feel encouraged to speak out against racism and seek support. Local councils and a future local anti-racism support network may consider their role in encouraging and coordinating these collaborative efforts. This could include, for example, working closely with local places of worship, such as mosques, temples or gurudwara, to make them aware of existing support services or collaborating with local police so that they can informally refer those who seek to report a non-crime related incident of racism to other (more appropriate) anti-racism support services.

1

INTRODUCTION

A young Muslim girl has been repeatedly called "terrorist" on the bus to school. At home she tells her parents about the incident, and her mother replies: 'what can we do?... Just ignore it'.

During a focus group discussion, the mother starts to question how she responded to her daughter: 'We do that in our community, I do that too, just ignore. We teach our children "ignore, ignore, ignore", but that's not good, we have to take steps'. And she adds: 'Your child will never come to you again to tell you about racism. She will keep it a secret and, in the end, it will affect her health and everything'.

Others who participated in this placed-based anti-racism project in Melbourne's southeast shared similar experiences, which capture some of the key issues this project set out to address: the persistence of racism and its effects on people's lives, the struggle to find the "right" way to respond to racism and the need to speak out against it. These experiences are not unique to Melbourne's southeast – they happen everywhere, in various forms – but this community has demonstrated collective commitment to discuss experiences of racism and, importantly, explore ways to make real-life changes and respond with purpose.

Listening to the voices of local Aboriginal, multicultural and multifaith communities in Casey and Greater Dandenong was at the heart of this research and community engagement project, conducted by Victoria University in partnership with, and funded by, the City of Greater Dandenong and the City of Casey in 2021 and 2022. We sought to learn about how local communities have experienced racism, but also how they responded to it, their reasons for reporting or not reporting, and what kind of anti-racism support they needed. Led by this community input, we aimed to co-develop a practical roadmap toward meaningful anti-racism action – action with the prospect of real-live changes and tailored to the specific needs of the communities in Casey and Greater Dandenong.

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RACISM MANIFESTS IN PREJUDICED AND (SOMETIMES UNCONSCIOUSLY) BIASED ATTITUDES, DISCRIMINATORY BEHAVIOUR AND INSTITUTIONAL AND SYSTEMIC FORMS. IT TARGETS PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES BECAUSE OF THEIR (REAL OR PERCEIVED) RACIAL, ETHNIC OR CULTURAL BACKGROUND, RELIGION, SKIN COLOUR OR ANY ASSOCIATED CHARACTERISTICS.

We acknowledge, of course, that overcoming racism must be the ultimate long-term goal. The project focussed on how we can utilise existing community capacities, resources and expertise to improve the reporting pathways and support services for those who have experienced racism.

Racism has been widely regarded as a serious concern faced by many across various communities in Australia, Victoria and also in Melbourne's southeast. Notwithstanding this broad consensus, all who participated in this project had their own unique experiences and perspectives to share. Some highlighted that racism is omnipresent and 'happens all the time', other stated they hadn't experienced racism themselves but have witnessed it. Some told us about subtle racist microaggressions they frequently face, and others shared their encounters with verbally and even physical racist abuse and threats. Some felt scared, ashamed or alone, and others were angry and motivated to speak out against their experience with racism. What they almost all agreed on, however, was that reporting racism is often too complicated for a number of reasons and usually doesn't lead to satisfactory outcomes, and that appropriate reporting and support services are either non-existent or not sufficiently promoted within the community.

Reporting (or not reporting) a personal experience with racism is not a singular decision or act but rather a complex process, shaped by a number of – often deterring – individual and structural factors. If we want more people to speak out against racism, it is vital to address these factors instead of simply calling on people who have experienced racism to come forward and report. In other words: while we acknowledge the importance of reporting and the potential benefits it can have for the individual, the community and society at large, the onus of reporting cannot be put onto those who face racism. The participants in this project made it clear that they want to see more concerted efforts from various stakeholders to

- Enhance awareness of what constitutes racism and people's rights to safety, respect and fair, equal treatment;

- Promote and enhance existing reporting processes and support options particularly in relation to their cultural appropriateness and effectiveness; and

- Establish alternative community-based anti-racism support services, provided by trusted organisations in the local communities, to close the gaps in existing reporting and support services.

STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

After an overview on the demographic profile of both municipalities based on the 2021 census data (section 2) and a short outline of the research and community engagement approach we deployed in this project (section 3), this report presents key findings from the analysis of 11 community focus groups with 57 people and a community survey among 112 local Aboriginal, multicultural and multifaith communities in Greater Dandenong and Casey. Based on this in-depth community input and complemented by the views and experiences shared during four community engagement events, the final section of this report offers practical recommendations on how to develop and implement effective anti-racism measures that empower communities to speak out against racism, provide the support they need and ultimately help reduce racism and its harmful effects. We refer to these recommendations as the anti-racism roadmap in Casey and Greater Dandenong.

2 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILES

The City of Greater Dandenong and the City of Casey are neighbouring municipalities in Melbourne's southeast.

Both local government areas (LGA) have seen multi-decade increases in cultural, religious and linguistic diversity in their neighbourhoods, and local communities continue to expand as new migrants and refugees arrive and settle. Each municipality has its specific demographic profile and characteristics which are important to consider when developing and implementing various community services, including locally tailored anti-racism support services.

Using ABS (2022) census data collected in 2021, the following demographic snapshots of both LGAs highlight some of the locally specific characteristics of the cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity in Greater Dandenong and Casey.

36.6%

Greater Dandenong is one of the most diverse LGAs in Australia, with only 36.6% of residents born in Australia

GREATER DANDENONG

The total population of Greater Dandenong was 158,208 as of August 2021 when the latest census was conducted. This is around 6,000 people more than in 2016, which represents a moderate ongoing population increase. The number of people who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander increased from 517 in 2016 to 615 in 2021, which amounts to around 0.39% of the total population, a proportion significantly below the national and Victorian average.

The 2021 census data on **overseas born residents** demonstrates that Greater Dandenong is one of the most diverse LGAs in Australia, with only 36.6% of residents born in Australia. It is not only the high proportion of overseas born itself that illustrates the enormous local diversity, but also the fact that most overseas born residents do not have an Anglo-Saxon or Western European background. Most have migrated from Asian countries, especially Vietnam, India, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, China and Afghanistan (Figure 1).

One fifth of those born overseas have arrived in Australia since 2016; 56% **immigrated** after 2000 and a further 28% between 1981 and 2000. These figures suggests that while large segments of multicultural communities have become well established locally, significant numbers of migrants and refugees continue to move to Greater Dandenong, typically facing challenges of settlement in a new social and cultural environment.

Only 10.8% of Greater Dandenong residents stated that both their **parents** were born in Australia (compared to the Victorian average of 42.4%), while 77.9% declared that both their parents were born overseas (Victorian average: 41.3%) (Figure 2). A closer look at people's **ancestry**, based on their ethno-cultural self-identification, further underscores how diverse the local population is.

While the Victoria-wide census data show that the most common responses to the ancestry questions are English (29.2%) and Australian (27.2%), followed by Irish and Scottish, in Greater Dandenong more residents describe their ancestry as Chinese (12.2%) or Vietnamese (11.2%) than English (11.0%) or Australian (10.3%). Other common ancestries in the LGA were Indian, Italian and Greek (Figure 3).

FIGURE 1: TOP 15 COUNTRIES OF BIRTH (OVERSEAS BORN): TOTAL NUMBER AND PROPORTION OF THE TOTAL POPULATION (2021; GREATER DANDENONG)
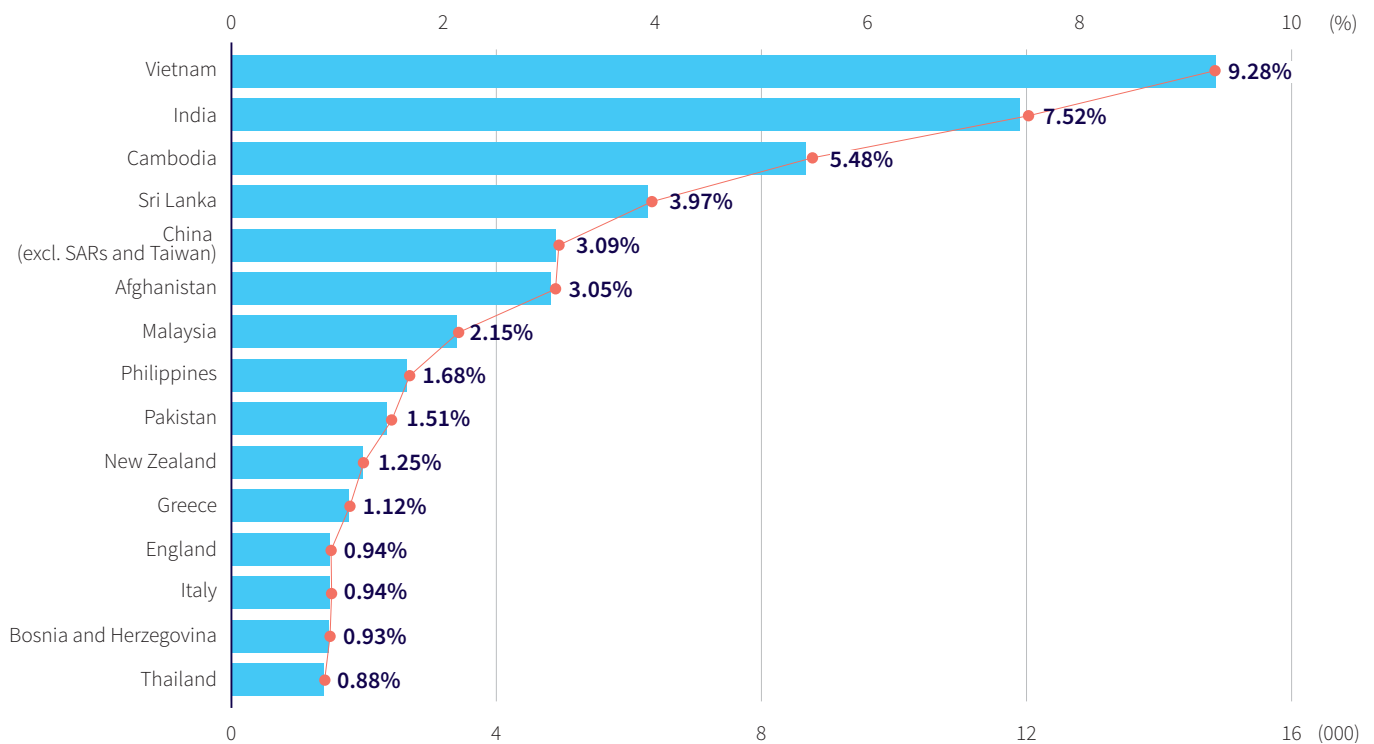
10.8%

Greater Dandenong residents stated that both their parents were born in Australia

FIGURE 2: AUSTRALIAN AND OVERSEAS BORN PARENTS (2021; GREATER DANDENONG)

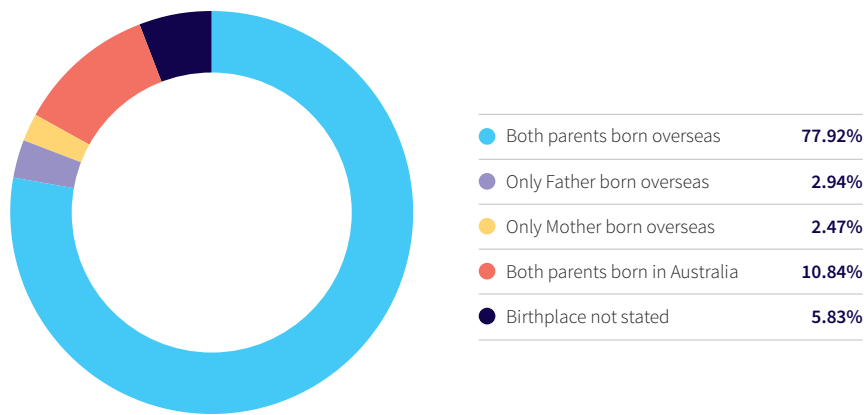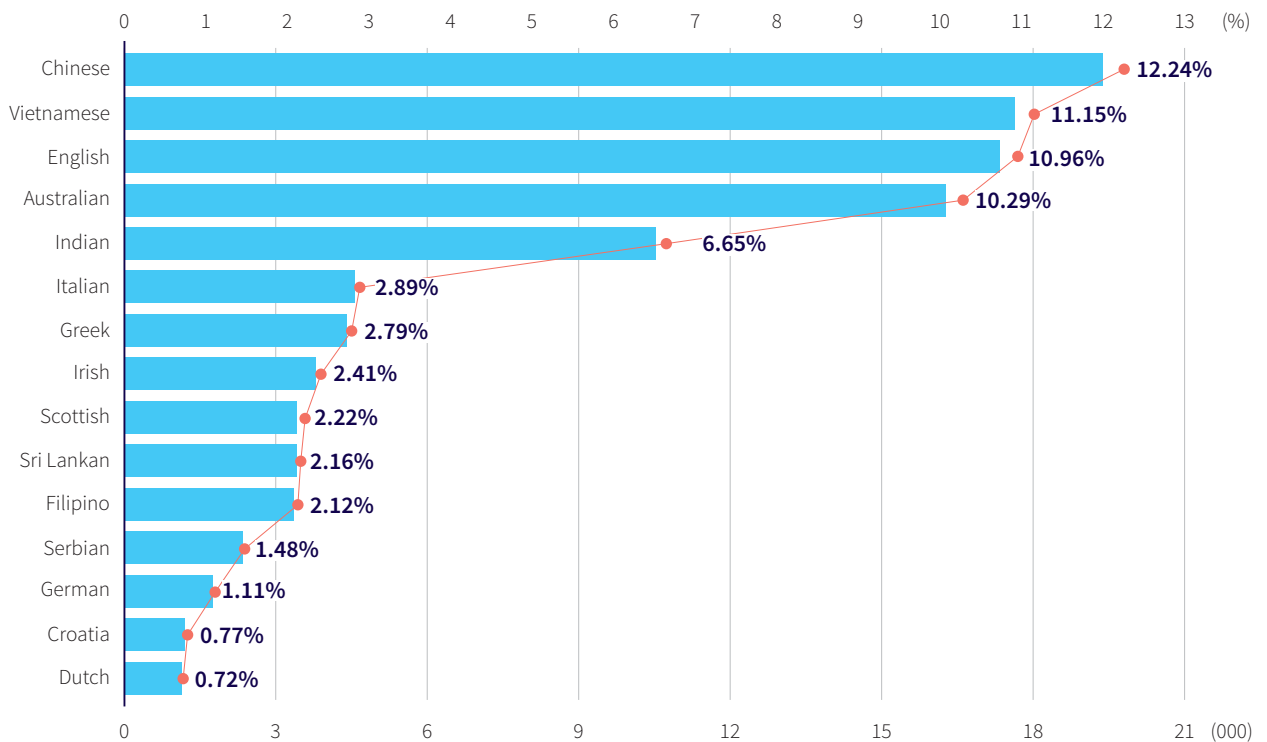|	
● Both parents born overseas	**77.92%**
● Only Father born overseas	**2.94%**
● Only Mother born overseas	**2.47%**
● Both parents born in Australia	**10.84%**
● Birthplace not stated	**5.83%**

FIGURE 3: TOP 15 ANCESTRIES: TOTAL NUMBER AND PROPORTION OF THE TOTAL POPULATION (2021: GREATER DANDENONG)
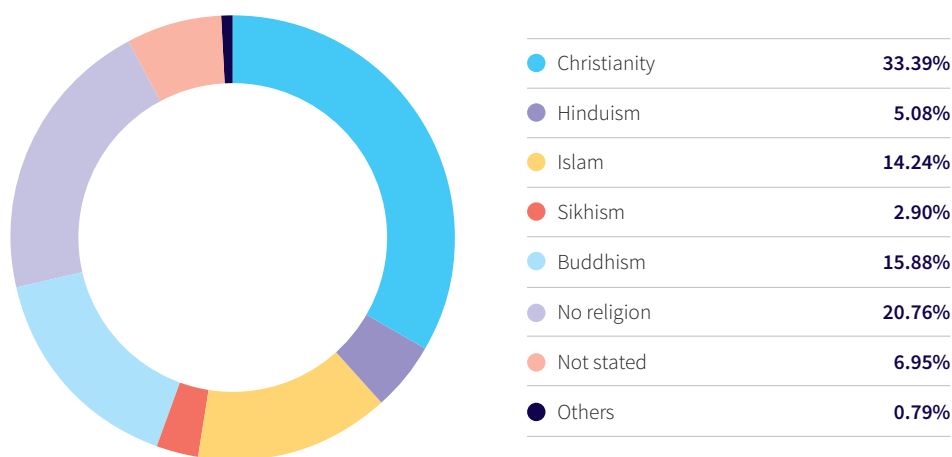

The majority of residents in Greater Dandenong speak a language other than English at home (64.4%); just under 30% speak only English (the remaining 6.3% did not state their language used at home), compared to the Victorian average of 67.2%. Around three quarters of those in Greater Dandenong who speak (also) another language at home, have a good or very good command of the English language. But there is also a significant proportion of residents who do not speak English well or not at all; the latter applies to around 16% of the total population. There is a notable variety in English proficiency across different linguistic community groups. For example, local residents who speak Arabic, Hindi, Punjabi, Sinhalese or Tamil at home have an on average high level of English proficiency (around 85% or more of them speak English well or very well), whereas English language skills are less advanced (over one third don't speak English well or at all) among Cantonese, Mandarin and Khmer speaking communities.

The proportion of people in Greater Dandenong who identify with a religion is quite high, with only 20.76% of the population having no religion – well below the Victorian average of 38.8%. Reflective of the great cultural diversity, the census data demonstrate that a majority of those who stated a religious affiliation do not identify with a Christian denomination. Almost 16% are Buddhists, over 14% are Muslims, 5% Hindus and almost 3% are Sikh, while all different Christina denominations together make up only just over 33% (with most of them being Catholics or Eastern Orthodox) (Figure 4).

FIGURE 4: RELIGIOUS AFFILIATIONS (2021; GREATER DANDENONG)

● Christianity	**33.39%**
● Hinduism	**5.08%**
● Islam	**14.24%**
● Sikhism	**2.90%**
● Buddhism	**15.88%**
● No religion	**20.76%**
● Not stated	**6.95%**
● Others	**0.79%**

CASEY

The City of Casey is Victoria's most populous LGA with 365,239 residents as of August 2021 – almost 66,000 more than in 2016. This constitutes a significant population increase of 22%, which is disproportionally attributed to the growth of Casey's multicultural communities.
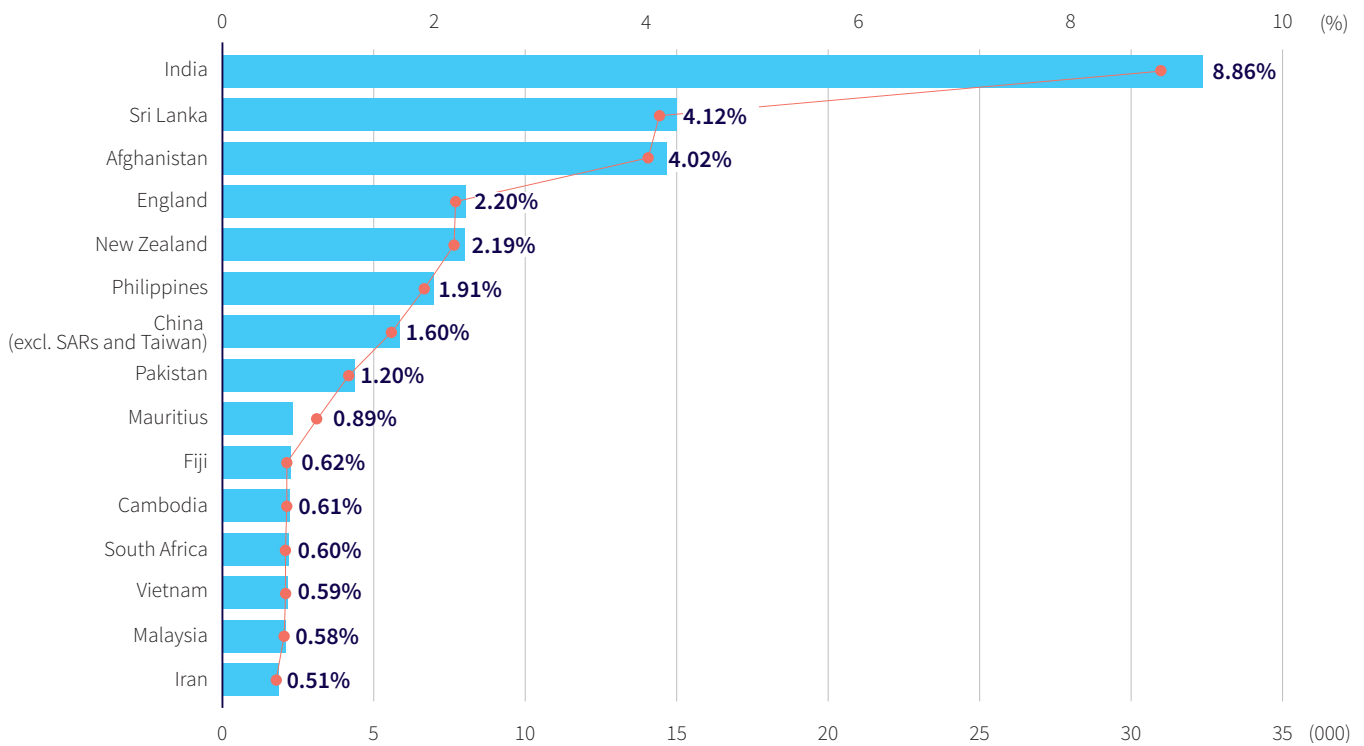
In 2021, 2,395 or 0.66% of the local population identified as **Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander**, up from 1,615 (or 0.5%) in 2016. This is one of the highest proportions of all LGAs in metropolitan Melbourne but still below the state-wide average.

According to the 2021 census, 53.5% all residents in Casey were born in Australia, which is significantly below the Victorian-wide average of 65.0%. The most common **countries of birth**, apart from Australia, is India, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan, followed by England and New Zealand. Figure 5 shows the top 15 countries of birth, most of which are in Asia. Some overseas born communities have grown particularly strongly since 2016. The number of Indian-born residents, for example, increased from 17,391 or 6.0% of the total population (2016) to 32,354 or 8.9% (2021). The Afghan-born population grew from 8,534 (2.9%) to 14,678 (4.02%) during this five-year period, while the proportion of the English- and New Zealand-born population decreased slightly.

7/10

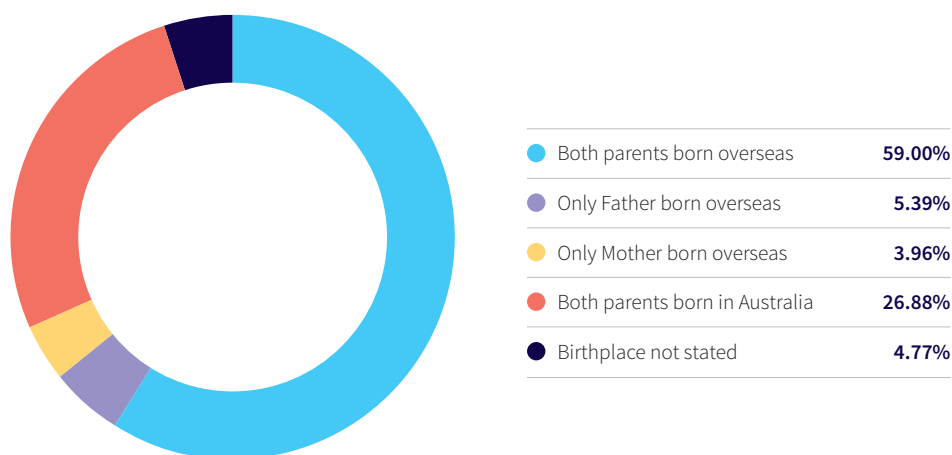**Casey residents have at least one parent born overseas.**

FIGURE 5: TOP 15 COUNTRIES OF BIRTH (OVERSEAS BORN): TOTAL NUMBER AND PROPORTION OF THE TOTAL POPULATION (2021; CASEY)

Country	Percentage
India	8.86%
Sri Lanka	4.12%
Afghanistan	4.02%
England	2.20%
New Zealand	2.19%
Philippines	1.91%
China (excl. SARs and Taiwan)	1.60%
Pakistan	1.20%
Mauritius	0.89%
Fiji	0.62%
Cambodia	0.61%
South Africa	0.60%
Vietnam	0.59%
Malaysia	0.58%
Iran	0.51%

Just over 16% of overseas born residents have migrated to Australia since 2016, while 49% of Casey's overseas born population arrived between 2001 and 2015 and 21% settled in Australian between 1981 and 2000. The figures suggest how local multicultural communities continue to evolve and change as newly arrived immigrants from various backgrounds face settlement challenges but may also benefit from networks and resources provided by already more established communities.

A majority of Casey residents look back at a family history of migration: Seven out of ten people have at least one parent born overseas, and 59% stated that *both* their parents were born outside of Australia (Victorian average: 42.4%). Only 26.9% of the local residents in Casey declared that both their parents were born in Australia, compared to the Victorian-wide average of 42.4% (Figure 6).

FIGURE 6: AUSTRALIAN AND OVERSEAS BORN PARENTS (2021; CASEY)

Both parents born overseas	**59.00%**
Only Father born overseas	**5.39%**
Only Mother born overseas	**3.96%**
Both parents born in Australia	**26.88%**
Birthplace not stated	**4.77%**

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Almost 22% described their ancestry as 'English', the same proportion stated 'Australian', and around 5% stated 'Scottish' or 'Irish' respectively. While these proportions demonstrate the continuous – albeit declining – prominence of Australian or Anglo-Saxon/Celtic backgrounds among residents in Casey, the figures are significantly below the Victorian-wide average (English ancestry: 29.2%; Australian: 27.2%; Irish: 9.4%, Scottish: 8.2). The other main ancestry group among Casey's population were Indian (9.3%), Chinese (4.37%) and Italian (3.4%). (Figure 7)

FIGURE 7: TOP 15 ANCESTRIES: TOTAL NUMBER AND PROPORTION OF THE TOTAL POPULATION (2021; CASEY)
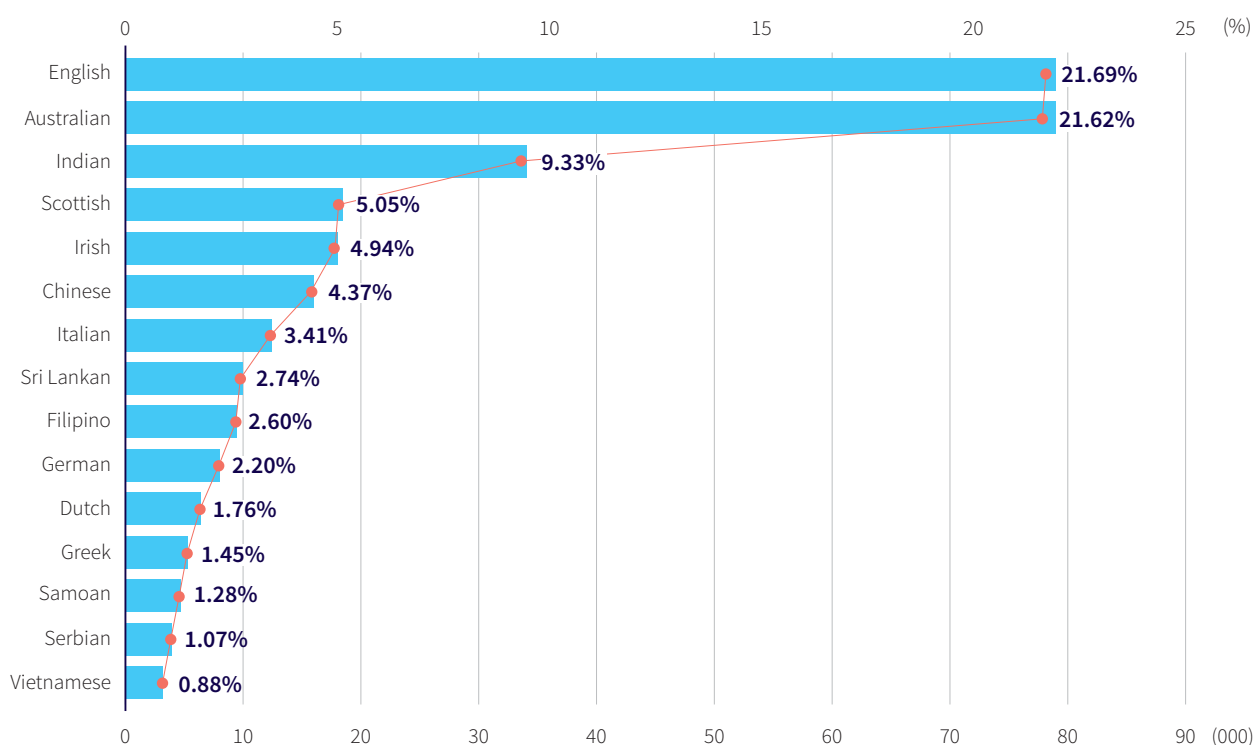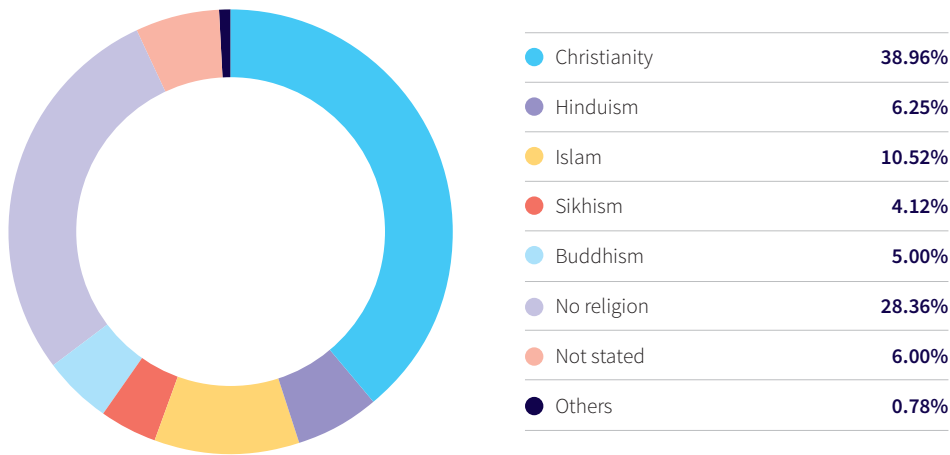

Just over half of Casey residents speak only English at home (53.1%), compared to the Victorian-wide average of 67.2%. The most common languages other than English spoken in Casey's households were Punjabi (4.62%), Sinhalese (3.52%) and Mandarin (2.17%), followed by Hindi (1.78%), Malaysian (1.49%) and Arabic (1.42%). Of those who speak a language other than English at home, 85.9% have a good or very good command of English, and when including those who only speak English, an overwhelming majority of 88.6% do not seem to have any difficulties communicating in English. Just 6% of the local population (and 14.1% of those who speak a non-English language at home) speak English not well or not at all. These figures indicate an overall high level of English proficiency within most of these linguistically diverse communities (often well above 90%), but in some communities a significant minority (over one quarter) do not speak English well or at all, such as among Mandarin, Khmer or Vietnamese speaking communities.

Casey's population is religiously diverse, but Christianity has remained the most common religious affiliation, with almost 39% identifying with a Christian denomination (around half of them are Catholic). Only 28.7% stated in the 2021 census they had no religion – a proportion well below the Victorian average of 38.8%. The most prominent non-Christian faith groups in Casey are Islam (10.5%), Hinduism (6.3%), Buddhism (5.0%) and Sikhism (4.1%) (Figure 8).

FIGURE 8: RELIGIOUS AFFILIATIONS (2021; CASEY)

● Christianity	**38.96%**
● Hinduism	**6.25%**
● Islam	**10.52%**
● Sikhism	**4.12%**
● Buddhism	**5.00%**
● No religion	**28.36%**
● Not stated	**6.00%**
● Others	**0.78%**

The local populations in Casey and Greater Dandenong are culturally, religiously and linguistically more diverse than Victoria as a whole, while the proportion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people is below the state-wide average. Greater Dandenong is one of the most diverse LGAs in Australia; it is sometimes referred to as a majority-minority area, where previously dominant Anglo-Saxon communities are now quantitatively outnumbered by those who migrated (or whose parents migrated) to Australia from non-English-speaking and non-Christian majority countries. This observation does not equally apply to Casey, but recent demographic developments suggest that Casey – the largest LGA and one of the fasted growing municipalities in Victoria – will continue to grow and become more and more diverse.

The diversification processes in both LGAs demonstrate how multiculturalism evolves locally, with parts of the community becoming increasingly established while new migrants and refugees arrive and face the challenges of settlement. Related to these post-migration settlement processes are ongoing language barriers, experienced by significant minorities in certain migrant communities across both LGAs. This needs to be taken into account when designing community engagement programs and support services, including anti-racism reporting and support actions.

Another demographic feature in Casey and Greater Dandenong is the very high proportion of residents who identify with a religious affiliation, many of them from non-Christian denominations such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism. Given the established fact that religious community organisations often play a crucial role in the settlement process and beyond (Hirschmann 2004), religious community structure may also be well placed to provide other community support.
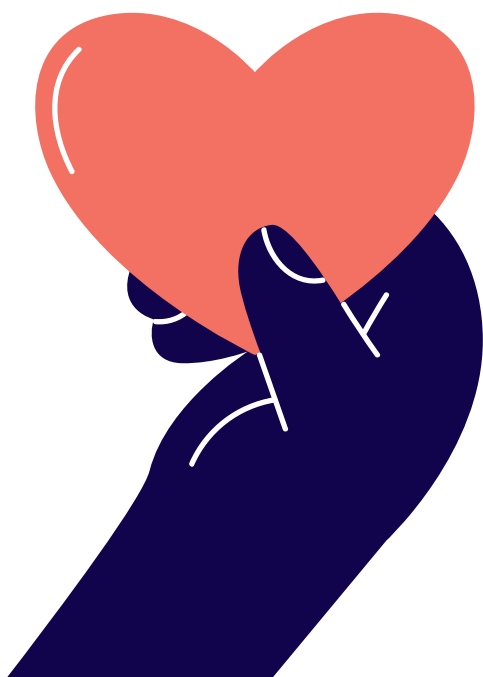
3

THE PROJECT APPROACH: LISTENING TO COMMUNITIES

The project's central goal was to listen to the voices of local Aboriginal, multicultural and multifaith communities about their experiences with racism and their views on reporting and support needs.

This community input would ultimately form the foundation for the development of a locally specific roadmap towards improved reporting pathways and support services for those who face racism (section 5). It is an approach piloted in the City of Wyndham, and recently described in *Empowerment through community-led responses to racism,* a report published by Victoria University together with Welcoming Cities (Peucker et al. 2022).

We sought to pursue such a community-centred approach by combining traditional research and data collection methods with extensive community engagement activities. Transparency, trust and genuine collaboration were key during this 18-month process, as the project team worked closely with council staff from the City of Casey and City of Greater Dandenong, a range of local community organisations and service providers, and many residents from across various communities affected by racism.

The research components, which received ethics approval from VU, encompassed a community survey and peer-facilitated focus groups; this was complemented by an extensive process of open community engagement.

COMMUNITY SURVEY

We used a survey that had previously been deployed in similar place-based anti-racism projects in Wyndham and Whittlesea and adapted it to the specific context in Casey and Greater Dandenong. The survey was open to individuals (aged 18 or older) who

- live, work or spend a significant amount of time in one of the two municipalities; and
- who identify as being from an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, multicultural and/or multifaith community.

This was an efficient opportunity for community members to share experiences with racism, views on reporting, reporting barriers and support needs and their suggestions on how support services could be improved. The survey was promoted locally in close collaboration with community groups, service providers and the two councils. After a systematic in-scope check, there were 112 valid responses from local community members from Aboriginal, multicultural or multifaith backgrounds. While the survey findings are not statistically representative due to the small and non-random sample, they offer very important quantitative explorative insights in the perspectives of local community members.

Almost 31% of the respondents were between 18 and 35 years old, 39% were between 36 and 45 and the remaining 31% were over 46. The majority of respondents were women (72%). Almost two-thirds were employed (63%), and 19% were (also) involved in volunteer (unpaid) work; around one quarter neither volunteered nor were employed. While one third had lived in one of the two LGAs for more than 10 years, a significant proportion had only recently moved there (18% less than 2 years; 16% between 2 and 5 years); at least some of them may have only recently arrived in Australia. The survey respondents identified with a range of cultural or ethnic backgrounds and came from a range of countries and regions, including Afghanistan (from different ethnic groups), Sri Lanka (including Tamils), the Middle East, Southeast Asia, China, parts of southern Europe and from different Pacific Island nations; some also identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. Others described themselves based on their faith, often Islam (including Shia) but also Sikhism, Buddhism and Hinduism.
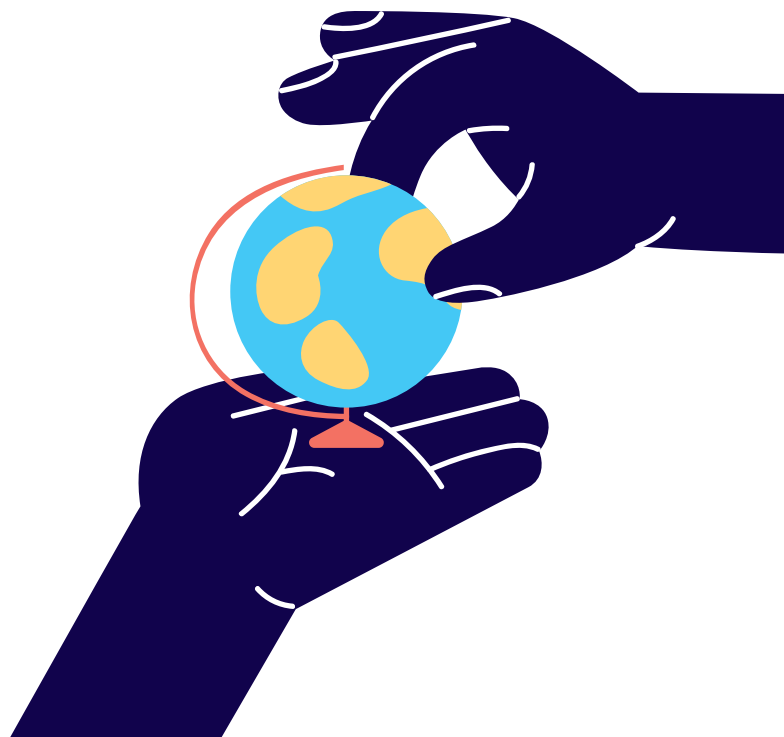
COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUPS

In addition to the community survey, we ran 11 focus groups where people from the local multicultural and multifaith communities could share and discuss in greater depth their experiences with racism, their views on reporting barriers and support needs and their suggestions on how to encourage more people to speak out against racism and find adequate support. These community focus groups were organised and moderated by peer facilitators from the local community, some of them bicultural workers with close ties to different segments of the community. The facilitators took part in a short training, provided by Victoria University, to prepare them for running their focus groups. The facilitators had a great deal of autonomy in organising and running their focus groups, while we offered to assist when needed.

Some of the focus groups were held in a community language, others in English; some were held in-person, while others were conducted virtually. They were all recorded and selectively transcribed and analysed by the VU team. Facilitators were paid for their service and received a certificate of appreciation, and each focus group participant received a gift voucher as a thank-you.

11 COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUPS

were organised and moderated by peer facilitators from the local community

Altogether 57 people from a local multicultural and multifaith community in Casey and/or Dandenong participated in the focus groups; the findings allowed in-depth insights into people's individual experiences, feelings and perspectives. The majority of focus group participants were, like in the survey sample, women. Some of the focus groups brought together residents from a specific community group (e.g. Burmese Muslims, Chinese, Sri Lankan) or certain language group (e.g. Dari, Urdu), or were women-only groups, while others were culturally and religiously diverse and gender-mixed. For a number of reasons, we were not able to include focus groups with Aboriginal and Torres Strait community members, although we acknowledge this would have strengthened the project.

OPEN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The research methods of survey and focus groups generated the empirical insights presented in this report, but this project was more than a research project. From the outset, it sought to engage with various segments of the community in a variety of ways that go beyond empirical data gathering. Some community members might not feel comfortable completing the survey or taking part in a focus group discussion for a variety of reasons, but still wanted to share their experiences and insights. This is one of the reasons why we sought to set up alternative opportunities for communities to speak out and contribute, for example through informal conversations via phone, Zoom and in-person.

Of particular importance were the four community sessions and workshops we held throughout the project. The first of these took place in December 2021 via Zoom. We subsequently arranged three in-person events in May 2022 (Council Chamber City of Greater Dandenong), July 2022 (Bunjil Place) and October 2022 (Springvale City Hall). These sessions provided a welcome opportunity for many community members to speak about their experiences of racism and related support needs, and while we could not use their community inputs directly as empirical research evidence (section 4; due to research ethical considerations), they played an important role in informing the development of local anti-racism roadmap (section 5 of this report).

57 PEOPLE

from local multicultural and multifaith communities in Casey and/or Dandenong participated in the focus groups

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COMMUNITY SESSIONS AND WORKSHOPS PROVIDED A WELCOME OPPORTUNITY FOR MANY COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO SPEAK ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES OF RACISM AND RELATED SUPPORT NEEDS

4 FINDINGS: SURVEY AND FOCUS GROUPS

In the following section, we present key findings from our community survey and the focus groups, reflecting the experiences and perspective of around 170 participants from multicultural and multifaith communities in Casey and Greater Dandenong.

While a handful of people from the local Aboriginal community participated in the survey (but not in the focus groups), we cannot claim that the empirical evidence collected for this project broadly reflects the views of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. Therefore, the following elaborations will only refer to local multicultural and multifaith communities. We acknowledge the unique nature, severity and prevalence of racism against First Nations people, as highlighted by Aboriginal communities and confirmed by previous research in Victoria (Ferdinand et al. 2012; VicHealth 2012); this was also articulated by several (non-Indigenous) focus group participants in our project.

EXPERIENCES OF RACISM

Racism has been, and continues to be, part of the lives of many people in Casey and Greater Dandenong as in all municipalities. Many experiences with racism were shared by the focus group participants, in the community survey and during the various in-person community sessions we conducted for this project. While issues related to racism, discrimination and exclusion have occupied the minds of some participants for quite some time, for many others the project seemed to offer new and highly appreciated opportunities to reflect and openly speak about these experiences in a safe and empathetic environment.

In the survey, 61% of the respondents stated that they (or someone in their household) had experienced racism in the past 12 months. In line with previous survey-based research, the responses suggest that women were slightly more likely to have faced racism (Figure 9A). Moreover, our analysis revealed that those who had lived in Casey or Greater Dandenong for five years or more were proportionally much more likely to state they had experienced racism in the previous 12 months. In other words, those who had only recently moved to one of the two municipalities – many of whom probably as recent arrivals to Australia – were less likely (Figure 9B).

> **EXPERIENCES OF RACISM ARE COMMON; THIS ALSO APPLIES TO COMMUNITIES IN CASEY AND GREATER DANDENONG. OVER 60% OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS HAVE EXPERIENCED RACISM IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS.**

There can be various explanations for this divergence of experiences, including different perceptions or understandings of what constitutes racism. That inference seems to be supported by evidence from the focus groups where some participants mentioned that initially, upon arrival, they did not recognise or pay attention to racism during the particularly challenging period of settlement but grew increasingly aware of racist incidents around them over time. Such qualitative insights are also a reminder that quantitative surveys on experiences of racism may deliver results that are influenced by a range of individual factors and thus may not always reflect the 'objective' scope of racism as accurately as we think.

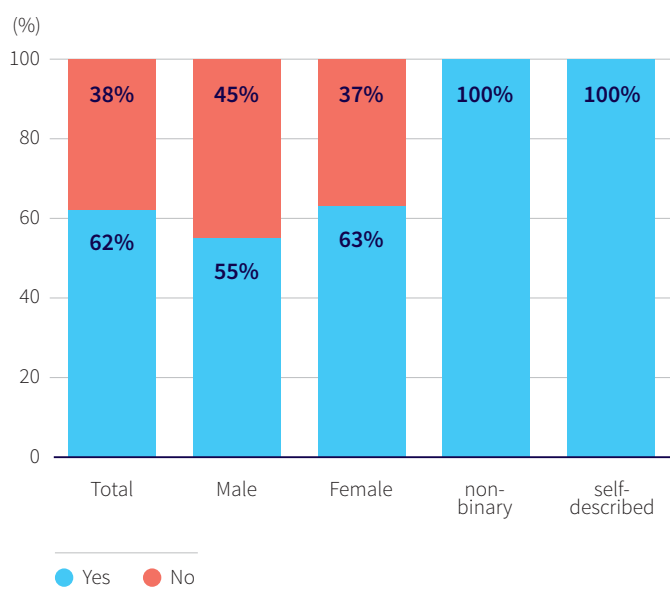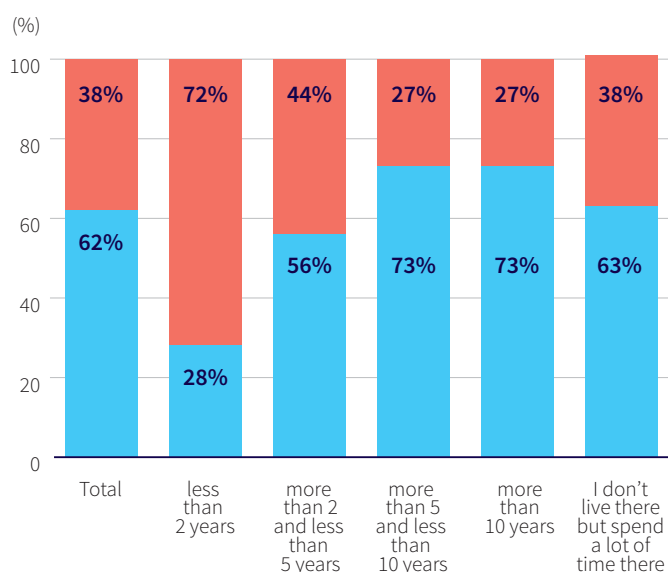**FIGURE 9A:** EXPERIENCES OF RACISM, PAST 12 MONTHS; BY GENDER

FIGURE 9B: EXPERIENCES OF RACISM, PAST 12 MONTHS; BY DURATION OF RESIDENCE IN CASEY OR GREATER DANDENONG


Q: Have you personally (or another member of your household, e.g. your child) experienced an incident you considered to be driven by racism and/or religious prejudice/discrimination in the past 12 months? (Note: only one person identified as non-binary and one self-described)

Survey respondents as well as focus group participants stated they had experienced racism also locally. The majority of survey respondents said that they have (also) faced racism in either of the two municipalities. In Greater Dandenong, the suburb mentioned most frequently by participants as sites of racist experiences was Dandenong, followed by Keysborough and Noble Park. In Casey, it was Narre Warren, Cranbourne and Berwick. Given the exploratory, non-representative nature of our survey sample, it is important to note that these findings should not be regarded as reliable evidence that racism necessarily occurs more commonly in these suburbs.

Asking survey respondents about their view as to how often incidents of racism happen across the two municipalities, 13% expressed the view that racism was rare or did not exist at all. The majority thought that it occurred sometimes (36%), often (22%) or very often (18%) (Figure 10). Possibly reflecting their personal experiences, women were more likely than men to consider racism to be prevalent in their local context. The assessment that racism occurs often or very often was proportionally more commonly expressed by those who have lived locally for longer (10 years or longer), while many of those who arrived only within the past two years stated they were not sure.

FIGURE 10. PERCEIVED PREVALENCE OF RACISM IN CASEY AND GREATER DANDENONG, BY DURATION OF RESIDENCE IN CASEY OR GREATER DANDENONG
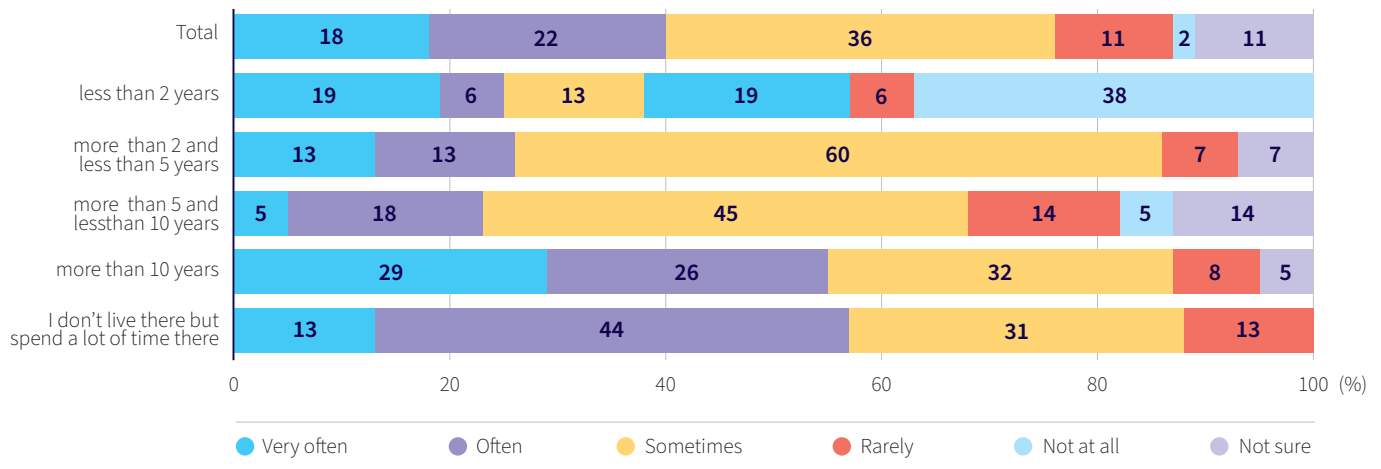
Q: In general, how frequently do you think incidents of racism and/or religious prejudice/discrimination happen across the two municipalities of Greater Dandenong and Casey?

Areas and types of racism

The survey responses and the findings from the focus group analysis consistently highlight that participants face racism across a range of social contexts (Figure 11). The following five social contexts appear particularly prone to racism:

- Employment
- Shopping centres
- Schools
- Public transport
- Social media

FIGURE 11: AREAS OF RACISM
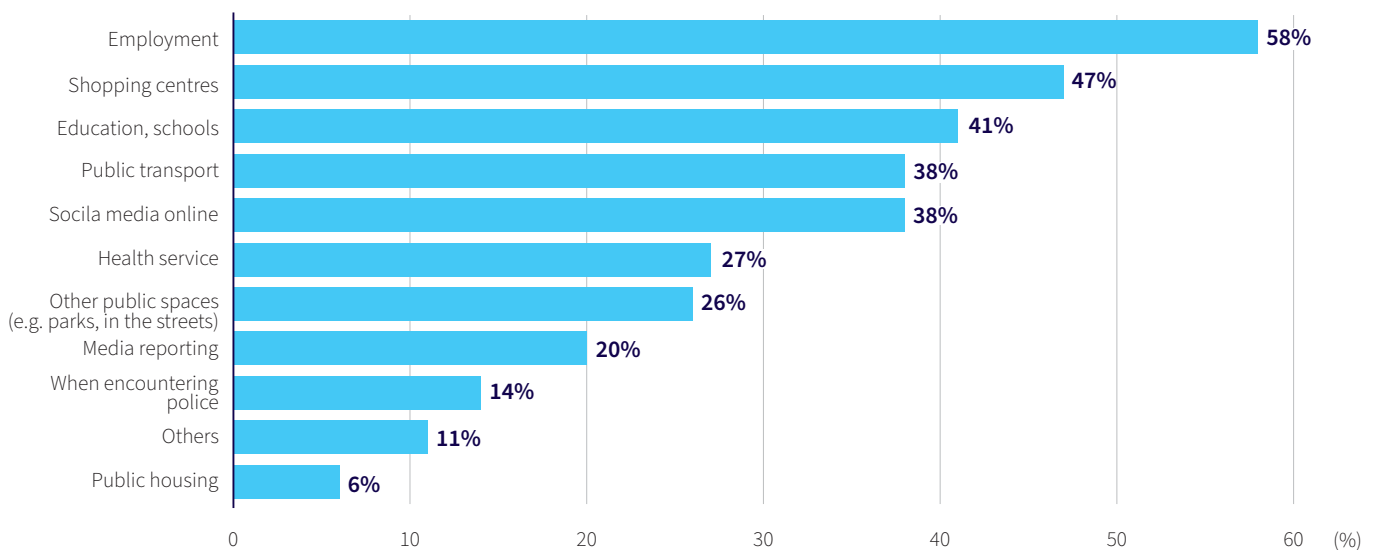
Q: In which areas of life have you (or another member of your household) experienced racism and/or religious prejudice/discrimination?

Female respondents face racism proportionally more often than their male counterparts in employment, schools (presumably in relation to racism directed at their children), and in the context of health services, while male respondents mentioned racist encounters with the police proportionally more often than women.

The survey findings demonstrate that racism sometimes manifests in overt, at times aggressive ways. However, according to many participants, more often it is subtle and, as such, forms part of many people's everyday lives. In the survey, more than half of all survey respondents encountered what may be best described as racist microaggressions: They stated that the respective incidents made them feel unwelcome and looked down upon (60%).

But 54% (also) faced verbal abuse or insult, and 51% describe the racist incident as a form of disadvantaged and/or unfair treatment (discrimination). Some experienced verbal threats (23%) and even physical threats (8%), as well as abusive and prejudiced (online or otherwise) content (29%) and personally targeted online abuse and threats (19%; e.g. in an online gaming setting) (Figure 12). The most serious incident alleged in the anonymous survey was when a female respondent stated she had been raped because of her ethnic background. We are in no position to comment further on this case, which would amount to an extremely serious racist hate crime—in the terminology of Victoria Police, a prejudice motivated crime.

FIGURE 12: TYPES OF RACISM
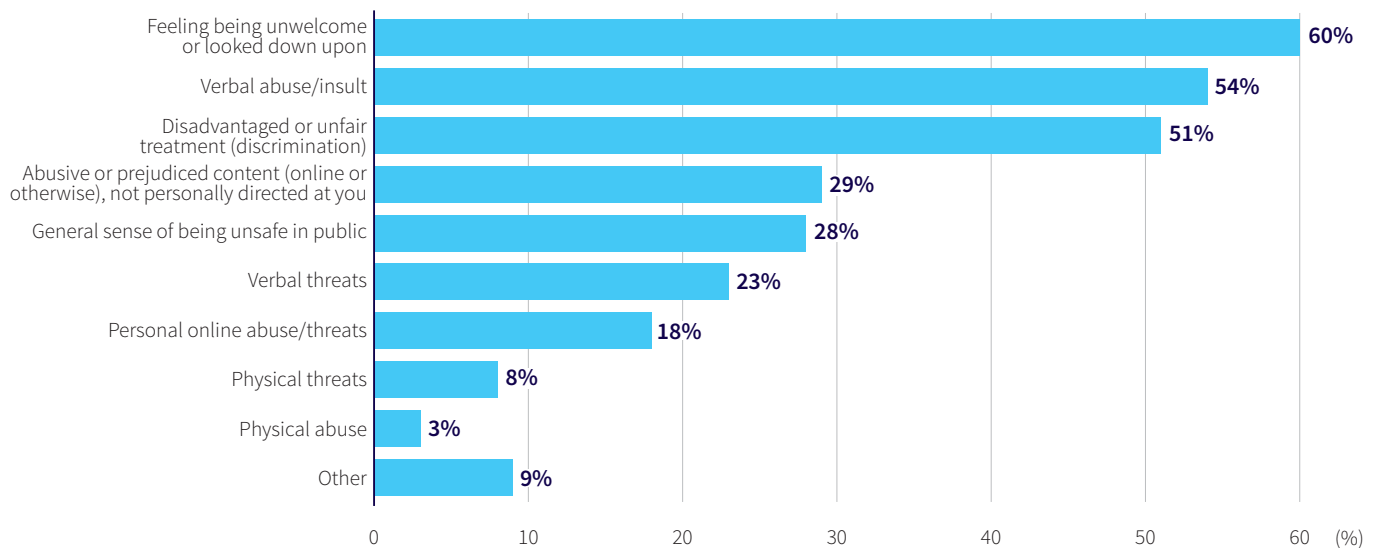
Q: How would you describe the nature of these incidents

RACISTS MICROAGGRESSIONS ARE CASUAL, VERBAL OR NONVERBAL, EXPRESSIONS OF RACIST STEREOTYPES, WHICH COMMUNICATE, INTENTIONALLY OR UNINTENTIONALLY, NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS A PERSON BASED ON THEIR (ASSUMED OR REAL) ETHNIC, CULTURAL OR RELIGIOUS IDENTITY.

Participants felt they had been the target of racism and discrimination because of various identity markers and attributes; many of them are of the view that several attributes may have played a role simultaneously (Figure 13). Around 60% of all survey respondents who had experienced racism assumed it was because of their ethnic or cultural background, while around four in ten believed it happened because of the colour of their skin (42%) and/or because of their faith or religious background (37%). One third mentioned their language background as a likely factor, and some stated that other identity markers may have also played a role such as their gender, age or disability.

FIGURE 13: REASONS FOR BEING TARGETED
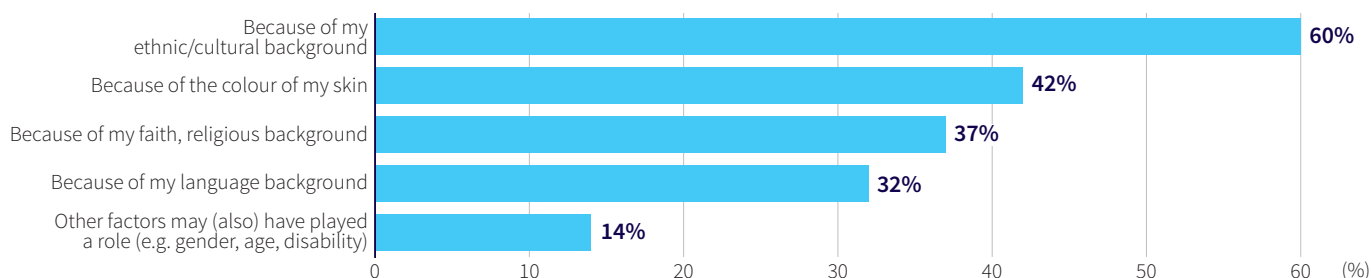
Q: In your opinion, why were you (or the member of your household) targeted?

Many focus group participants expressed the view that their non-English accents prompted their racist mistreatment. Wearing the hijab was also widely regarded as a common factor in racist behaviour. Some also mentioned how different layers of their identities, for example, gender, religion and ethnic background, intersect and cumulate into specific forms of racism.

Voices from the community

The focus group discussions and the project-related community forums and workshops provided a platform for community members to share their experiences in more depth. Many expressed a view that racism may have been more blatant in the past and has become often more covert and insidious.

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IT'S RACISM, GENDER DISCRIMINATION AND RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION. BECAUSE I'M A BLACK MUSLIM WOMAN, I USUALLY GET ALL THREE THINGS COMBINED (FG 8).

The accounts of the focus group participants confirm the survey evidence that racism happens in various ways in the lives of many participants. Encounters with racist microaggressions and incidents of biased, exclusionary othering were described by some as being 'very, very common' or an almost daily experience. In addition, participants also shared their personal experiences with discrimination and unfair or unfavourable treatment and even verbal or physical threats and abuse. Some accounts are presented in the following excerpts.

Racist threats and abuse

One Muslim woman (FG 7) recalled a racist incident that happened to her whilst grocery shopping in a local shopping mall with her young daughter and husband. As her husband tried to push the shopping trolley past another male costumer, the man yelled at her husband: *'You monkey face people, go back to your country!'*, and then added *'or I do this'*, making a hand gesture of cutting their throats. The man then walked off towards the checkout where he was served by the cashier who was allegedly aware of what had happened. The focus group participant said that this made her very angry: *'No staff came to save us. This was the first incident and I started to develop that hate in my heart because no-one came to help us'.*

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[RACISM] IS BECOMING MORE SUBTLE, BUT JUST BECAUSE IT'S NOT SO MUCH IN YOUR FACE, IT IS STILL HURTFUL. (FG 4)

Another woman (FG 4) described how she was spat at by an older woman at a public event in Dandenong a few years ago.

> [She] actually spat on my face and said: "go back to your country". I was really angry because in my culture to spit at someone is the worst thing you can do. I wiped off the spit but now, thinking about it, I wonder why did I not do something about it. But at that time lots of feelings were going through my mind. There was this feeling of shame. It wasn't me who did this shameful act, but I felt ashamed…she said I don't belong here… it was a horrible experience.

One focus group participant (FG 7) worked as an assistant pharmacist when a customer 'used the f-word and said to me: you f*** Indian scum, you should go and leave the country'. Other focus group participants shared similar incidents where they were subjected to racist abuse, for example, yelled at from a passing car. One woman described how she had witnessed an, in her view, racially motivated assault on an Asian girl who had fallen asleep on the train by several teenagers who 'were ganging up on her beating her up' (FG 7).

Discrimination and unfavourable treatment in employment

According to the survey responses, discrimination and unfair, unequal treatment in employment was a particularly frequent form of racism. This was also a major topic in the focus groups, where many participants shared how they faced exclusion and discrimination at the workplace in a variety of ways—during the recruitment process, in promotion decisions, job loss and racist microaggressions by clients, colleagues and supervisors.

Common concerns in the context of discrimination in employment revolved around **recruitment** practices. Many focus group participants were convinced that racism is often a barrier to their endeavours to find

employment. 'If you want to get a job, you need to be extra good, better than the Anglo-Saxons – that's a well-known fact, but it's always subtle', one woman stated (FG 4).

A view shared by several participants was that their non-English name was often the reason why they did not get invited to a job interview. 'I've had a lot of trouble finding work, some people said I should change my name, so it looks more Australian… Until today I can't find a proper job, they are racist about your name' (FG 9). Others confirmed that having a non-English sounding name decreases one's recruitment prospects. A participant in the Chinese focus group (FG 10) spoke about a female friend who had struggled finding a job, but once she used her husband's 'Caucasian' surname, she 'quickly landed a good job'.

A male participant (FG 4) who works in employment placement himself shared his professional experiences with placing job seekers from non-Anglo-Saxon backgrounds. Speaking about recruitment chances in the IT sector, he said:

> If you are Chinese background, you are certainly discriminated against, very clearly. It used to be easy to place them, and also Russians, in computer jobs. But now they are not even getting interviews, and they are really highly skilled, also Malaysians. That has never happened before.

The same focus group participant also pointed to race-based **redundancy decisions** that he had become aware of through his work. He spoke about a hotel where several people of Chinese background used to work as 'basic house-keepers'. The previous manager 'was very happy with their work', he recalled, 'but then a new manager came and stood them all down. He said I can't work with these Chinese people – clearly anti-Chinese, but he made up other excuses for firing them all. So yes, it's subtle and you can't prove it' (FG 4).

In the same focus group, a participant explained how, when he worked for a state government department a few years ago, he became aware of discriminatory *'unequal treatment of Aboriginal people'* who worked there (FG 4). He said: *'They don't like Aboriginal people. They don't let them do certain jobs and don't train them. And that's on purpose, because six months later the Aboriginal staff lose their job because they are considered not qualified. And that's a government department, that's discrimination!'*

A Muslim woman (FG 7) shared her experience as volunteer treasurer and book keeper at a kindergarten. *'In a big executive meeting with the president, the newly hired director referred to my role as book keeper and said: "We need to hire a person who has a proper education", not knowing that I have a Masters in Banking and Finance, and she said about me: "these people only know plus and minus". She was my supervisor and she was not comfortable working with me, so I was told I had to resign.'* The vacant position was then publicly advertised, and the focus group participant applied, this time not as a volunteer, and she got the job again. She recalled:

> *The third day in the office, I can hear her say, and she wanted me to hear that: "What does she want here?" The president told her that I was the new book keeper, and she looked at my resume and said: "oh, I didn't know they allow their girls to study." She then made my life hell in the office; she wanted me to feel I'm a lesser person. She treated me like her servant. My colleague who noticed all this wrote a letter to the president and explained what had happened, and ultimately, they fired that person.*

Discriminatory treatment at work was also seen by some as hampering people's chances for a **promotion** and opportunities at the workplace. A woman in the Chinese focus group (FG 10), who works in a child care centre, stated the *'room leaders are all Aussies. If you are not an Aussie, however hard you work, you will never become room leader'*. Similarly, a Muslim woman in another

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THEY PREFER WHITE PEOPLE IN THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS RATHER THAN THE BROWN PEOPLE.' (FG 7)

focus group (FG 5) shared how those who wear a hijab are sidelined and disadvantaged at work: *'Someone should go to a meeting to represent the company but there are certain dress codes, and hijab is not part of that, so your boss sends someone else, although you are better qualified to represent the company than anyone else. They are judging you on the basis of your scarf'.* In the survey, a respondent shared a similar workplace experience:

> *My experience as woman of colour working in Casey and Dandenong in a leadership role, I experience subtle forms of racism. Like being overlooked in meetings, not acknowledged for what I am saying or proposing, given less time than other speakers in forums, being excluded from key consultations. Despite having extensive experience in my field, I find that white women with less experience are afforded more respect and recognition.*

The accounts of several focus group participants demonstrate that the workplace is often **not a culturally safe environment** due to racist behaviours of supervisors, colleagues or clients. Several women highlighted they have been excluded, avoided and looked at 'in a strange way' by colleagues because of their background and/or because they wear a hijab. One participant from Arabic background (FG 4) stated that *'there is racism, but it's often very subtle, also from my boss. She used to favour everybody else, I was the last one, and she was always causing trouble for me, and not for the others. I found she didn't like Arab people'.* One woman (FG 5) said:

> *When I arrive in Australia, I thought Australia is free from racism, but then after a while when I went through my work placement, I realised that's not the case... I felt it was because of my hijab ... it was obvious, they behaved differently with me... I felt very disappointed and requested to work somewhere else.*

A Muslim woman in another focus group (FG 1) mentioned incidents where hijab-wearing staff were being pushed and treated rudely and aggressively, or *'they think we are all oppressed just because we wear the hijab'*, and she add that she *'had to quit work because of the way others treated me so badly'*.

Another woman (FG 4) shared her experience as a bank employer working in costumer care, where *'one regular Caucasian lady customer never wanted dark-skinned people, including me. She openly requested to be served by a customer care staff who was Caucasian and she expressed her preference openly and in public'*. Similarly, a female focus group participant (FG 3) shared her experience with a client in an aged care facility, where she worked; the client explicitly refused to be looked after by her because of her hijab.

One woman shared her experience with racist treatment by a client at her first job in Australia as a kindergarten teacher (FG 7).

> *The parents came to drop off their kids, and one mother looked at me – I was wearing my hijab –, pointed her finger at me and said: "Who are you and what do you want in my child's room?" I told her I was the teacher, and she rolled her eyes and left, and she went to the manager and said: "if you have these kinds of people in your kinder, it will be closed soon. Because we are going to take our kids out, we won't leave them here if you have these kinds of people here".*

Everyday racism, microaggressions and racial profiling

Confirming the survey findings, people in the focus groups noted that subtle forms of racism, exclusion and biased treatment occur frequently. The boundaries between insidious cases of racist microaggression and more blatant expressions of racism are not always easy to draw. Negative stereotypes and biased misconceptions of people from non-Anglo-Saxon backgrounds often surface in everyday conversations in the lives of participants, and these can accumulate into hurtful racist microaggressions.

Several focus group participants recalled incidents where others made fun of them (or others) because of their accent. This also happened in schools. One woman stated, for example, that a teacher was *'commenting really badly on a student's accent'* (FG 7), and another woman who worked at a school herself recalled that *'Australian students were laughing about my accent'* (FG 6).

Other commonly shared experiences of what was seen by some as racist microaggressions revolved around people's biases of those who 'don't look Australian' as being uneducated, having a low command of the English language, or being oppressed. In one focus group, a black Muslim woman said (FG 8): *'What I hear almost daily is "Oh, you speak good English. Where are you from? Where are you really from?" Or they say "You're black, but you're beautiful". They think it's a compliment.'*

Related to this, many focus group participants highlighted how their sense of belonging to Australia has been questioned or denied as they are not seen nor treated as 'true Australians'. The following statements illustrate how such microaggressions and forms of exclusion may look like:

- *'The only true Australians are the Aboriginal people, still they [Anglo-Saxon Australians] want to tell me that I'm not Australian…"you will never be Australian". This in itself is discrimination, because they don't want to acknowledge you as one of the new Australians who live here'* (FG 4).
- *'I'm mixed-background, I'm a bit ambiguous in terms of background. …because of my name, I mean for white Australian, I'm not Australian, I don't tick their box for being Australian, Caucasian Australian, because I don't speak that way and don't connect culturally in the same way'* (FG 8).
- *'Even in places and institutions that claim to be inclusive and diverse, you face racism all the time. For example, they are surprised I can speak English, they have this judgment that being a Muslim means I have no rights. Under the label of inclusivity, they have this pre-judgement'* (FG 7).

Several participants stated they feel treated less favourably, singled out or racially profiled, for example when shopping or at the airport. Sharing these experiences, some expressed they are not always sure whether their ethnic or religious background does play a role or not. This uncertainty casts constant doubts over their daily encounters and denies them a sense of normality as they constantly ask themselves why they have been treated differently.

A typical example that was raised by several participants was related to their bags being checked frequently in shops, or when they are being treated in an unfriendly way while other clients or customers are treated 'with a smile'. Some participants spoke about similar experiences at an Australian airport:

At Melbourne airport, the immigration officer was a bit blunt and a bit rude, and I thought he was just behaving the way he is, but when we passed by and heard how he treated the Caucasian guy behind us, he was so much more friendly – he said "welcome back". And my son said: I think that was a bit racist, he was not friendly with us but very friendly with the Caucasian guy. Is this racism? He treated us differently compared to a white family (FG 8).

In responses to this account, a male focus group participant of Arabic background (with an Arabic-sounding name) shared his experiences of being constantly pulled over for additional checks at airport security:

I had the feeling it's because of my name. So I asked an officer who was reasonably friendly why. Is it the name, the face, the skin colour? And he actually told me it's because of my name: "Everyone with a name like yours are in the system to get picked up". It's in the system, there is subtle systematic behaviour of racism, for them it might just be standard protocols (FG 8).

Several participants spoke about negative experiences with the police, and one male participant highlighted the severity of allegations of racism within the police, stating: *'Personal racism like "go back to where you came from" is bad, but what is worst is racism within the police, they are supposed to look after you'* (FG 4).

Two women recalled separate events where they felt treated less favourably by police after they got involved in a car accident. One of them claimed *'it wasn't my fault, but police fined me because I'm the migrant, I have the accent; the other guy was a tradie who could communicate with the police much better than me'* (FG 4). The second participant in the same focus group recalled a similar incident in Box Hill; she spoke about unfriendly and unfavourable treatment:

The police arrived and was not friendly to us at all. [The officer] checked the child in the other car if she is alright and when I asked if he could also check on my child, he said 'No, you can call the ambulance'. Very very rude. … My face, my language – it's not Australian. He just discriminated against me and the discrimination continued at the police station'

She further alleged that the police initially refused her request to get a Mandarin interpreter:

He asked all these questions, and I didn't want to make mistakes, and my English is not good enough, so I asked many times, five times, to have a Mandarin interpreter, and he said no. I was very scared, but he said "you can speak English, you don't need it".

REPORTING RACISM

There is consistent empirical evidence that most incidents of racism are not formally reported and therefore remain unrecorded. Various international studies have shown that only a minority of those who experience racism end up reporting the incident (FRA 2017), and emerging domestic research confirms that this applies also to Australia and Victoria (Doery et al. 2020; Peucker et al. 2021: Peucker et al. 2022; Vergani and Navarro 2020).

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ONE OF THE PROBLEMS IS THE PERCEPTION OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE AUSTRALIAN AND IF YOU ARE NOT WHITE OR CAUCASIAN YOU ARE NOT SEEN AS AUSTRALIAN' (FG 8).

Our local study in Casey and Greater Dandenong also highlights the problem of under-reporting, but it also found that a small number of participants appeared determined to speak out against racism and formally report it. For some their involvement in the project encouraged them to reflect on their experiences with and response to racism, and some of them explained that their participation in the project increased their commitment to not 'ignore' racism any longer.

Under-reporting racism was clearly acknowledged by most participants with 86% of the survey respondents agreeing that people who experience racism often do not report the incident (Figure 14). Around 18% of respondents stated they had personally reported an experience with racism to an organisation or community group (formal reporting), while half of all respondents

had only ever told a family member, friend or colleague (informal reporting); the remaining 31% have never told anyone (Figure 15).
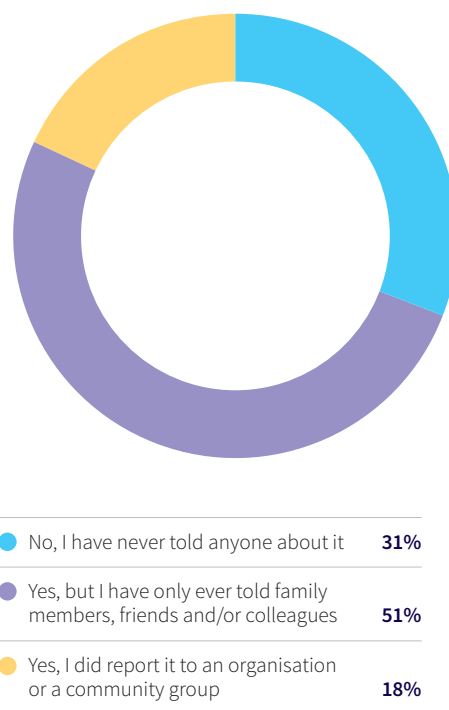
Noting that the number of those in the survey who have formally reported racism is very low, we found that the majority of them reported to a community group or community organisation that may often not be specialised in responding to a report of racism. Others reported to specialised services, which may (depending on the nature of the particular incident) be well-placed to provide support. Examples included the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC), the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), the police or community services specialised in Islamophobia (e.g. Islamophobia Register, Islamic Council of Victoria's Islamophobia Support Service).

FIGURE 14: ASSESSMENT: PEOPLE OFTEN DO NOT REPORT RACISM.

● Strongly agree	**66%**
● Somewhat agree	**20%**
● Somewhat disagree	**8%**
● Strongly disagree	**6%**
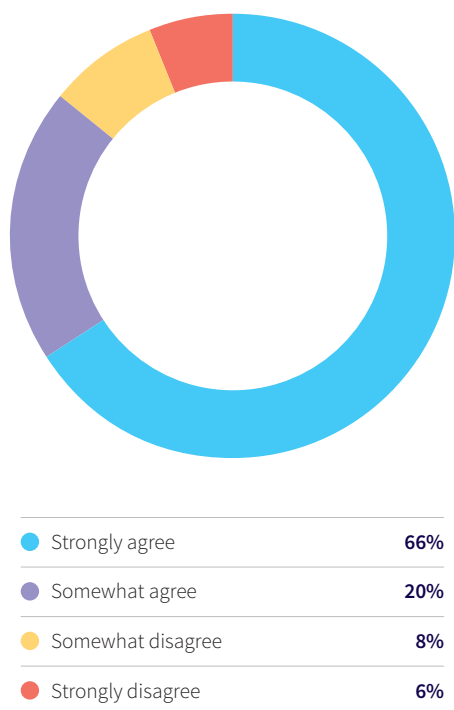
Q: People who experience racism and/or religious prejudice/discrimination often do not report these incidents?

FIGURE 15: REPORTING RACISM

● No, I have never told anyone about it	**31%**
● Yes, but I have only ever told family members, friends and/or colleagues	**51%**
● Yes, I did report it to an organisation or a community group	**18%**

Q: If you (or another member of your household) have ever experienced or witnessed racism and/or religious prejudice/discrimination, have you ever told anyone about it?
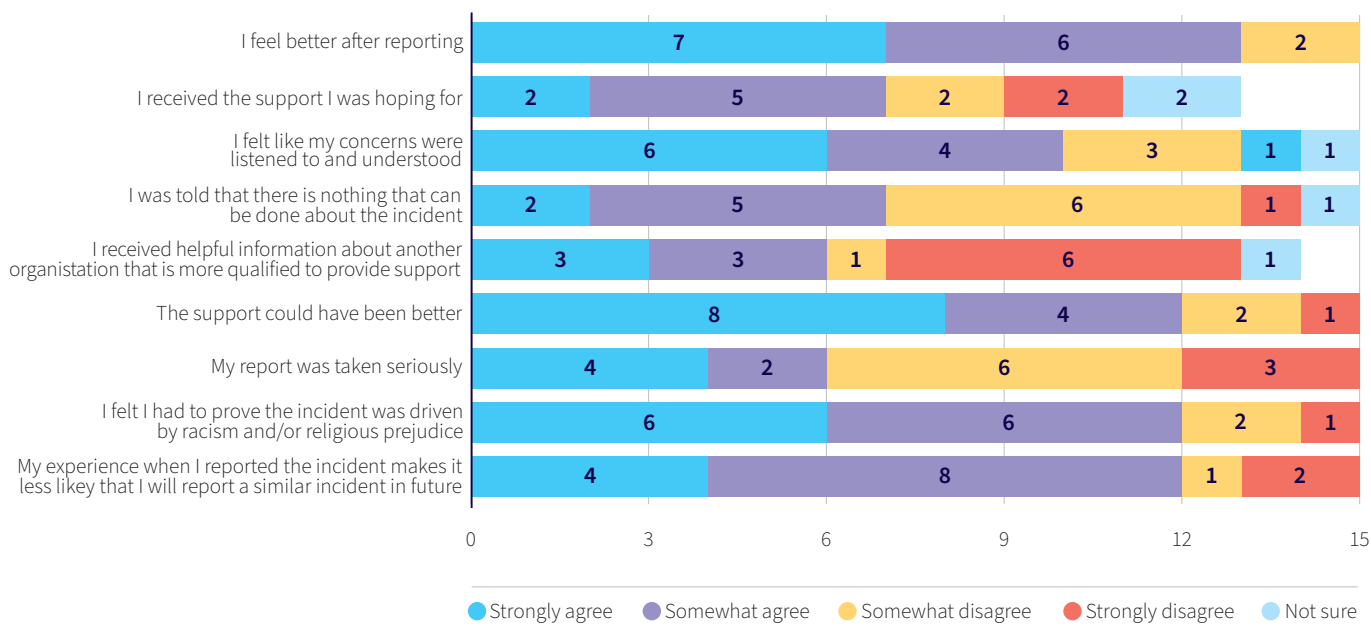
In the focus groups, most participants stated they were unaware of any organisations they could report to. The only place most of them knew about was the police – and some of them had actually reported racism to the police. One participant's words captures this widespread perception: *'No one has ever reported any of this. We don't know where to report to. The only possible place I could think of for reporting is police.* (FG 1)'

Only very few focus group participants were aware of the VEOHRC or AHRC, and none had ever contacted them for support after an incident of racism. One male participant explained in his discussion group: *'There are places to report, like the human rights commission. They are there, the question is: are they effective? None of us has ever reported any of this, right?'* (FG 4). Some focus group participants shared that they had reported or made a complaint about racist behaviour within the organisation where the incident occurred (e.g. their workplace), which in some cases proved effective, leading to the desired outcome (e.g. holding the perpetrator to account).

Experiences with reporting racism and reasons for reporting

Survey respondents who had formally reported an incident of racism provided feedback on their reporting experience. While most of them stated they felt better after reporting, which suggests an in principle positive emotional effect of speaking out, almost all of them agreed that the support could have been better. Many even said that after this reporting experience they were now **less likely to report** a similar incident of racism again. They often felt they had to prove the incident was driven by racism, and although many of them thought their concerns were listened to and understood, others had the sense their report was not taken seriously (Figure 16).

FIGURE 16: PERSONAL EXPERIENCES WITH REPORTING RACISM (TOTAL NUMBERS)

In the focus groups, several participants spoke about their experiences with reporting racism (typically to their employer or police), but most expressed disappointment and dissatisfaction with the process and/or outcome of the reporting. Some explicitly argued that their previous experiences with reporting have made them more reluctant to report again in the future. The following statements capture the broader sentiments and experiences in the focus groups:

- *'I have complained to my employer, he has never taken it seriously'* (FG 2).

- *'I was well aware about racism reporting procedures at the workplace. But whenever I made a complaint regarding a racism related issue, my manager never attended and strategically slipped away'* (FG 2).

- *'We have clear policies and procedures at my workplace to report racism related incidents, but I haven't seen any positive outcome after the inquiries. These kinds of practices discourage employees to make a complaint when racism happens'* (FG 2).

- *'I went to police and they said nothing. So next time something happens, I won't go. Look, they won't do anything, so why should I waste my time?'* (FG 3).

- *'Reporting to police is also a very long process with thousands of questions, and after that they say "we are done here", and they won't get back to you about what happened and what they did'* (FG 3).

- *'They make [reporting] so hard. A lay person can't do these things. They have to get on with their lives. So they brush it off, that's the experience of a migrant in an Anglo-Saxon country, which it actually isn't [because it's Aboriginal land]… Take it on the cheek and keep going'* (FG 4).

Addressing these negative reporting experiences appears crucial in encouraging more people to speak out against racism and seek support. We will discuss this in the roadmap section of this report (section 5).

If we want to improve the reporting experience, we also need to understand the **reasons why people report racism**. We explored this in our survey in two ways. First, we asked those who had reported about their specific reasons for doing so, and second, we asked every respondent, regardless of whether they have experienced racism or not, whether they have reported it, about their view on why people would want to report in general.

For those who had formally reported, the main reasons were related to their attempt to contribute to positive change. 'If no one reports, nothing will ever change', was the most common response, followed by (and related to) the motive that the incident should simply not go unrecorded. Others stated they reported because they wanted to hold the perpetrator accountable, and some sought legal advice.

The responses to the more general survey question about reasons for report similarly indicate that people were motivated by the desire to raise awareness of the persistent problem of racism (Figure 17); more than six in ten respondents considered this to be one of the main reasons for reporting (62%). A similar proportion believed that people report in order to get legal support (59%). Just under half of the respondents mentioned access to emotional and/or psychological support (49%) and 42% think people want to 'punish' the perpetrator, while only 27% believe people report in order to 'seek mediation or resolve the conflict.'

ONE OF THE PROBLEMS IS THE PERCEPTION OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE AUSTRALIAN AND IF YOU ARE NOT WHITE OR CAUCASIAN YOU ARE NOT SEEN AS AUSTRALIAN' (FG 8).

FIGURE 17: GENERAL REASONS FOR REPORTING RACISM
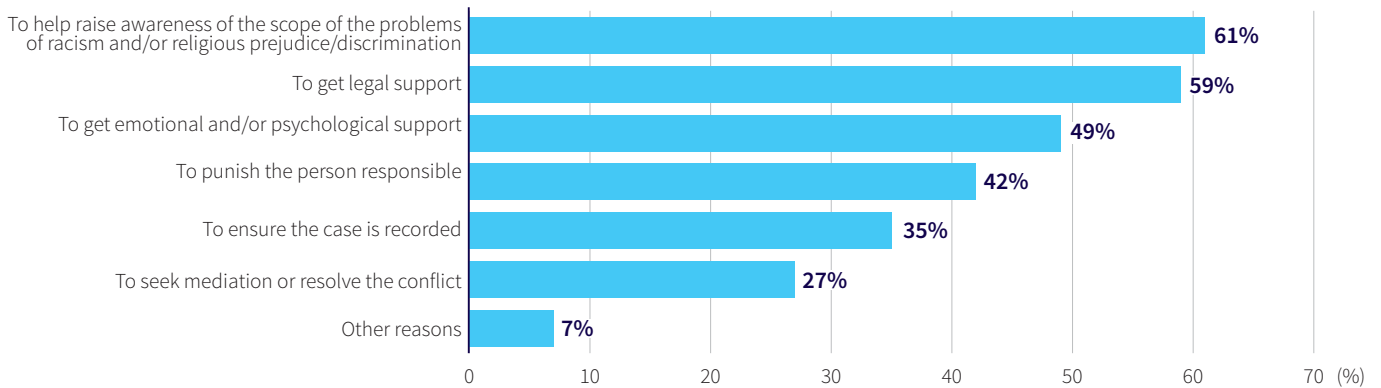
Q: Generally speaking, in your view, what are the main reasons someone would report an experience of racism or religious prejudice/discrimination.

In the focus group, only a few participants shared their views about reasons for reporting racism. Some saw value in trying to ensure the perpetrator won't behave in a racist way again. Acknowledging the widespread bias against Muslims in the media, for example, one Muslim woman said it was important *'to educate the person responsible instead of punishing them, find out the reason why they did it'* (FG 1). Another female participant explained that ignoring the incident was common but wrong: *'We do that in our community, I do that too: "Just ignore"… we teach our children "ignore, ignore, ignore". But that's not good, we have to make sure that that person won't do that to anyone else, we have to take steps'* (FG 3).

Others highlighted the expected positive effects of speaking out for their mental health. One participant called on others to report: *'I would recommend everyone to report it, because unreported it will just build up in a person over time, and that's hurtful. Racism should not be tolerated – so speak up!'* (FG 6). In another focus group, one woman referred to children experiencing racism at school: *'Your child goes to school, and it happens all the time, and your child comes to you and tells you once, and you say "ignore". Your child will never come to you again. She will keep it a secret and, in the end, she will go into a depression, and it will affect her health and everything'* (FG 3).

Reporting barriers

The survey findings also shed light on the **reasons for people not to report racism** (Figure 18). The most common reporting barriers, according to the survey respondents, were:

- insufficient awareness of existing services,
- language barriers,
- a sense that nothing would change if they reported;
- concerns they may not be taken seriously; and
- a lack of places where people can report and get support.

In relation to the latter statement about insufficient reporting options, a minority (37%) of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that 'services and organisations available for people in Greater Dandenong or Casey to report racism are appropriate', while 31% disagreed or strongly disagreed and 33% were not sure.

FIGURE 18: REPORTING BARRIERS (TOTAL NUMBERS)
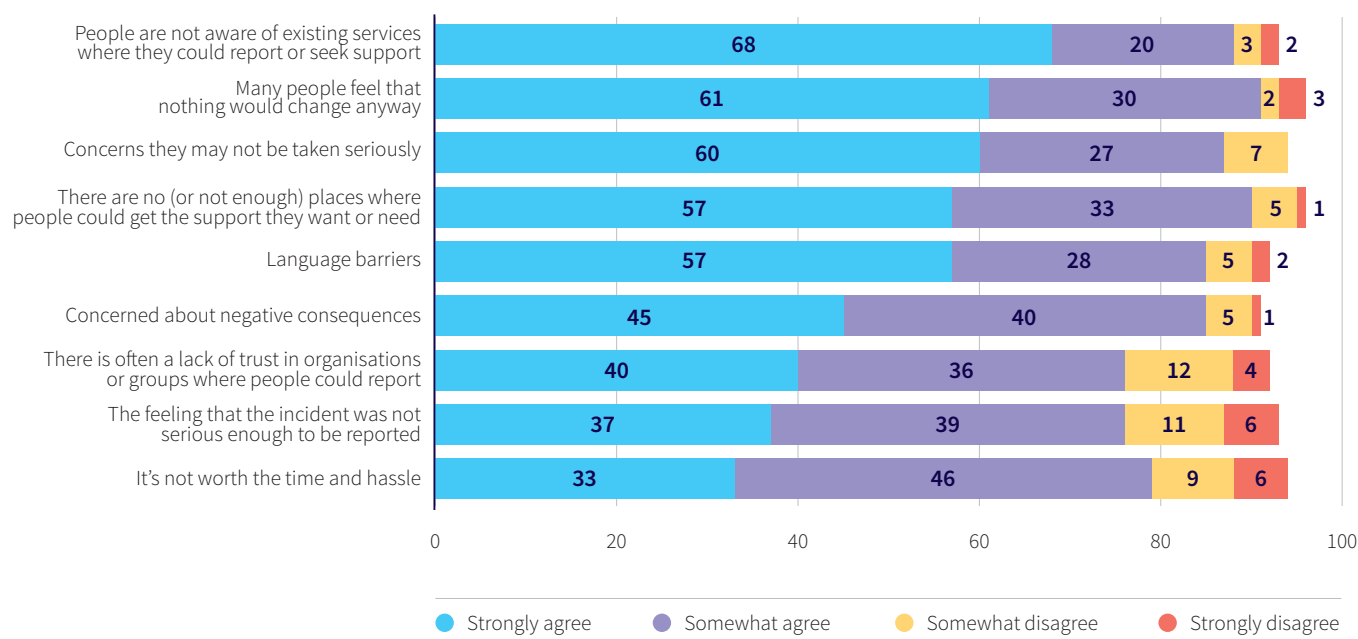
Q: What do you think are the main reasons why people don't report or seek help?

Similar views were articulated by the focus group participants. Most of them did not know about existing support services or expressed little confidence in the capacity of these services to deliver satisfactory outcomes: *'We don't report, because no one listens to our voice. What can we do? Go to the council or the police? What are they going to do?'* One participant described current *'equal opportunity and anti-discrimination laws [as] toothless tigers'*; referring to services of *'the human rights commission,'* he said: *'The question is: are they effective?'* Language barriers were also mentioned several times:

Reporting is a very big thing for many, especially those with limited English. Their children would have to act as interpreters, but they are very busy, they won't take their mom or dad to the police or sit with them and write an email to any of these organisations.

"

WE CAN REPORT IT. BUT NOTHING WILL HAPPEN' (FG 2).

There was a common concern that those who face racism would often find it very difficult to provide sufficient evidence, either because the racist incident occurred covertly (e.g. hidden discrimination) or because the incident happened in a public place without witnesses and perpetrated by an unknown person:

- *'It's useless to complain regarding a verbal harassment if it happens at a public place. No action will be taken. Honestly, I don't know where to complain'* (FG 2).

- *'Even if you report it, then you have to prove it, find witnesses'* (FG 4).

- *'Police want proof, and when we do provide proof, they say 'ah, it's your fault … but how is it my fault, I have other witnesses and they still say it's my fault'* (FG 3).

Given the widespread sentiment that reporting would not lead to any positive outcome or change, reporting is often not seen as a priority or considered worth the effort: *'It is literally impossible to prove, and there is no formal encouragement to report, we have other important things to do so we just swallow it and move on'*, as one male focus group participant stated (FG 4). (He was one of the very few who was aware of different reporting and support services.)

Because many regarded the police as the only place they could report to, they would only consider reporting very severe cases of racism. *'No, I would not report… well, unless you experience really very bad racism, when it harms you [physically] and it's done by adult people'* (FG 6).

Some participants also shared how their encounters with racism have affected them emotionally and how this can further deter them from speaking out against racism, as the process of reporting may further add to the emotional load. One person, who had been discriminated against by her supervisor, initially remained silent but ultimately made an internal complaint at work: *'I did not speak out earlier because I was afraid'* (FG 5). A participant in another focus group (FG 7) stated: *'Reporting is very brave, because most people are scared and just want to run away from the situation'*, and a third woman articulated her reason for not reporting like this:

> After that experience [with racism], you don't want to rock the boat, you feel like you are outnumbered. The anger, the sense of shame and not belonging. Then you think it through and you think: if I report it, what's going to happen? Nothing. This sense of helplessness. It would be good to have somewhere where we can report to, even if it's anonymously (FG 4).

Overall, previous unsatisfactory experiences with reporting racism appeared to be a significant factor in people's considerations about whether to report again: *'Racism is happening out there, but people don't speak up because they had tried to get help, but they have not been helped, so they can't be bothered now'* (FG 3). Another participant added: *'I went to police, and they said nothing, so next time something happens, I won't go. Look, they won't do anything, so why should I waste my time?'* (FG 3). One participant called for change: *'We need to develop confidence about the system. Otherwise, we won't take any action although we are well aware about the racism'* (FG 2).

ANTI-RACISM SUPPORT SERVICES

Less than one third of all survey respondents agreed (8% strongly agreed and 24% somewhat agreed) with the statement that there are enough services and organisations that offer appropriate support for people in Greater Dandenong or Casey who have experienced racism. Four in ten 'somewhat disagreed' (19%) or 'strongly disagreed' (21%), and the remaining 28% were not sure (Figure 19).

FIGURE 19: ASSESSMENT: AVAILABILITY OF APPROPRIATE ANTI-RACISM SUPPORT

|	
Strongly agree	8%
Somewhat agree	24%
Somewhat disagree	19%
Strongly disagree	21%
Not sure	28%
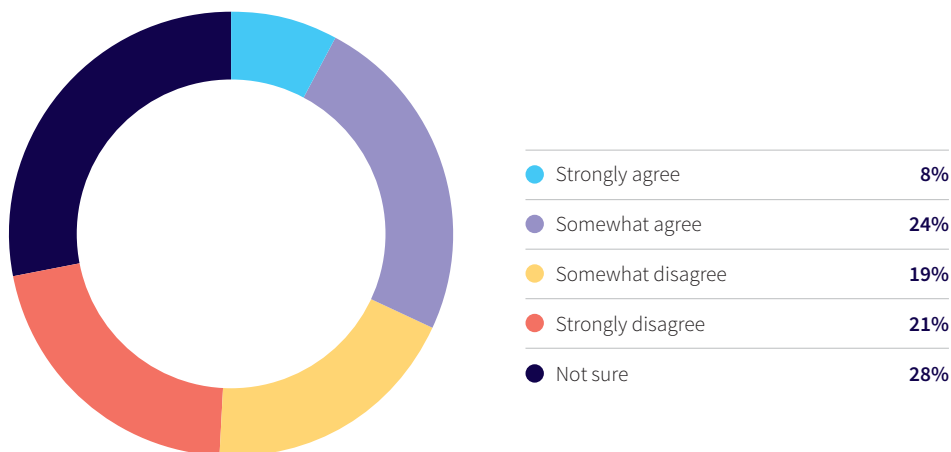
Q: There are enough services and organisations that offer appropriate support for people from Greater Dandenong or Casey who have experienced racism.

Survey respondents shared their views on how to improve support services for those who experience racism so that more people would come forward, report racism and seek support. Almost all survey respondents considered it important or very important that (Figure 20):

- Anti-racism support services are offered by organisations they trust;
- Services are better qualified to respond and provide adequate support;
- Existing services are promoted more within the community;
- Services are (more) culturally sensitive and provided in different community languages; and
- Services emphasise advocacy for the person who experienced racism.

FIGURE 20: WAYS TO INCREASE REPORTING
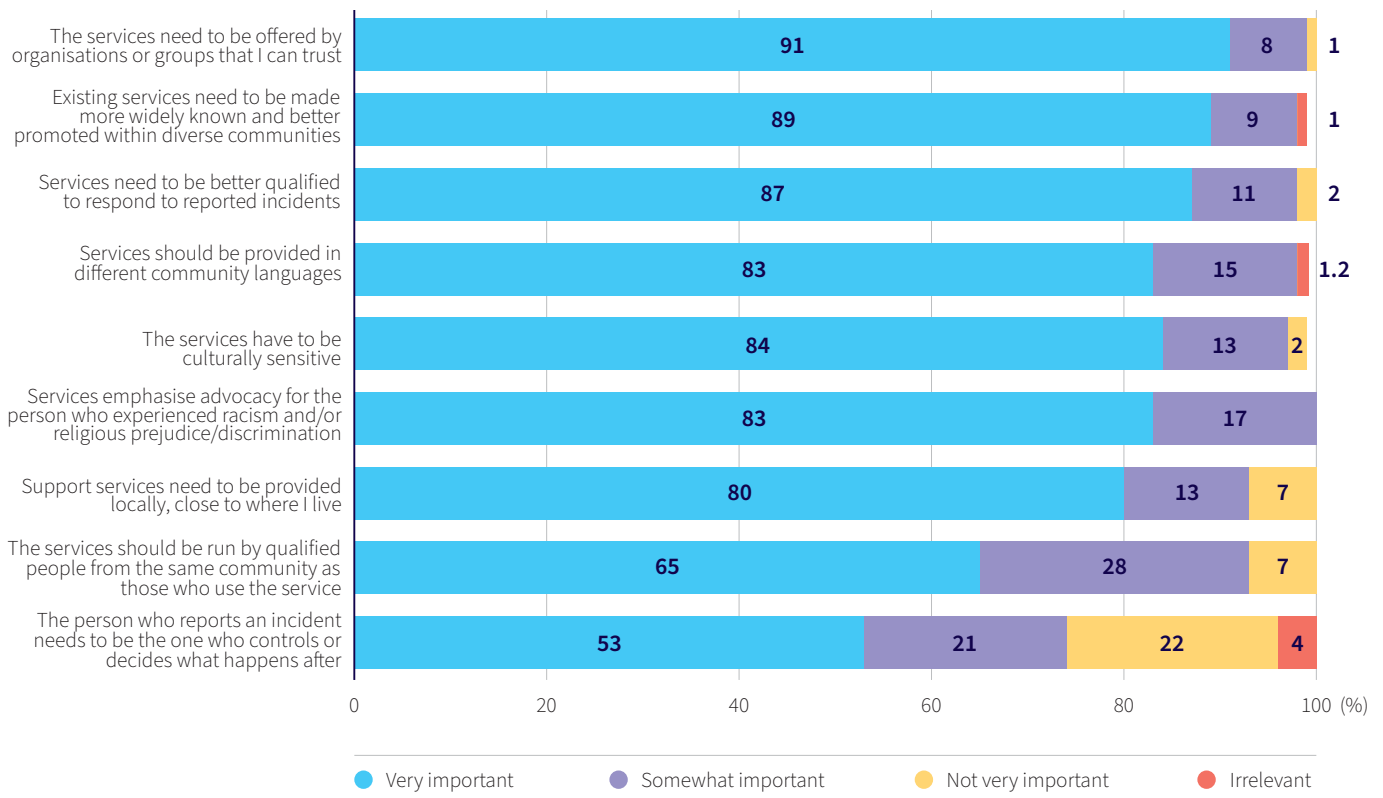
Q: What would make it more likely for you (and others in your community) to report experiences of racism and/or religious prejudice/discrimination?

"

THERE NEEDS TO BE SOMEONE WHO IS HEARING US AND AVAILABLE WITH SUPPORT SERVICES ON THE LOCAL LEVEL (FG 7).

The participants in the focus groups expressed similar views. Related to the call for more advocacy for the person who experienced racism, some participants stressed how important it was to have a place or organisation to report to where they feel comfortable, are 'heard' and receive qualified support:

- *'We need to know where we can go to get support and be comfortable to approach these organisations'* (FG 7).
- *'They should hear us. A person with responsibility should at least hear us, should give sympathy'* (FG 5).
- *'There needs to be someone who is hearing us and available with support services on the local level'* (FG 7).

In one focus group (FG 1), the potential role of bicultural workers was mentioned as *'first point of contact'* for those who have experienced racism, as these community workers have the trust in the community and often speak their language; a Muslim woman said: *'It doesn't have to be a Muslim, but they need to be qualified to be able to offer support and referral options'.*

Several participants articulated expectations that the *'government should put the spotlight on the issue'* (FG 6) and **local councils** need to *'come forward and support this'* (FG 4) by organising community sessions to raise awareness of people's rights and to promote existing support services for those who face racism. One focus group participant (FG 8), for example, suggested: '*The council could arrange a community café and run information sessions there about racism, reporting lines and everything.'*

Others stressed that once support services are in place, they need to be widely promoted by the council and others: *'Advertise them well and in every language, because most people who face racism have a language barrier. The council should advertise it very well'* (FG 4), possibly supported by the local MP: *'maybe ask your local MP for assistance, they could also make this more aware in the community'* (FG 6).

Schools were frequently mentioned as crucial stakeholders in advancing anti-racism and assisting students, parents and staff in developing better awareness of what constitutes racism, and in encouraging them to speak out against it in a safe way. One participant (FG 4) said:

Students should be educated about equal treatment. Also their parents, and how they should make their children aware of racism. And kids at school should have a place to go where they feel confident to talk about it. I will now bring this up at school and mention it to the principal; something needs to be done about this.

Another participant (FG 4) made the following suggestions:

Start with counselling in the schools. It's high time, let them know what racism is and what you need to do and how you need to react, which organisation you can reach when you face any racism. Similar to the police when they go to different schools to talk about cyber-bullying, the council should organise such sessions for kids and staff at school about racism and educate those who are doing the racism.

There were discussions in several focus groups about how to improve reporting pathways. Participants clearly favoured a **combination of face-to-face, online or phone reporting** to cater for different needs and preferences. Many of them highlighted the importance of having the option of anonymous reporting, for example through an anti-racism hotline on the phone or online. One participant (FG 6) said: *'Face-to-face is better, but also online for those who don't want to do it face-to-face. You can then also remain anonymous.'* Another person agreed: *'Many people probably prefer [reporting] online and anonymous out of fear of retaliation.'* Similarly, a participant in another focus group argued that *'some people may not feel confident to go in public to talk about this, but they would then have this number they can call'* (FG 8).

Community trust

The survey responses as well as the focus group discussions highlight the importance of trust in the organisations that people could report to. A lack of trust and confidence in the current support system is a major barrier to reporting racism for many. It is therefore crucial to understand which local organisations participants consider trustworthy and well-placed to act as contact points for reporting racism and possibly for providing support.

Unsurprisingly, there is not one organisation that is unanimously trusted across all segments of the local communities. Many discussions in the focus groups and some comments in the open text responses in the survey revolved around the role of police and local councils and to what extent they are considered trustworthy organisations that people could turn to in order to report racism and seek support.

Around one half of survey respondents indicate that the two local councils and local police are seen as trustworthy within large parts of their community. However, some expressed mistrust towards police and reservations about the police's capacity to handle reports of racism. This is significant because certain cases of racism, in particular those that meet the criminal threshold ('prejudice-motivated crime'), can only be formally investigated by police.

While the two local councils were often described as having an important role to play in local anti-racism support (e.g. logistic support, setting up a hotline/helpline or funding grassroots community anti-racism initiatives), they were not always seen as the right institutions to record complaints of racism and provide community support. As one survey respondent wrote: *'I'd be hesitant to … have council run this because they're not usually representative of the community and the bureaucracy tied to it would remove an element of trust or feelings of safety for community.'*

There was, however, overwhelming support for community-led anti-racism support services, run by cultural or religious community organisations in Casey and Greater Dandenong (e.g. mosques, temples, cultural associations) and by certain established local service providers (e.g. Southern Migrant & Refugee Centre, Wellsprings for Women, Southeast Monash Legal Services, Centre for Multicultural Youth, South East Community Links, and various neighbourhood centres or community hubs).

The local community voices in the survey, through focus groups and during various project-related workshops and forums, clearly expressed the need to improve reporting pathways and support services for those who experience racism. This requires a multipronged approach and concerted efforts from a range of stakeholders with different responsibilities. It mandates a joint commitment around a collaborative process that acknowledges community experiences, expertise and needs as well as different levels of resources and decision-making power. The final section of this report discusses key recommendations for this process, presenting a roadmap for community-led anti-racism work in Casey and Greater Dandenong.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS: A LOCAL ANTI-RACISM ROADMAP FOR CASEY AND GREATER DANDENONG

From the outset and throughout its delivery, this project was guided by the commitment to developing practical recommendations on how to effectively change the reporting and support service structures for people in Casey and Greater Dandenong who face racism.

This would need to result in real improvements in people's lives. It should be seen as one important puzzle piece among a comprehensive series of place-based anti-racism practices. The project endeavoured to be both a research study and a community engagement initiative. While this report marks the end of the research, it seeks to build a foundation that can help further the community engagement, dialogue and collaboration processes that have emerged during the project.

This section brings together the learnings from over 12 months of deep listening to the community through the community survey, the focus groups and our open community engagement, in particular the four anti-racism community forums. Based on this rich community input, we developed a local roadmap towards improved anti-racism reporting and support services in Casey and Greater Dandenong.

Reporting (or not reporting) a personal experience with racism is not a simple singular decision but a complex process shaped by a range of individual and structural factors. Accordingly, the proposed roadmap needs to be multifaceted to address as many of these factors as possible – trying to reduce barriers and strengthen those factors that may encourage people to report racism and seek support.

Importantly, this roadmap must not unduly shift the onus of reporting onto those who face racism. Nor can it enable expectations that those who experience racism need to navigate a reporting process that may be disempowering and potentially retraumatising. Of course, apart from bystander (or 'upstander') reporting, it is the individual who experiences racism who needs to decide whether they report or refrain from doing so, but it is the responsibility of other stakeholders to ensure that the reporting process is as accessible, appropriate and empowering as possible – and linked to the kind of support services that people seek.

"

IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF OTHER STAKEHOLDERS TO ENSURE THAT THE REPORTING PROCESS IS AS ACCESSIBLE, APPROPRIATE AND EMPOWERING AS POSSIBLE.

RECOMMENDATION 1: DIVERSITY AND REPRESENTATION

Some participants have called for more commitment to positively highlighting the multicultural richness of the local community and fostering cross-community dialogue. This is important but should not be regarded as a primary anti-racism strategy. Racism also happens within spaces that celebrate diversity and claim to be inclusive.

Related to this is the ongoing lack of **representation** of diverse communities across all levels of various organisations, including management and leadership roles, which is not only an effect of exclusionary structures and processes but also contributes to cementing exclusionary boundaries. Representation does matter and can be an important catalyst for greater awareness, normalisation and appreciation of difference. It can also help challenge widespread stereotypical images of what it means to be Australian and *'train the brains that Australians can be of different colours'*, as one focus group participant put it (FG 8).

RECOMMENDATION 2: AWARENESS RAISING

A pivotal element of meaningful local anti-racism practice in Casey and Greater Dandenong (and elsewhere) is to work with communities to build deeper awareness of what constitutes racism and what reporting pathways and support services are available. These awareness raising efforts should be guided by the expertise of those communities impacted by racism.

Some participants were highly attuned also to systemic and often subtle manifestations of racism, while others expressed uncertainty about what racism means and how to recognise it when they encounter it. These uncertainties are a crucial reporting barrier: *'There is no awareness in the community about racism at all, although it is existing*

at a very large scale' (FG 3). We suggest implementing **community-led workshops** as well as information sessions in schools and workplaces where people can learn about the complex and multifaceted nature of racism and how it can manifest in both overt and more subtle, insidious ways.

More broadly, there is a great need to raise awareness about **people's rights to equal treatment** and non-discrimination, what laws and mechanisms are in place to protect people against racism, how and where they can best report what kinds of racism, and what **support options** are available. This addresses another key barrier to reporting: low levels of awareness in the community of their rights, existing pathways and support such as the services of the VEOHRC, the eSafety Commissioner, police, or the community-based options like the ICV Islamophobia Support Services. Outreach and information campaigns about these services seem to have failed to reach large sections of the communities affected by racism. Awareness-raising activities can also help people better understand the specific responsibilities of police in recording and investigating 'prejudice motivated' crimes (or incidents) and that the police cannot investigate racism as such but only as a potential motive in an alleged crime (e.g. assault).

We recommend that different stakeholders, from local schools, employers, local councils and community service providers to police and human rights agencies (e.g. VEOHRC), run awareness-raising sessions tailored to the specific audience and ideally in partnership with community groups. Many in the community in Casey and Greater Dandenong have expressed high hopes that the two local councils can play a leading role in facilitating such community awareness-raising sessions.

RECOMMENDATION 3: DIVERSIFYING REPORTING PATHWAYS

It is vital to have a variety of reporting options in place in order to be able to cater as much as possible for the specific circumstances, preferences and support needs of the individual person. Some may report because they want to explore their legal options, find a solution for a specific problem (e.g. being racially bullied or discriminated against at work) or hold the perpetrator to account; others may primarily seek emotional support and find a safe place where they are listened to and 'heard'. For all these individual motives, **reporting pathways need to be linked to concrete support services** and ensure that people feel safe to report, either via a phone helpline, email or in-person. This process is usually not anonymous, with the person reporting the racist incident sharing at least some personal information. Confidentiality is therefore as crucial as a relationship of trust. This applies in particular to those who have concerns about potentially negative consequences for reporting racism, for example because of their legal residence or citizenship status or fears of repercussions, for example at their workplace or school (secondary victimisation).

But reporting is not always linked to the desire to access support, and as our findings have shown, many people may feel motivated to report simply because they want to raise awareness of the scope of racism and to make sure the case does not go unrecorded. This could be done **anonymously**, without providing personal details, for example via an online reporting platform or via a phone hotline. Such reporting mechanisms already exist, notably the VEOHRC Community Reporting Tool or the more specific Islamophobia Register, and we recommend further promoting these platforms (there was very little awareness of these services among our participants). To accommodate different

reporting preferences and needs, we also propose establishing a dedicated **anti-racism hotline or helpline**, where people have the option of reporting anonymously, ideally in different community languages. Such a phone reporting hotline could be set up and operated by local councils, as suggested by several participants in our project, or with a broader geographical scope, which would require the support from state or federal agencies or community stakeholders. In Victoria, a state-wide reporting phone hotline would complement the VEOHRC enquiry line and chat services, which offers information about racism, among other issues.

Safe and supportive processes of reporting should also be established and promoted within **workplaces and schools**. Access to such internal processes may be easier and have the potential of being more effective and leading to more immediate outcomes for the individual.

RECOMMENDATION 4: COMMUNITY-LED SUPPORT SERVICES — ESTABLISHING A LOCAL ANTI-RACISM SUPPORT NETWORK

While it is important to promote existing reporting and support services, it has also become clear that these services are regarded as insufficient by many in the community (noting that most people did not even know about them). The reasons were manifold, but what appears central is the low levels of trust and confidence among many in the community that existing services can provide effective responses and outcomes and/or offer the kind of empathic support and advocacy people desired.

In response to these widespread community sentiments, we recommend **establishing a local community-led anti-racism support network**, comprised of locally trusted and established community organisations

and service providers, especially those with longstanding engagement with local multicultural and multifaith communities. This is where relationships of trust already exist, and this foundation can be strengthened and broadened further.

In this project, members from local multicultural and multifaith communities (and also a small number of people from the Aboriginal community) have specified which community groups and service providers they would like to see play a more central role in providing anti-racism support to local communities. At the time of writing, exploratory discussions are occurring with these organisations to explore the formation of a community-led local anti-racism support network. If such a network for Casey and Greater Dandenong were to be formally established, this would need to be widely promoted.

While such an anti-racism support network could undertake a range of activities including awareness-raising (see above), the primary purpose of participating organisations would be to act as 'first points of contact' for those in the community who have experienced racism and would like to report and seek support. As such, the organisations would not need to provide expert advice or legal services, but offer a culturally safe and emotionally supportive space for people to speak out, to be listened to actively and empathetically, and to explore further support options jointly, if desired (e.g. referral to specialised services). This anti-racism support network may also develop a basic recording template to **anonymously record** the reported cases of racism (with the consent of the individual). This would align with the expectation of many in the community that their reported experience with racism does not 'go unrecorded'. Related to this, a consistent recording system applied by a number of local community organisations may help build empirical evidence on the locally specific

nature and manifestations of racism in Casey and Greater Dandenong, which can be used to raise awareness of racism and facilitate targeted and more effective anti-racism prevent and intervention measures.

RECOMMENDATION 5: PROMOTION REPORTING PATHWAYS AND SUPPORT SERVICES

The lack of awareness of reporting pathways is a key obstacle for many who wish to speak out and/or seek support (see recommendation 2). It is pivotal to regard this not primarily as a 'knowledge deficit' of the community but a 'promotion deficit' of the respective services. **Promoting existing reporting pathways and support options** as well as, once established, the services of the local anti-racism support network require concerted, multipronged and continuous efforts by many stakeholders, especially on the local level. As mentioned above, the local councils can play a very important supportive role here, for example by (co-)hosting or facilitating community forums and information sessions (together with communities), running social media campaigns, and preparing and disseminating multilingual information brochures and flyers.

As part of these public promotion efforts, we suggest considering developing an '**anti-racism support' logo** that can be used as a recognisable identifier and trademark in any promotion material in relation to local anti-racism measures by the council and/or the organisations within the local anti-racism support network. This logo could also be displayed by a range of local stakeholders, including local businesses, GPs, libraries and community centres (possibly even as badges for security staff in shopping centres), to express their support for anti-racism. Ideally, these stakeholders would also make an anti-racism pledge and be trained to refer customers and clients who experience racism to the local anti-racism support network.

RECOMMENDATION 6: COMMITMENT OF AND COLLABORATION BETWEEN VARIOUS STAKEHOLDERS

Anti-racism work requires committed actions from a range of stakeholders, from communities and civil society groups to all tiers of governments, from employers and schools to police and human rights agencies. The same applies to the way anti-racism support services need to operate, due to the fact that racism occurs across all areas of life, including various institutional settings (e.g. school, at the workplace). This means that various stakeholders have a role to play in building an environment and structures where more people feel encouraged to speak out against racism and seek support. Local councils and a future local anti-racism support network may help coordinate these **collaborative efforts** or explore potential collaborations between stakeholders.

- Agencies and organisations that already provide support services, most notably, **Victoria Police** (and, more specifically, local police) and **VEOHRC**, should consider local awareness raising campaigns on how and under what circumstances their respective agencies are well placed to assist people in reporting and seeking support. Such campaigns may also include contributing to community forums and interactive workshops, hosted by, for example, local community groups, service providers or the council. This can also help strengthen community relationships and build trust. Given that a future anti-racism support network would not provide expert support, it would need to be able to make referrals to existing, more specialised organisations.

- **Local police** are often seen as the only place where people can report racism, although it appears that in most cases, especially when the incident does not amount to a crime, the police may not be the most adequate agency to provide support and respond in a satisfactory manner. Not only do local communities need to be better informed about the role of police in the context of recording (racist) prejudice motivated crimes and incidents, but we also recommend that local police stations are made aware of alternative anti-racism support services (e.g. VEOHRC or a future local support network) which they can informally refer people to for further support.

- Many **local cultural or religious community groups**, including places of worship, such as mosques, temples or gurudwara, offer safe spaces and enjoy a high level of community trust. Ideally, such community organisations may formally join the local anti-racism support network, but they can also play an important role in a more informal capacity, for example, by organising or co-hosting community information sessions about racism, encouraging their members to speak out and promoting the services of a local anti-racism support network or the VEOHRC.

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