

All in this  
**Together**

A community-led response to  
racism for the City of Wyndham

This report was prepared by Mario Peucker, Thomas Clark, and Holly Claridge; it presents key findings from a project conducted between late 2019 and early 2021 by Victoria University, in partnership with Wyndham City Council, and supported by the Scanlon Foundation.

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# Acknowledgements

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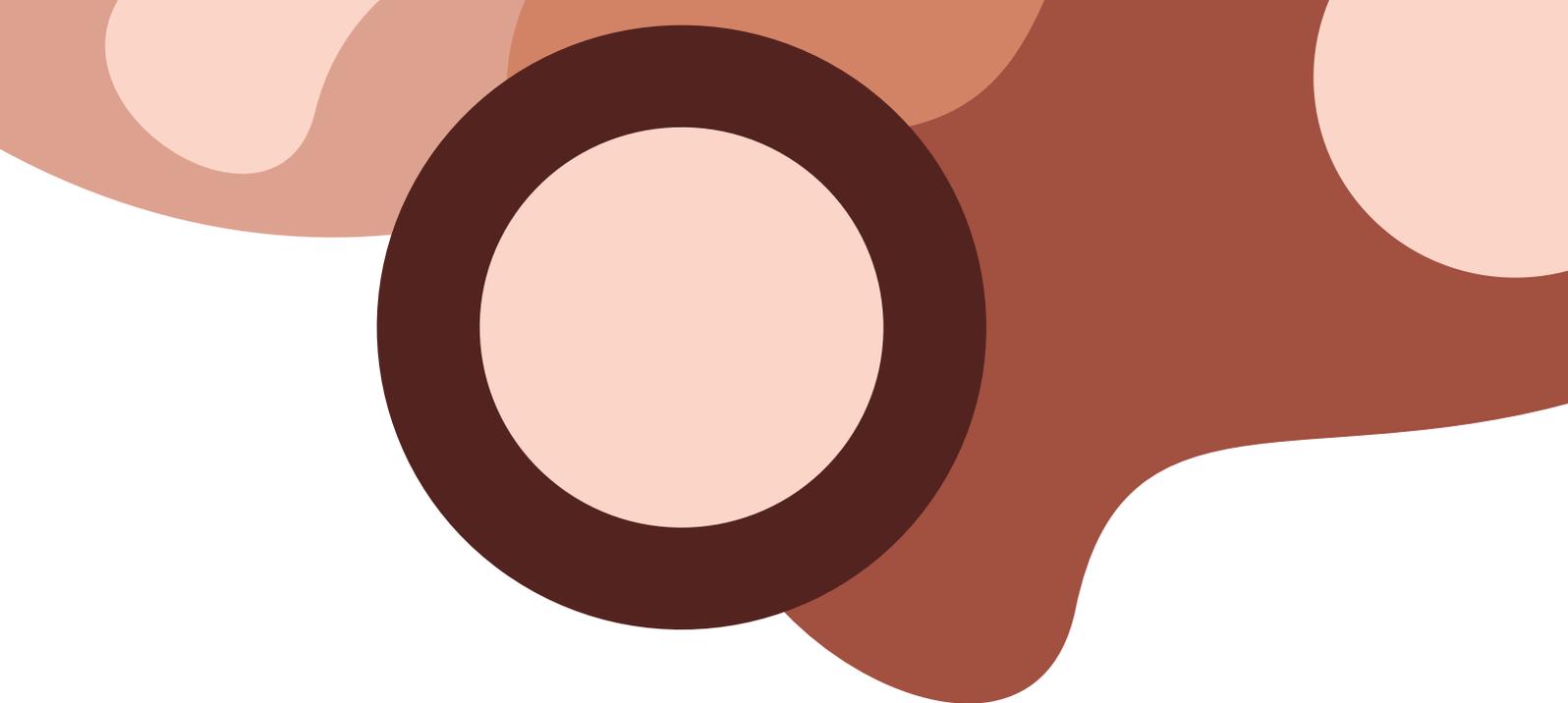
We particularly want to thank Wyndham Community and Education Centre for the purposeful collaboration and for your inspiring commitment to supporting local communities. Likewise, we extend our gratitude to all the local organisations and their people who have shared insights and assisted us.

We are deeply grateful to our project partner, Wyndham City Council (WCC), which has demonstrated its leadership and commitment to promoting social cohesion and tackling racism by enabling the success of this project. WCC staff have been steadfast friends of this work, unfailingly generous with their time and insights. Their capacity to engage with the Council's strong community connections has been a critical factor for making this project meaningful at a local level.

This project has been made possible with the generous support of the Scanlon Foundation, underscoring its well-known commitment to social cohesion and innovative anti-racism services. We thank the Foundation profoundly for the active encouragement, the ongoing assistance and the flexibility it has afforded to us to steer this project through the challenges of 2020 and 2021.

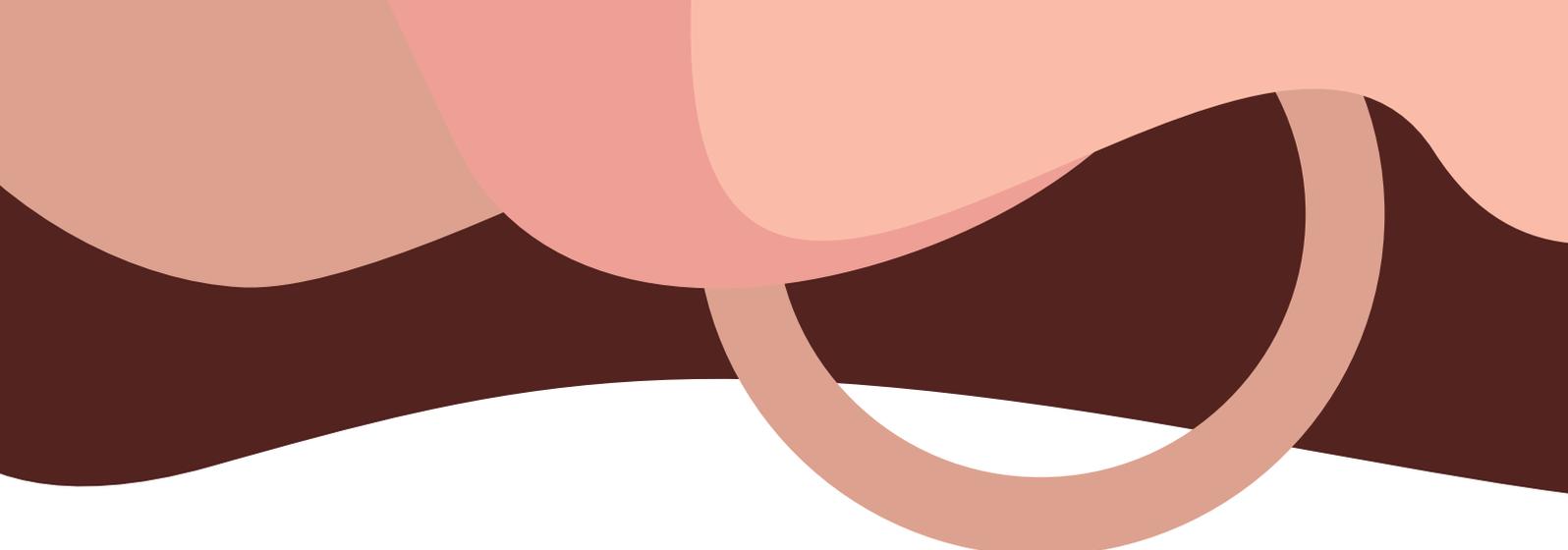


We acknowledge and recognise the Traditional Owners of the Kulin Nation lands on which we work and live, and we pay our respect to Elders, past, present and emerging, and to the deep knowledge embedded within the Aboriginal community and their ownership of Country.



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# Executive Summary

## Overview

This report presents the findings from a project, conducted between late 2019 and early 2021 by Victoria University in partnership with the City of Wyndham, with support from the Scanlon Foundation.

The project took a strong place-based approach to explore how people who live in Wyndham experience racism, how they use and perceive pertinent support and reporting services and how these could be made more accessible and adequate.

These community-driven insights formed the foundation for the co-design of a local roadmap towards support services specifically tailored for the needs of people in Wyndham who have experienced racism.

Racism and discrimination are not unique to any municipality, but this project in Wyndham has the distinction of being the first in Australia that applies an evidence-based approach to translate the voices and expectations of the local community into improved and more adequate anti-racism support services at a municipal scale.

# Background and aims

Despite ongoing efforts to promote inclusion and to tackle discrimination and racism by governments and various other institution and community organisations, racism is still part of many people's lives in Australia and many other countries around the world. The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 may have had a positive effect on social cohesion and community trust in some ways, but it also seems to have led to an increase in racist incidents, especially but not only among Australians of Asian background.

Acknowledging the persistent and pervasive nature of racism without surrendering to resignation, being overwhelmed by a sense of paralysing hopelessness or accepting 'the seemingly inevitable' constitutes a major collective challenge for Australia's multicultural society. This is where this local project – and, by extension, this report – seeks to make a contribution.

The starting point of this project was simple, but its approach was innovative and it has piloted a working model that is new in Australia. We know from international and emerging Australian research that many people from culturally, ethnically or religiously diverse backgrounds experience racism, but only very few of them report these incidents.

Underreporting certainly hampers our understanding of the scope and nature of racism; worse is that the person who had to face racism does not receive the support they may desire and deserve. The premise of our project was this: Instead of merely calling on people to report racism, we need more accessible and adequate support services and reporting pathways that are responsive to the specific needs and expectations of those who have experienced racism.

Convinced that such an initiative needs to be place-based and take into account specific conditions at a local level, Victoria University partnered with the City of Wyndham in 2019 to run a 16-month pilot project, funded by the Scanlon Foundation. It is important to note that Wyndham, located in Melbourne's outer west, was not chosen to suggest there might be a particular problem with racism in the municipality, but rather because it is one of Australia's fastest-growing and most culturally diverse local government areas.

The project's ultimate goal was to develop a local roadmap towards enhanced and locally tailored support services and reporting pathways for those in Wyndham who have experienced racism. In order to achieve this goal, we needed to understand the experiences and views of those in the community affected by racism.

We sought to investigate a suite of questions, including: How do communities perceive existing support and reporting services? What are their reasons or motives for reporting racism or for refraining from doing so? How should anti-racism support and reporting pathways adapt to encourage reporting? These were only some of the questions we asked people from Wyndham's diverse communities through an online survey and a series of community-led focus groups.

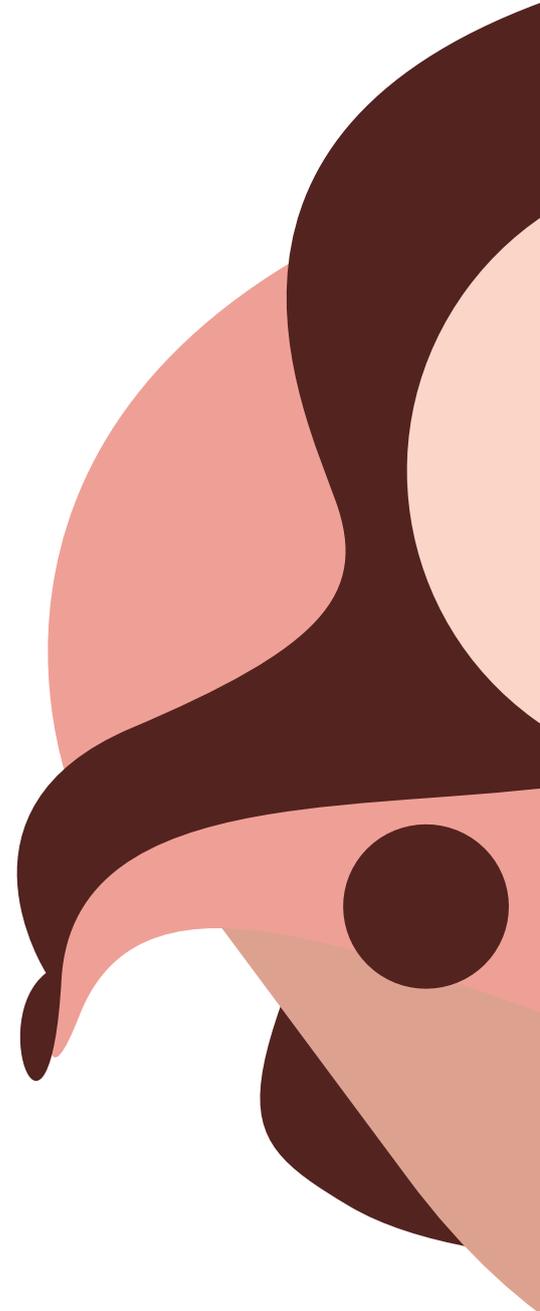
# Outcomes

Complemented by extensive community consultations with various local organisations and grassroots community groups, these empirical insights guided the development of the Wyndham Roadmap. The Wyndham Roadmap suggests the development of a three-tier local community-based support network that builds on the existing organisational landscape, whilst adapting to the specific needs and expectations of Wyndham's diverse communities. The local network is about to start operating as this report is being finalised.

While the emphasis of this project has from the beginning been on improving support services for those experiencing racism, we never lost sight of another long-term benefit of enhanced support services: reporting can lead to better evidence on the locally specific scope and nature of racism.

The Wyndham Roadmap therefore proposes that the local support network systematically records all reported cases of racism and makes them publicly available in aggregated form. This will open up unprecedented opportunities for community anti-racism advocacy and awareness raising initiatives, as well as for the development of effective, locally tailored prevention and intervention measures in Wyndham.

Additionally, we hope that a locally grounded response may help to break the often-silencing effects of racism. Enabling the communities of Wyndham to define and respond to problems of racism and discrimination empowers people to speak up and about their experiences. Ultimately, it offers a way to change the conversation around inclusion and exclusion in Wyndham's thriving multicultural community.



# Selected key findings

## Experiences of racism

- Only 13% of survey respondents from Wyndham's culturally, ethnically or religiously diverse communities are of the view that racist incidents occur only rarely or not at all in Wyndham.
- Almost two thirds (64%) stated they (or someone from their household) had experienced racism in the 12 months prior to the survey. This proportion is similar to the findings of comparable surveys among diverse communities in Australia, suggesting that racism in Wyndham is not more prevalent than in many other municipalities.
- Racism often occurs in public spaces. The three most commonly mentioned areas where the survey respondents experienced racism were: shopping centres (54%), public transport (49%) and other public spaces including parks or in the streets (47%).

## Reporting racism

- Almost all participants consider underreporting a reality, with 96% of survey respondents agreeing that experiences of racism are often not reported.
- Of those who have experienced racism in the past 12 months, only 13% reported the incident to an organisation or community group.
- The main reasons for reporting a racist incident were: raising awareness of the scope of the problem of racism (83%), getting emotional or psychological support (72%) and/or ensuring the incident was recorded (48%).
- The majority of those few survey respondents who have reported racism were not satisfied with the support they had received and their reporting experience; nevertheless, they felt better after reporting, which suggests that reporting itself can have positive, empowering effects.

# Selected key findings

## Barriers to reporting

- The main personal reasons for not reporting a racist experience were the view that reporting would not change anything (43%) and that they felt the incident was not serious enough to be reported (36%); Concerns about negative consequences and lack of knowledge about how and where to report were also among the main reasons for non-reporting.
- Overall, what deterred from reporting racism is a combination of lack of support and reporting services; not knowing about existing services; feeling that reporting would not change anything; concerns they would not be taken seriously, and fears of negative consequences.

## Views on support and reporting services

- Only 19% of the survey respondents considered existing reporting services to be appropriate, and only 17% regarded existing support services as appropriate.
- To increase people's inclination to report experiences of racism, participants made a range of suggestions: services need to be made more widely known within the community; they should be (more) culturally sensitive and offered in community languages; should be better qualified to respond; should ideally be run by qualified people from the respective community; and should be provided locally, close to where people live.

01

Are we  
all in this  
together?

# Are we all in this together?

01

When the COVID-19 pandemic reached Australia in early 2020, one phrase quickly became a mantra of solidarity: We are all in this together. This seems to be supported by the findings from the [2020 Scanlon Social Cohesion survey](#) (Markus 2020) which shows that community trust has indeed increased compared to previous years. But we know this is only one side of a very complicated story. The pandemic also illuminated that some parts of the community were affected much more severely than others.

A study by the Australia Institute (Nahum and Stanford [2020](#)), for example, found that those in more precarious, low-paid employment were hit disproportionately hard. 'It is painfully ironic that the worst impacts of the pandemic were felt by those who could least afford to lose their work and income', Jim Standford highlighted.

It was not only a question of employment precarity. The COVID-19 pandemic has also led to a significant increase in [reported incidents](#)<sup>1</sup> of racist abuse, harassment and attacks particularly targeting people of Asian appearance, but also many others from culturally, ethnically and religiously diverse backgrounds. The COVID-19 pandemic has also become what the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) called a '[racism pandemic](#)'.<sup>2</sup> Some cases were reported in the media, and the viciousness shocked many of us, but it is estimated that the vast majority went unreported.

For example, a study conducted by CMY and Australian National University highlighted the prevalence of racism among young people. The survey found that while 85% of young people had experienced racism during COVID-19 pandemic, only 6% reported these incidents (Doery et al. [2020](#)).

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1. <https://www.humanrights.vic.gov.au/legal-and-policy/covid-19-and-human-rights/reducing-racism-during-covid-19/>

2. <https://www.cmy.net.au/cmy-news/racism-pandemic-hits-young-multicultural-victorians/>

Of course, racism does not only affect young people. It has been a constant and pervasive part of the lives of many Australians from non-Anglo-Saxon background since long before the pandemic. Various studies and reports have delivered empirical evidence in recent years: we know racist incidents often happen in public places, but also in schools, employment, the housing market and elsewhere; we know it is often subtle but sometimes also blatant and even physically violent; and we know that women are targeted particularly often.

Yet we suspect that the true extent of racism remains hidden and, most probably, vastly underestimated. Many questions remain unresolved, especially when it comes to how racism manifests in specific local contexts. This hampers the development of more tailored and effective prevention and intervention measures, which could complement national and state anti-racism strategies.

One important step towards finding answers to these questions is to improve the ways in which racism, Islamophobia<sup>3</sup> and other related prejudice motivated incidents are recorded. Most policymakers, academics and human rights agencies agree that the current systems of recording such incidents are insufficient and in need of reform.

A long-term strategy of establishing nationwide recording standards would result in better insights into the scope and nature of racism and ultimately help respond to racism more effectively.

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3. Throughout the report we use the term racism in a way that also includes Islamophobia as a form of anti-Muslim racism (Islamic Council of Victoria 2020).



Acknowledging the well-established understanding that racism is severely underreported, both overseas (Fundamental Rights Agency 2017) and in Australia (Vergani and Navarro 2020; Doery et al. 2020; VEOHRC 2013), our project took a different and more place-based approach by prioritizing the immediate support needs of those who experience racism. The basic premise was this: If there were more services that meet the needs of people from diverse communities who have experienced racism, more people would turn to these services and receive the support they desire and deserve.

This was the starting point for a local initiative by Victoria University in partnership with Wyndham City Council in one of the most diverse and fastest growing local government areas in Australia. The project was centered on listening to the experiences and views of local residents from diverse backgrounds in Wyndham, not only to understand how and where they have experienced racism, but to understand the types of support that would be most suitable and helpful.

Why would they report racist incidents and what would their expectations look like? What would discourage them from reporting and seeking support? Are there enough support services and are existing services and avenues of reporting, both in and beyond Wyndham, sufficiently known among local residents? If they are, are they considered appropriate and trustworthy? And which organisations or community groups in Wyndham and elsewhere would communities feel comfortable turning to for support? These are some of the questions this project sought to answer.

Taking on board the lessons we learned through a community survey, a series of focus groups and extensive consultations with Wyndham's communities, we developed a roadmap towards establishing a local multi-stakeholder network. This network is intended to provide more accessible and adequate support to those who have experienced racism, tailored to the specific needs and expectations of Wyndham's diverse communities.

Once the network is established in Wyndham, more people are expected to report racism and seek support. That will offer another important benefit: It will provide new opportunities to record such incidents systematically. This in turn will improve evidence-based insights on the locally specific scope and nature of racism, and will subsequently assist in developing more targeted and effective prevention and intervention measures.

A young woman of South Sudanese background who participated in our project described the situation in Australia and in Wyndham in very powerful words: **'The emphasis of racism and discrimination should not be the responsibility of an individual or community. It's a group effort. The community must understand that in Wyndham, we are working towards a better community for all families and ethnic communities, that we've come a long way and that the future is bright ahead in the Wyndham community.'**

In this sense, the mantra of solidarity may be more true than we thought: We are all in this together – in the COVID-19 crisis as well as in our joint commitment to tackling racism and supporting and learning from each other.



2022  
The  
City of  
Wyndham:  
a snapshot

# The City of Wyndham: a snapshot

Wyndham, in Melbourne's outer south-west, is among the fastest growing local government areas in Australia. Over recent decades, it has also become one of the most culturally diverse municipalities in Victoria. The City of Wyndham has been committed to harnessing this cultural and religious diversity and promoting an inclusive and cohesive society.



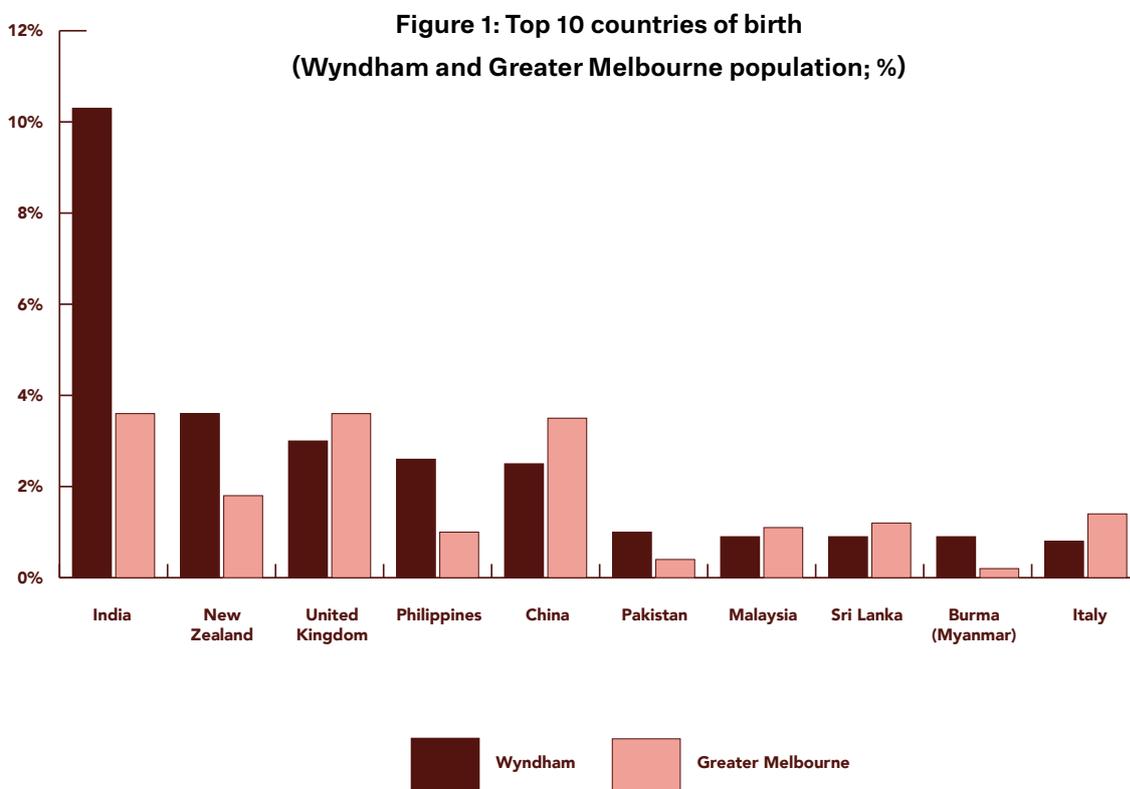
## Wyndham's diverse communities

According to population estimates, around 270,000 people reside in Wyndham, up from 217,000 as recorded in the most recent 2016 ABS Census.<sup>5</sup> Population growth is expected to continue at a high rate and is mainly attributed to the expansion of Wyndham's culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse communities.

According to the 2016 ABS Census, almost 42% of Wyndham's 217,000 residents were born overseas. This was well above the averages for Victoria (28%) and Greater Melbourne (34%). More than half of them (54%) arrived after 2005, compared to 40% in Greater Melbourne.

Wyndham's diverse communities come from every corner of the world. The main countries of origin of Wyndham's overseas-born population are India (10.3%), New Zealand (3.6%), the United Kingdom (3.0%), the Philippines (2.6%) and China (2.5%), followed by Pakistan, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Myanmar.

It is also worth noting that Wyndham<sup>6</sup> has a particularly large – and quickly growing – Māori community with 15.6% of Victorians with Māori ancestry living in Wyndham, and a significant and also growing Pasifika community. Moreover, Wyndham is home to the largest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in the western region of Greater Melbourne.



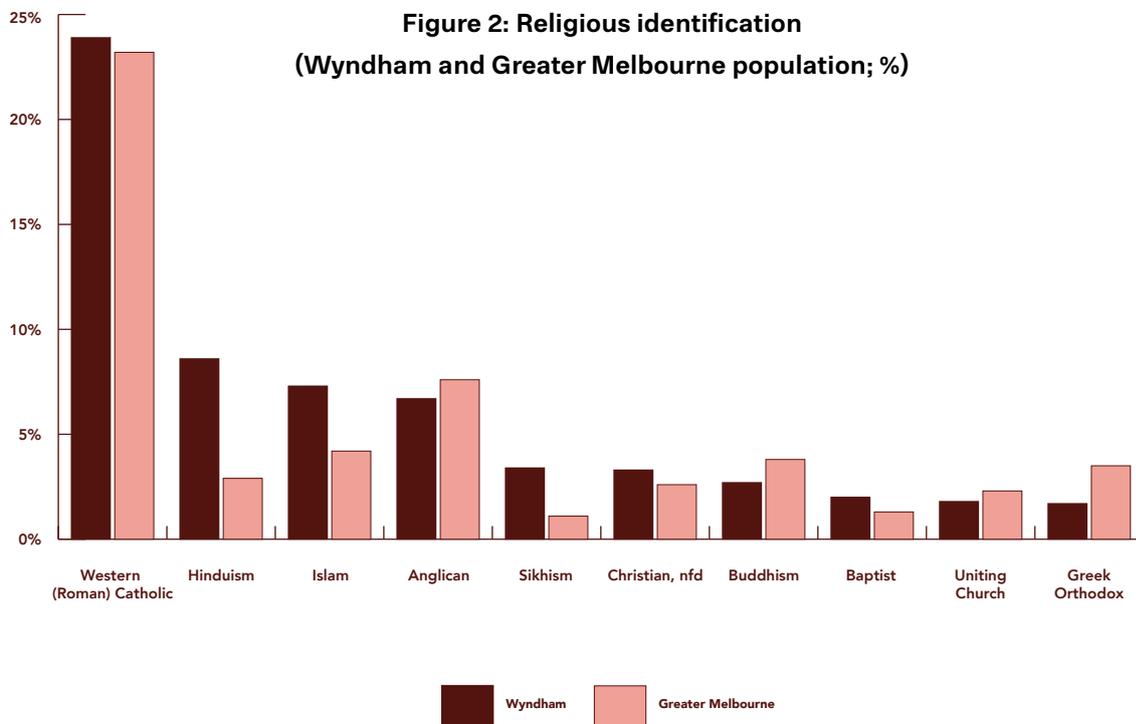
5. <https://profile.id.com.au/wyndham>

6. <https://www.wyndham.vic.gov.au/about-council/wyndham-community/research-and-statistics>

Wyndham's diversity is also reflected in the wide range of spoken community languages. More than four out of ten residents of Wyndham speak a language other than English at home (41%); this is a much higher proportion than the Greater Melbourne average of 32%.

The main languages spoken at home reflect the large Indian community, with Punjabi, Hindi, Gujarati, Bengali and Telugu all being among the top ten languages used at home. Moreover, Mandarin and Cantonese (China), Arabic and Urdu (mainly Pakistan) as well as Filipino/Tagalog (Philippines), Karen (Myanmar/parts of Thailand), Vietnamese and Tamil (Sri Lanka) are also among the top ten languages spoken in the homes of Wyndham's diverse communities.

While the proportion of Wyndham residents who identify with various Christian denominations (e.g. Catholic, Anglican, Baptist or Uniting Church) is similar to the Greater Melbourne average, people of Hindu (8.6%), Islamic (7.3%) and Sikh faith (3.4%) are significantly overrepresented in Wyndham's population.





The City of Wyndham has a proud history of welcoming migrants and refugees from all corners of the world. From the Greek and Italian communities that settled in Werribee during the 1950s and 60s, to the more recent humanitarian migrant arrivals from the Horn of Africa, Burma/Myanmar and South Sudan, Wyndham has been a place where people have sought refuge and opportunity.

Wyndham 2040, the long-term community vision for Wyndham, describes a welcoming, connected city that is known for listening to and learning from the diversity of its residents. Creating the conditions for an inclusive community is something that a community has to do together. As the level of government closest to community, the capacity for Council's to lead and influence how this is achieved is significant.

This is reflected in the 2017–21 Wyndham City Plan as a commitment to delivering on the Wyndham 2040 vision and states that: **'Council will celebrate the cultural diversity of our City, actively support social inclusion and tackle inequalities by ensuring all residents have access to services and building social connections in our local communities.'**

Over many years Wyndham City Council has worked to celebrate and safeguard the diversity of the municipality. From Council and community events held during Cultural Diversity Week and Refugee Week to taking part in national programs like the Refugee Welcome Zone and the Racism: It Stops With Me campaign, Council has actively promoted Wyndham's multicultural community as one of the city's greatest assets.

In 2017, Wyndham City Council signed up to the Welcoming Cities<sup>7</sup> initiative to further grow and establish policy and practice in this area. This network has been vital to helping Council identify where there are good and established practices that support inclusion and where there are gaps or improvements that can be made to ensure that Wyndham is a welcoming city.

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7. <https://welcomingcities.org.au/>



In 2019, Wyndham City Council introduced a Social and Economic Inclusion Department to support social cohesion and inclusion of Wyndham residents with a particular focus on employment initiatives. Through funding provided by State and Federal Government a network was formed to engage local businesses, coordinate employment pathways programs and link people looking for work with local employment opportunities.

This network acknowledges that Wyndham's future success is linked to its ability to bring about inclusive economic growth and reflects what Wyndham residents from all background have voiced: having a job or owning a business is essential to feeling like you belong and can contribute in a community.

Building on the social inclusion practice that has been demonstrated through Wyndham libraries, early years and youth services, sport and recreation programs,

community development and community strengthening activities and arts, culture and events Wyndham City Council has added an inclusive economy element to the range of policies and practices it will implement.

A Social and Economic Inclusion Framework, an Inclusive Industries Toolkit, a series of employment pathways programs and a joint initiative with business, community and government called Opportunity Wyndham is positioning the city to deliver on its 2040 vision and ensure that as Wyndham grows in population it also grows in opportunity.

However, while the work of becoming a welcoming city is not at the beginning, it is also not nearing its end. Listening to and learning from the diversity of Wyndham residents is an ongoing commitment and continues through the pages of this report.

# 03

Listening  
to the  
community:  
our research  
approach

# Listening to the community: our research approach

03

Research was not a goal of this project in its own right, but it was a critical feature of the project to gain a better evidence-based understanding to develop a roadmap towards enhanced support services and reporting pathways for people from Wyndham diverse communities who have experienced racism. Listening to the lived experiences and expertise on the ground was at the centre of our approach.

In close collaboration with a range of local community organisations and service providers, the project team developed and implemented a program of research that combined survey questionnaires and focus groups. This research received ethics approval from Victoria University.

There were three main stages of the research:

### **1. Organisation Survey**

The first stage involved an online survey among local organisations and community groups that provide support services for Wyndham's diverse communities.

The main goal was to explore their experiences with, and capacity to respond to, clients or community members reporting incidents of racism. The responses came from representatives of 33 local organisations and community groups.

### **2. Community Survey**

The next stage involved inviting individuals from Wyndham's diverse communities to share their views on and experiences with racism in general (not only in Wyndham), existing support and reporting services, reasons for reporting and reporting barriers, as well as their suggestions on how support services could be improved.

Through extensive consultations with various local community groups, we collaborated with people from across Wyndham's diverse communities. While we received over 115 responses, we applied a systematic in-scope check leaving us with 96 valid responses from local community members from non-Anglo-Saxon backgrounds.

### **3. Community Focus Groups**

In the third stage of the research, we invited people from Wyndham's diverse communities to discuss and share their views on the issues covered in the community survey in greater depth through a series of a community-led and peer-facilitated focus groups.

Assisted by Wyndham City Council, the project team worked closely with various local community groups to identify individuals who would be willing to facilitate a focus group with members of their respective community.

After attending a specifically designed training, the facilitators invited up to eight participants from their community to take part in the focus group and subsequently led these focus group discussions (which were held via Zoom).

Facilitators were paid and received a certificate of appreciation for their role as trained peer facilitators. Focus group participants were also given vouchers to recognise their time and contributions.

Eight focus groups were conducted in late 2020, for the following groups: Indian, Māori and Pasifika, Multicultural Youth, Muslim Men, Muslim Women, Recent Arrivals, South Sudanese, and one mixed group recruited through a council managed community centre (Neighbourhood Hubs)<sup>8</sup>. All focus groups were recorded, selectively transcribed and analysed.

They offered deep insights into the personal experiences and perspectives of the participants (n=40) and valuable suggestions on how support and reporting services can and should be enhanced to respond more adequately to the specific needs of Wyndham's diverse communities.

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8. We sought to also organise focus groups with people from the local Aboriginal community and from the Karen and Pasifika community in Wyndham, but these could not be convened in a timely fashion partially due to pandemic related disruptions in 2020.

# GOV

Key  
insights  
and  
learnings

# Key insights and learnings

04

## 4.1 Wyndham's diverse communities' experiences with racism

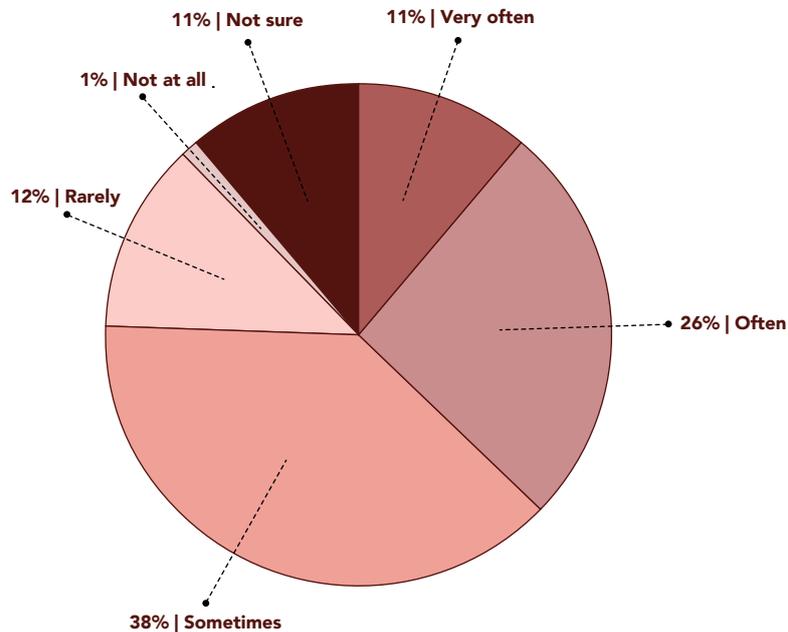
In our community survey we asked Wyndham locals from culturally, ethnically and religiously diverse backgrounds how common, in their view, racist incidents are in Wyndham.

Almost four in ten respondents expressed the view that racist incidents happen often (26%) or very often (11%) in the local community, and another 38% think it happens sometimes. Only a small minority of respondents are of the view that racism occurs never (1%) or only rarely (12%) in Wyndham, while 11% were not sure (Figure 3).

***'I was once called "Bloody Indian" I really felt bad, even though I am not Indian. When I wear a scarf, I experience Islamophobia sometimes, when I wear Western clothes, I feel people behave differently and give me more respect'***

**Survey respondent, Muslim woman of Pakistani background**

**Figure 3: 'How frequently do you think incidents of racism happen in Wyndham?'**



Asked about their personal experiences, almost two thirds (64%) stated they (or someone from their household) had experienced racism in the previous 12 months.

This proportion is similar to findings from other studies (Dunn et al. 2015), which suggests that racism is not more prevalent in Wyndham than in other parts of the country.

The respondents felt they were targeted because of the following often intersecting personal attributes:

- their ethnic or cultural background (26%);
- their faith/religious background (25%);
- the colour of their skin (25%); or
- their language background (11%).

There were marked differences between the various ethno-religious groups. Although these sub-samples are too small for representative conclusions, it is noteworthy that personal experiences of racism were stated particularly often by respondents who:

- identify as Māori or Pasifika,
- are of African background (different countries of origin),
- identify as Muslims, or
- are of Asian (other than Indian) background.

For example, survey respondents of Indian background were less likely to state personal (or family members') experiences of racism in the past 12 months. While some participants explained that racism happened frequently or 'all the time', many reported that they have experienced racism 'sometimes' (38%) or at least 'once or twice' (33%).

A female survey respondent of South Sudanese background described her personal experiences with racism like this: 'It depends. I experience micro-aggression daily. Spats of overt racial vilification are rare.' Similarly, the facilitator of the focus group for Muslim Women tried to capture the discussion in these words:

**"Even if we are not attacked directly, the way we feel like in our everyday life, we do feel like it's racism that's stopping us from being out there and doing a lot of things ... Physical attack is something that happens sometimes, but this feeling is something that lives with you 24/7."**

As demonstrated in findings from other studies on anti-Muslim racism (Iner [2019](#)), our research findings tentatively suggest that women experience racism particularly frequently.

Not only are women overrepresented in the survey sample, but experiences shared in the focus groups also point to an increased vulnerability of women from diverse communities.

Sometimes men from the same community appear unaware of the frequency of racist incidents that women face. For example, a participant in the Muslim Men's focus group reflected on an incident when his wife, who was wearing a hijab, was shouted at. The participant's wife explained to him that 'this happens every day,' which was a shock to the participant himself.

***'This happens 100 times a day but people don't talk about it'***

**Participant in the South Sudanese focus group**

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9. The survey invited responses from people who reside in Wyndham, and from those who work or spend a significant amount of time there.

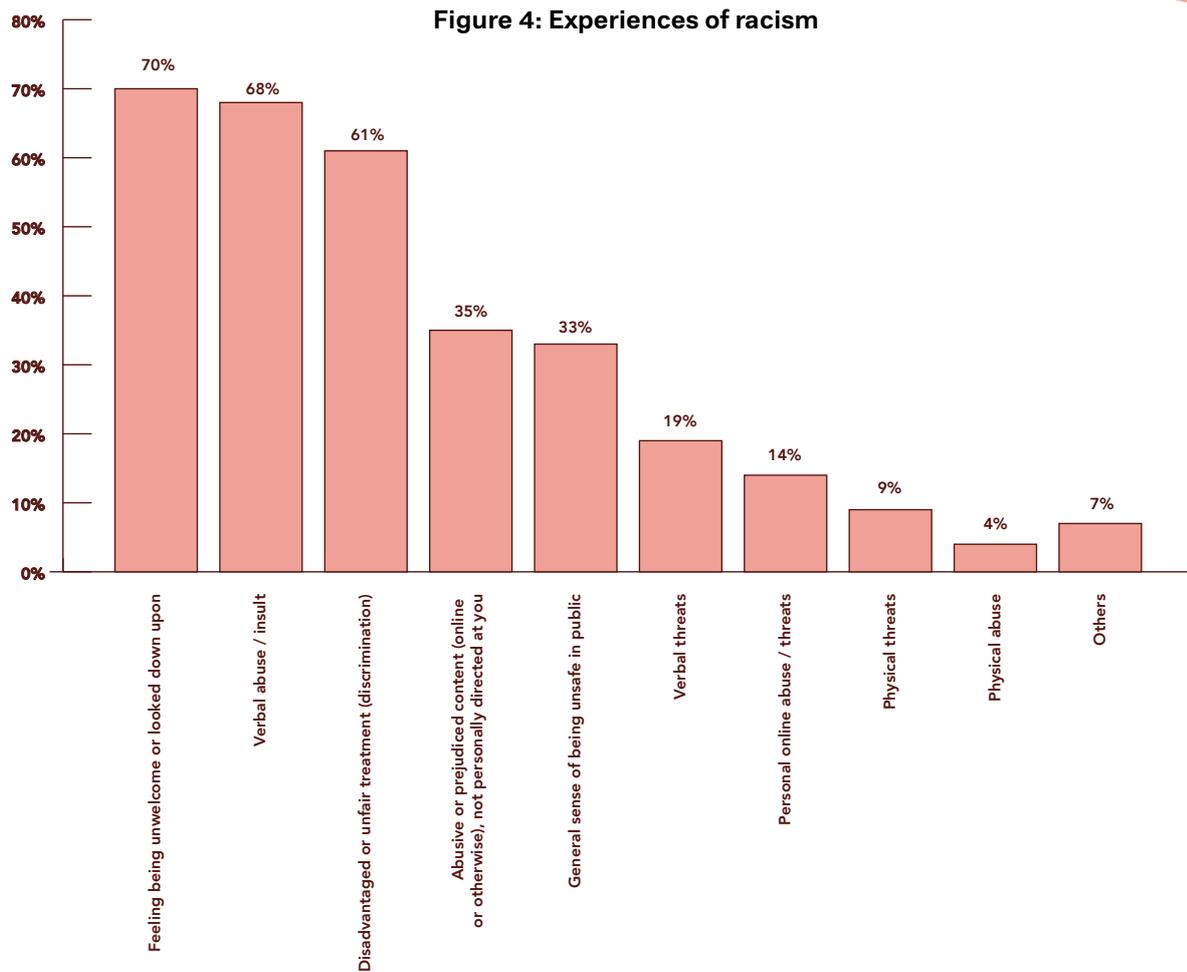
## Types of racist experiences

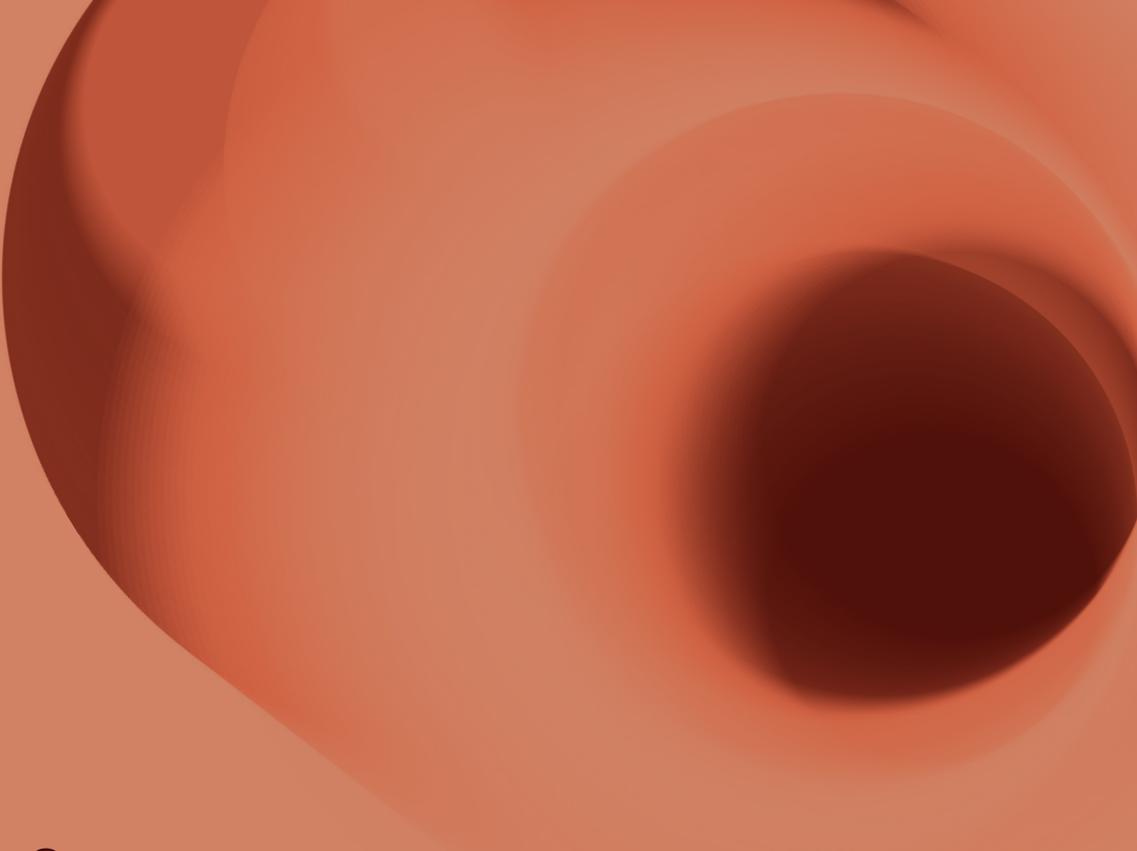
The most commonly articulated experiences of racism, according to survey respondents, included a personal feeling of being unwelcome or looked down upon (70%).

An almost equal proportion of respondents had experienced racist verbal abuse and/or insults (68%) and 61% stated they have been discriminated against (unfair and disadvantaged treatment) because of their cultural, ethnic or religious background. Verbal or physical threats or even physical abuse was experienced only by a small number of survey respondents (Figure 4).

**'Sometimes I get calls from private numbers and they abuse me and say: get out of this country'**

**Participant in the Indian focus group**





# Voices from the community

## Hurtful prejudiced expression of exclusion

'Racism is done behind the scenes until it hits you in the face', one participant in the South Sudanese focus group noted. He recalled an incident at work where his team leader had told the other employees in the room: 'Hide your phones, wallets and keys, [name of participant] is coming...'

A participant in the Recent Arrivals focus group shared that their new neighbour had said that 'the value of the houses will drop' because they have moved into the area.

## Threats to property

A participant in the Muslim Men's focus group spoke about a time when a stranger was holding a golf club at the local mosque and told him 'when you come back, all four tyres [of your car] will be cut into pieces.'

## Verbal abuse

A participant in the Multicultural Youth focus group stated: 'I play footy and get a lot of calls, a lot of racism on the side field. These are not single words, these are direct racism.'

## Discrimination

In a discussion about the challenges of seeking employment, a participant in the Muslim Women's focus group reflected:

'Sometimes it's indirect, you don't really know if it's racism or Islamophobic. You might be completely qualified and you have everything they need, but as soon as they see your name is different or that you have a hijab..., you know, then you just don't hear from them. You don't want to make assumptions, but... if it happens all the time, and with many other people that you know, obviously you're going to think this has something to do with who I am as a person not what I'm capable of. I feel like that's very common and it's hard to report on something like that because there's no proof, there's no evidence. It's just something you have to experience.'

## Media

Participants in the Muslim Men's focus group discussed their concerns about the media reporting about cases of COVID-19 linked to a local Islamic school.

A participant explained that he felt that Muslims were portrayed as 'spreading the COVID virus' and the facilitator reflected 'I honestly did feel quite helpless about how to overcome this.'

## Sites of racist experiences

Eight out of ten of those who had experienced racism in the 12 months prior to the survey stated that at least some of these incidents had taken place within the municipality of Wyndham. The suburbs where it has happened more frequently are typically the more populous suburbs of Hoppers Crossing and Werribee, followed by Tarneit, Truganina and Wyndham Vale.

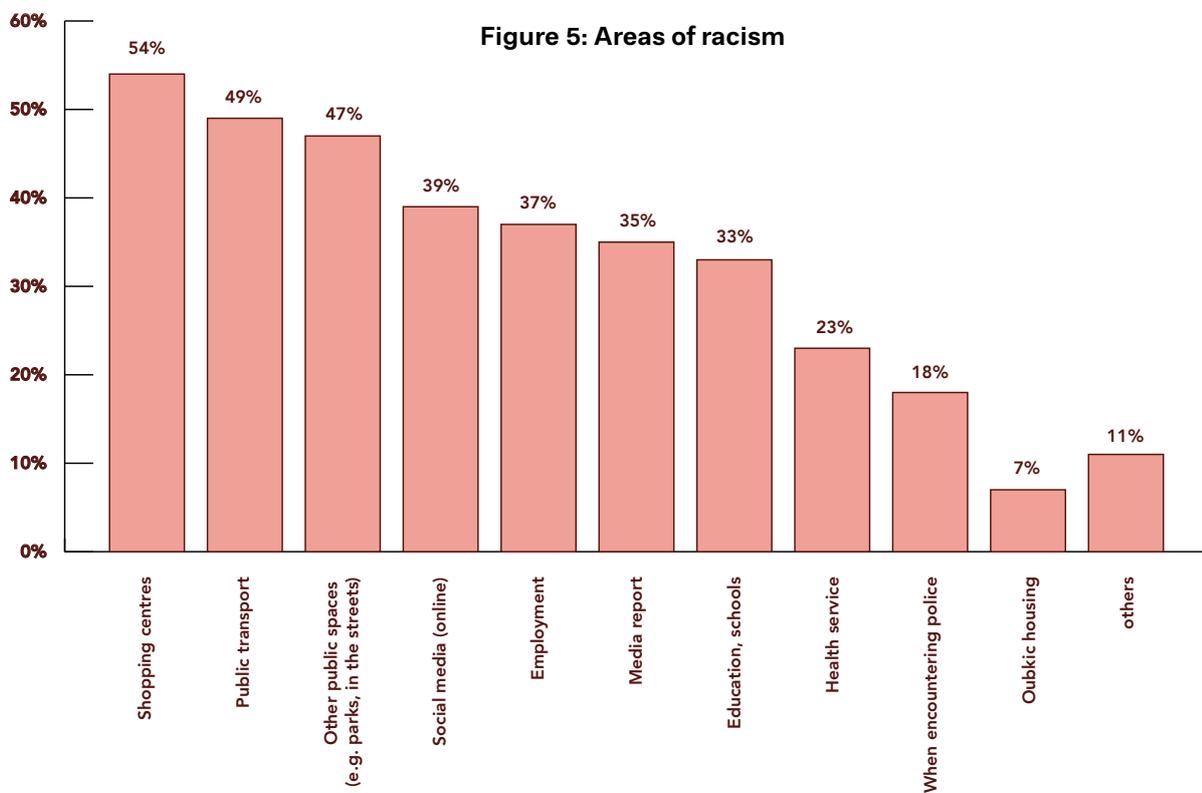
As previous studies in Australia have shown (Blair et al. 2017; Iner 2019), racism often occurs in public spaces where people go about their everyday lives. This also applies to Wyndham's diverse communities (Figure 5). The three most commonly mentioned areas where survey respondents experienced racism were:

- shopping centres (54%);
- public transport (49%); and
- other public spaces like parks or in the streets (47%).

Social media and media reporting, as well as employment and education, were also mentioned regularly as sites of racist experiences by those who responded to the survey.

**In September 2020, SBS reported about a particularly severe racist attack by a group of young people on an international student from India who was physically and verbally abused while she and her friend were waiting for a bus near Werribee Plaza in Wyndham; the abuse continued after they boarded the bus. The student recalled having being spat on and said: "They yelled racist things like f\*\*\*\* off you Indians, go back where you came from. You smell sh\*\*\*."**

**SBS Punjabi, 11 September 2020<sup>10</sup>**



10. <https://www.sbs.com.au/language/english/audio/go-back-where-you-came-from-two-charged-over-alleged-assault-of-indian-international-student-in-melbourne>

## Public transport

A participant in the Muslim Women's focus group shared her experiences on the train:

'It does happen a lot actually... I notice it a lot on the train... They can tolerate you from a distance but if you happen to sit next to them... then they just feel uncomfortable. They just think you're this monster or whatever, and they choose to... move away or switch seats. Or if they see you trying to look for a seat, they will put something down. Most of the time I kind of avoid the situation and just stand next to the door and just wait for my stop, even if I'm standing for half an hour... I just hate [that]. And it's just all the looks, they all look at you while you're walking, very strange feeling and environment in the train.'

## Housing

In a discussion about housing discrimination, a participant from the Recent Arrivals focus group noted: 'If they can see you are African, it's very hard to get a good house.'

She explained the difference between her experience and that of her friends, who had found a house in 'one month because they have a good name', whereas, 'for us it's very hard to find... [it takes us] 6 months, 7 months.'

## When encountering police

A participant in the Māori and Pasifika focus group noted that the police had pulled over the car four times in one day, in his view, because South Sudanese colleagues and youth were traveling with him in his car. Despite the police explaining that they were doing ‘roadside checks,’ the participant reflected that this often happens when people of South Sudanese background are in the car.

## Shopping

A woman of Indo-Fijian background, who completed the survey, shared the following experience: ‘One of the worst incidents that I personally faced racism was during lockdown at Point Cook shopping centre where a white male deliberately coughed at my face after taking his mask down and taunted me when I covered my face as an additional precaution, even though I had my mask on, by saying “all non-whites are dirty and even masks will not help protect us!” Left me rather shaken up...’

# Effects of racist experiences

Experiences of racism can be traumatic, as some of our study participants highlighted, and they can have long-term effects on the way people live their daily lives. Several participants spoke about how they have reconsidered and adapted the way they behave or try to respond to the stress and trauma caused by racism.

One woman of South Sudanese background, for example, wrote in the survey: 'People of Colour experience racism in every facet of their lives and do a great deal of ignoring most of the micro-aggressions experienced daily.'

Racism also affects people's actions and sense of safety in public spaces and often has lasting psychological effects on the individuals. A Muslim woman stated in the survey that racist experiences have impacted on her sense of safety in public space: 'I don't feel safe being out there alone. I rather go with friends or my partner... I wear a hijab and people look at me as if I am an alien, and comment or roll eyes...'

Another Muslim survey respondent shared an experience where her 'physiotherapist verbally attacked my religion [saying] all Muslims are terrorists and are pigs. [He] went on a 10-minute rant. I never completed my physio, I had 2 free sessions left, but I never returned I was traumatised.'

In the Māori and Pasifika focus group one local resident recalled how a personal experience of racial discrimination had affected him emotionally: 'I was messed up about that for ages. The anger was there but I never did anything about it.'

# Systematic racism is not abstract

In addition to these direct encounters, some study participants, both in the survey and the focus groups, also highlighted the systemic and institutionalised nature of racism.

‘Racism is a systemic issue, and not a personal or isolated issue. Racism, prejudice and discrimination is as much engrained in institutions like the judicial systems, police, employment and education, and is usually carried out by people, who are only relaying the messages and ideas reinforced on large scale media platforms and bodies,’ a survey respondent of South Sudanese background elaborated.

Systemic racism is not abstract – it is real in its consequences. In particular, during the community focus groups, participants shared many incidents that illustrate the tangible effects of systemic racism. A participant in the Recent Arrivals focus group, for example, noted: ‘The worst part of racism is systemic racism, and systemic racism is practised by those who are in the system.’

Similarly, but in relation to questions of reporting racism and seeking support, a focus group participant of Māori background stated: ‘We know that racism is systemic, so the last thing we want to do is tap into an organisation that follows those structures. I think that’s why we don’t report because that level of trust is just not there because those systems keep imposing those same traumas over and over again.’

Another person in the same focus group agreed and added: ‘I think systemic racism is rife,’ in particular ‘in the schools, in the education system.’

## 4.2 Reporting racism and seeking support

It is widely acknowledged that racist incidents are often not reported or formally recorded (VEOHRC [2013](#)), even when they may be considered a prejudiced motivated crime (Mason et al. [2017](#)).

This certainly has negative implications for our understanding of the scope and nature of racism, and by extension, opportunities for community advocacy and for the development of more effective, targeted prevention and intervention measures. But not reporting has also more immediate consequences for those who experience racism: they do not receive the support they deserve or desire.

Until recently Australia relied mostly on international research for empirical evidence on the phenomenon and scope of underreporting racism. The EU-wide representative Minorities and Discrimination Survey in 2016, for example, found that, on average, only 12% of surveyed ethnic and cultural minorities reported or made a complaint about their experience of discrimination based on their immigrant or ethnic background (Fundamental Rights Agency [2017](#)).

In 2020, two studies were published that shed light on the nature and scope of underreporting of racism in Australia. The CMY-ANU survey among multicultural youth on their experiences with racism during the COVID-19 pandemic found that almost six out of ten young people took no action at all and simply ignored the racist incident, while 29% spoke to a friend or family about it. But only six per cent formally reported their experience (Doery et al. [2020](#)).

A study by Vergani and Navarro ([2020](#)) also found evidence for significant underreporting of experiences of (racist or other) hate incidents in Victoria, sometimes even where the incidents involved physical abuse.

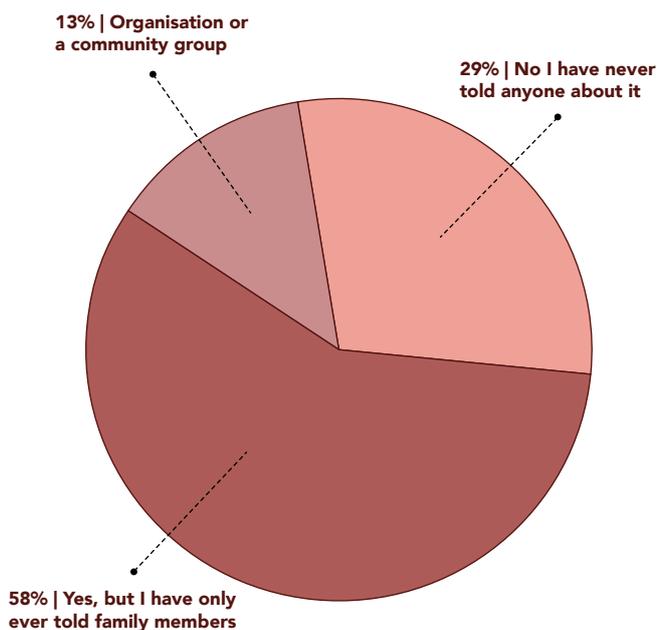
## Underreporting among Wyndham's diverse communities

What do people from Wyndham's diverse communities have to say about reporting racism? There was an almost unanimous consensus among the survey respondents that underreporting is a reality also in their local community, with 96% agreeing that experiences of racism are often not reported (70% agreed strongly; 26% agreed somewhat).

Asked about their personal experiences, we found that close to one in three survey respondents (29%) who have experienced racism did not speak to anyone about it, while 58% only ever told family, friends or colleagues about it. The remaining 13% reported the incident to an organisation or community group (Figure 6).

During a focus group discussion among members of the local Māori and Pasifika community, one participant described the typical response to racism in his community in the following way: 'If you find it serious enough, then you report to police, other than that I just report to God.' Similarly, a participant in the Muslim Men's focus groups said: 'Verbal abuse seems not necessary to report. What can you do? You can't identify the person? The person is gone... If there's physical harm, that's when I would report.'

**Figure 6: Reporting experience of racism**



Survey findings indicated that the organisations survey respondents reported to (e.g. Wyndham City Council or various community groups) are often not the ones best placed to provide specialised support in cases of racism.

Furthermore, our local organisations survey found that many of these organisations did not record racist incidents in a systematic way.

Only very few of those who completed the community survey had turned to institutions that – depending on the nature of the incidents – may be able to respond systematically and effectively, such as the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC), WEstjustice or the police.

## Why reporting?

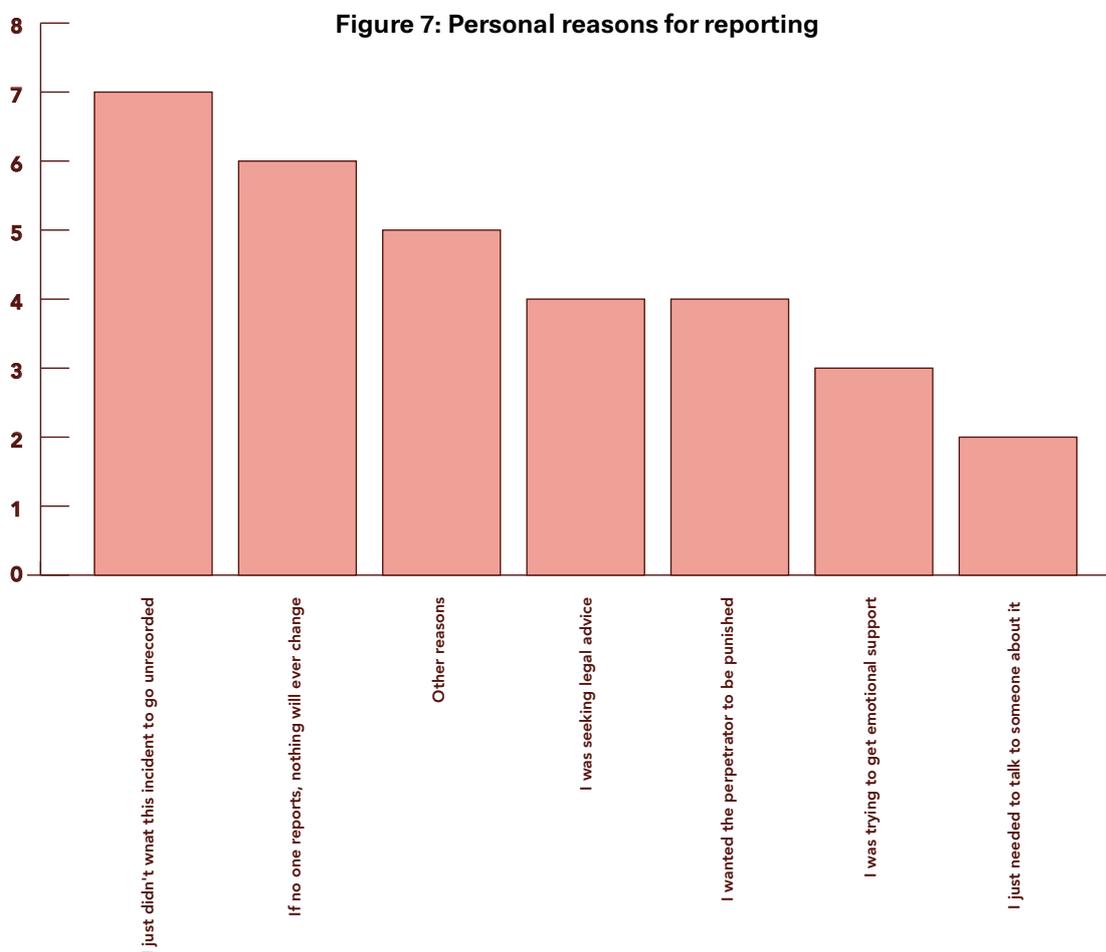
Most of those respondents who had reported their experiences with racism were motivated to do so by a sense of moral obligation and justice and the hope that it would help raise awareness and contribute to change. When asked about the reasons behind their reporting, the two top responses included: 'I just didn't want this incident to go unrecorded' and 'If no one reports, nothing will ever change' (Figure 7).

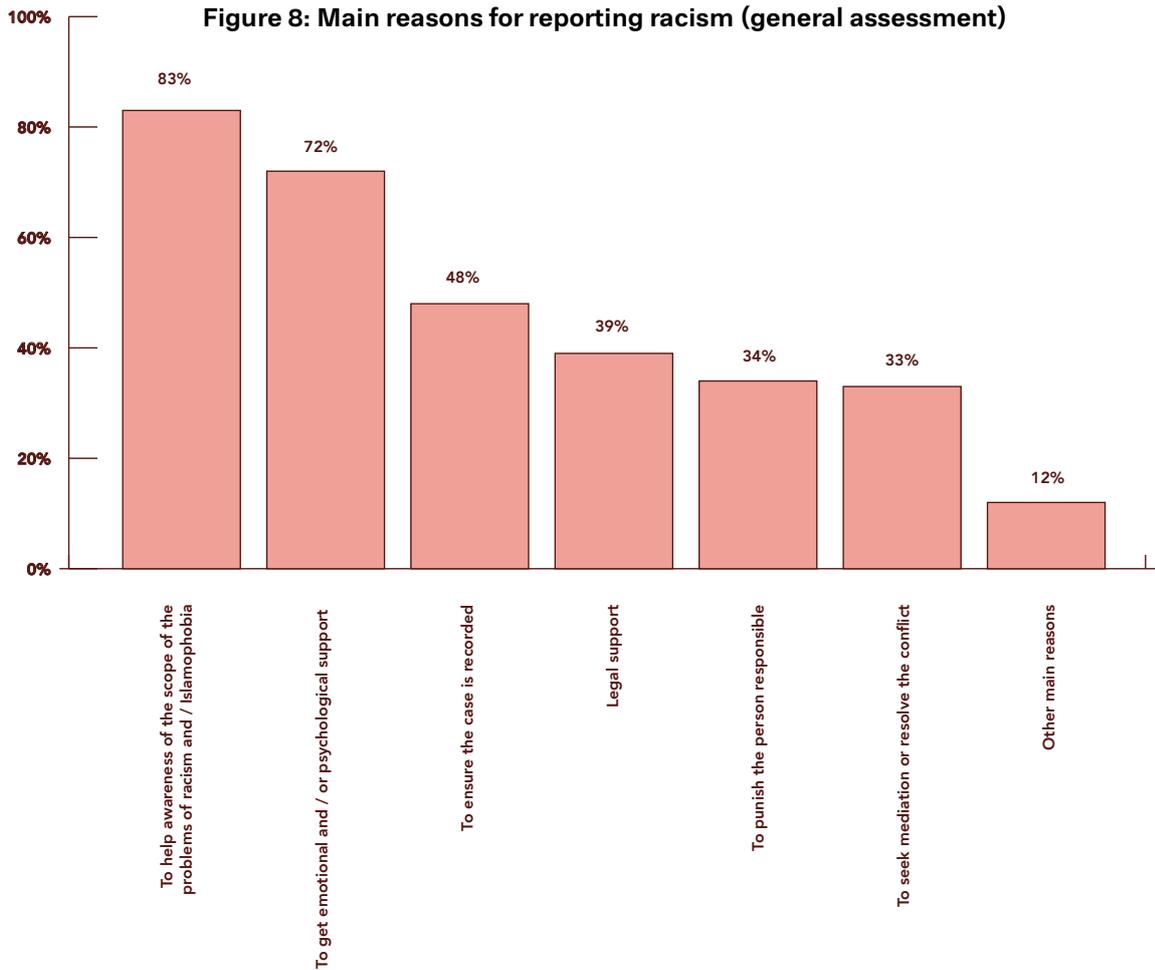
The community survey also asked the more general question as to why anyone would report a racist incident (Figure 8) – what would other people's reasons be, what would they try to achieve?

The top answers again reflected the motive of helping 'raise awareness of the scope of the problem of racism and/or Islamophobia' (83%). Other reasons for reporting, according to survey respondents, were to get emotional or psychological support (72%) and to ensure the incident was recorded (48%).

One survey respondent of Polynesian background highlighted the importance of speaking out after experiencing racism: 'The key issue here is to be heard, and being empathetic towards people from different background.' A female survey respondent of Indian background described the main reason as a desire 'to make positive changes in the community.'

Similarly, a participant in the Muslim Women's focus group emphasised the importance of sharing one's experiences to alert others, including the government: 'Unless you report, ... no one is going to think you have a problem... government is going to think we don't have a problem. It's like going to the doctor... and just sitting there, and expecting the doctor to understand you. So, with sharing the stories, we can be protected. But without telling our stories, if we just accept everything, thinking [...] it's not a big deal anyway and we don't do anything about it, then our problem will never stop.'





These insights into individual motives for reporting experiences of racism offer crucial information that can inform the development of responsive support services, aligned with the multifaceted needs of Wyndham's diverse communities.

The findings highlight the broad range of goals and motives for reporting racism. They also show that the decision to report seems to be more often driven by people's commitment to raising awareness of the problem of racism than by the desire to seek remedies for the individual racist incident.

This does not mean that individuals have no interest in resolving the specific racist incident they reported. Many focus group participants expressed their frustration with the poor outcomes of reporting (see below). However, it suggests that reporting itself may have empowering effects on the individual, provided there is a sense that the reported incident can meaningfully contribute to raising awareness.

This underscores the importance of adequately recording the reported racist incidents and using this information for local anti-racism actions and advocacy.

## Experiences when reporting racism

What is equally important for the development of adequate support services is to better understand community perceptions of reporting processes and levels of satisfaction with the organisations they connect with.

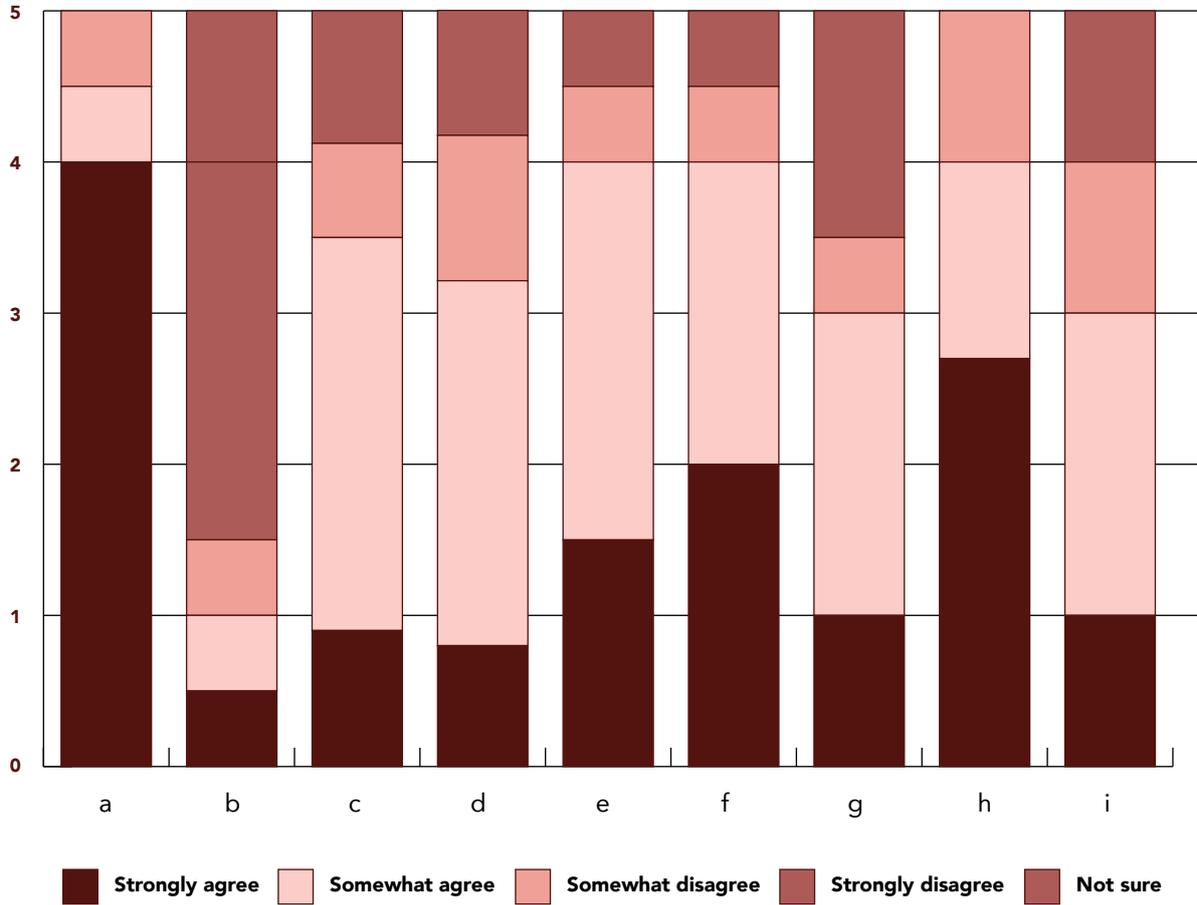
Although the number of survey respondents who ever reported racism was small, it is worth noting that almost all of them 'strongly agree' that they felt better after reporting the racist incident (Figure 9).

This suggests that getting an opportunity to report racism may have significant positive psychological effects. It is despite the fact that the reporting experience itself and the support people receive often does not live up to their expectations, as demonstrated in the community survey results. This is certainly not unique to the Wyndham community, however. The previously mentioned EU-wide survey also found rather low levels of satisfaction with reporting complaint processes across Europe (Fundamental Rights Agency [2017](#)).

The findings from our community survey and the focus groups strongly indicate that Wyndham's diverse communities often did not 'get the support they were hoping for' and that the 'support could have been better' (Figure 9). A majority of the survey respondents recalled that the representatives of the organisation they reported to told them that there was nothing that could be done about the reported incident, and many felt they 'had to prove that the incident was driven by prejudice, racism and/or Islamophobia.'

A participant in the Neighbourhood Hubs focus group, for example, said in relation to a racist incident at work: 'When you talk about it... it's like you need to almost convince them that this has happened and it's just a whole other trauma that goes with it as well.' Similarly, a participant in the Māori and Pasifika focus group expressed her view that the pervasiveness of racism is often denied: 'It's really freaky. I feel like that's why a lot of racism is not reported... We have this stigma that racism isn't real. It's bad.'

**Figure 9: Experiences with reporting racism**



- a. I felt better after reporting
- b. I received the support I was hoping for
- c. I felt my concerns were listened to and understood
- d. I was told that there's nothing that can be done about this incident
- e. I received helpful information about another organisation more qualified to provide support
- f. The support could have been better
- g. My report was taken seriously
- h. I felt I had to prove thae incident was driven by prejudice, racism and / or Islamophobia
- i. My experience makes less likely that I will report a similar incident in the future

Several participants across different focus groups criticised what they perceive as an unsatisfactory outcome, lack of action or, if there were actions taken, that they were not kept informed about the outcomes. One participant in the Muslim Men's focus groups, for example, stated: 'There was no follow up. I felt it was a serious matter... I should have been informed what has happened, but I never heard back.'

A participant in the South Sudanese focus group explained: 'We know that [racism] is happening consistently, yet when we report about it, no one is taking any action and no one is being held responsible.' Another participant in this focus group added: 'sometimes you become so paralysed because you don't see the impact of your reporting.'

Overall, the experiences with reporting a racist incident and seeking support appear to have been rather disappointing for many. This stands in contrast to the general self-assessment of those local organisations and community groups that participated in our organisational survey and that are occasionally or frequently approached by local residents who have experienced racism: The vast majority of these organisations (28 out of 33) are of the view that they 'can respond appropriately' to individuals who report experiences of racism.

People's dissatisfaction with the reporting process is problematic not only because the individuals did not get the support they were seeking, but also because this may influence their propensity to report and seek support if they experience racism again. More than half of the survey respondents agreed that their experience when reporting a racist incident 'makes it less likely' for them to 'report a similar incident in the future.'

A participant in the Recent Arrivals focus group put it this way, in the context of reporting racism to the police: 'People get discouraged because they know that even though you report, the police may not take any action and they will just dismiss it. This is the reason why people don't really report those issues.' A participant in the Muslim Men's focus group similarly noted: 'I'm taking all the pain to write, reflect, reach out and there's no response, I guess it acts as a deterrent from reporting.'

***'How many times do I have to tell our story about what has happened? How many people do we have to deal with? And what is the outcome from it? If there is no outcome and you're just telling your story again and again to people, you feel a sense of "there is no justice being served with what you have experienced"'***

**Participant in the Neighbourhood Hubs focus group**

### 4.3 Barriers to reporting and accessing services

Unsatisfactory experiences in the past seem to be an important, but certainly not the only reason for the severe underreporting of racism. If we want to ensure that support services for those who have experienced racism are adequate and accessible, we need to better understand what stops people from reaching out, reporting the racist incident and seeking support.

Some of the key insights from international research on reporting barriers (Fundamental Rights Agency [2017](#)) reverberate with anecdotal and recently emerging empirical evidence in Australia (Doery et al. [2020](#); Vergani and Navarro [2020](#); Kailahi et al. [2019](#)).

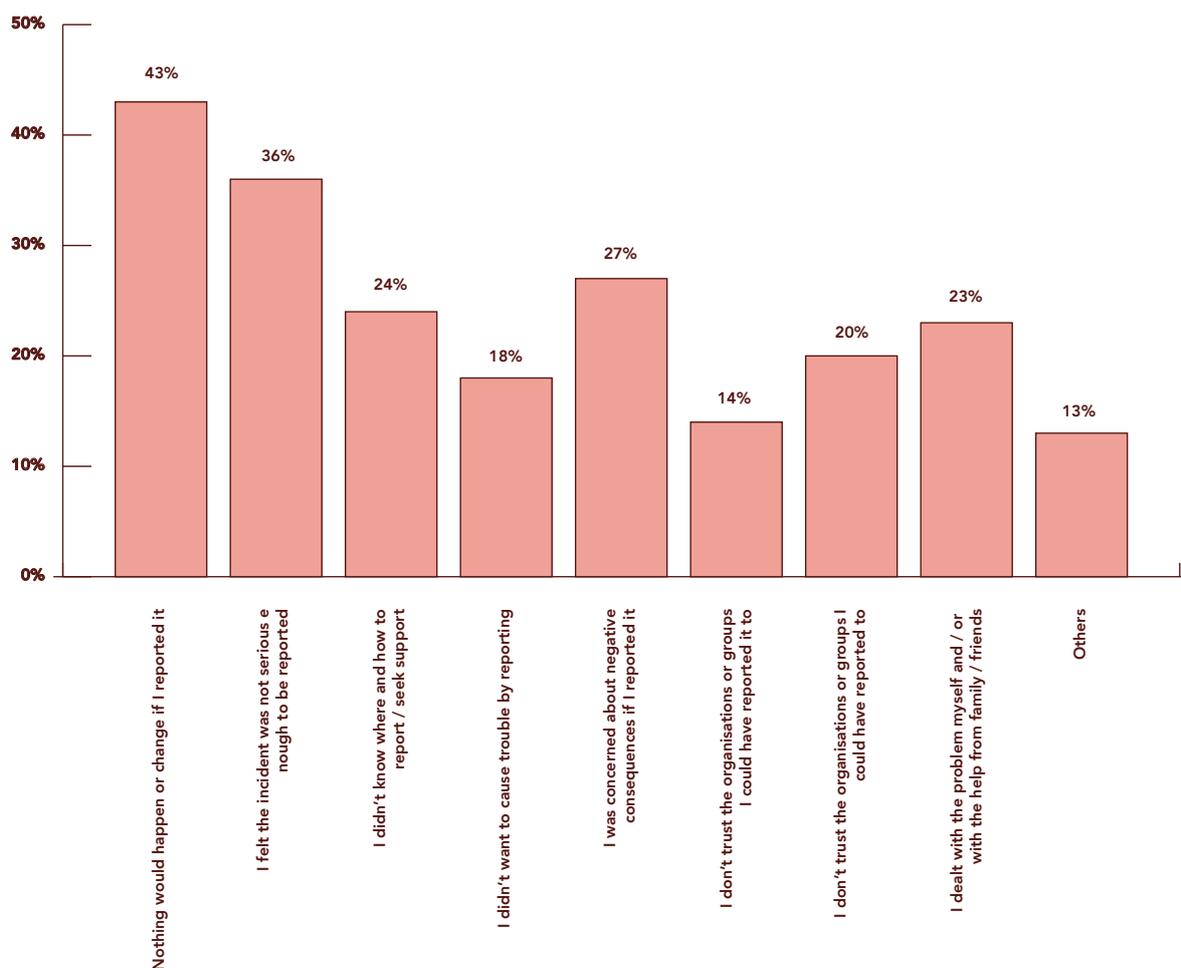
It often seems to be a combination of, among other factors, not knowing where to get support or how to report, a sense of resignation that reporting would not change anything and fears of negative consequences if the incident is being reported.

What do people from Wyndham's diverse communities consider the main barriers of reporting racism?

Consistent with the CMY-ANU survey findings (Doery et al. [2020](#)), the most common personal reasons for non-reporting of those in our project who had experienced racism (Figure 10) was that reporting would not change anything (43%) and that they felt the incident was not serious enough to be reported (36%).

A significant number of respondents also expressed concerns about 'negative consequences' (27%) and some did not report because they 'didn't want to cause trouble' (18%), 'did not know how or where to report' (24%) or considered the reporting process 'too difficult' or be 'too much effort' (23%).

**Figure 10: Personal reasons for non-reporting**



In addition to asking participants about their personal reasons for non-reporting racism, we also wanted to know why, in their views, others in Wyndham's diverse communities are discouraged from reporting racism and seeking support after experiencing it (Figure 11). These responses generally confirm the findings about their personal reasons, although there are some conspicuous differences.

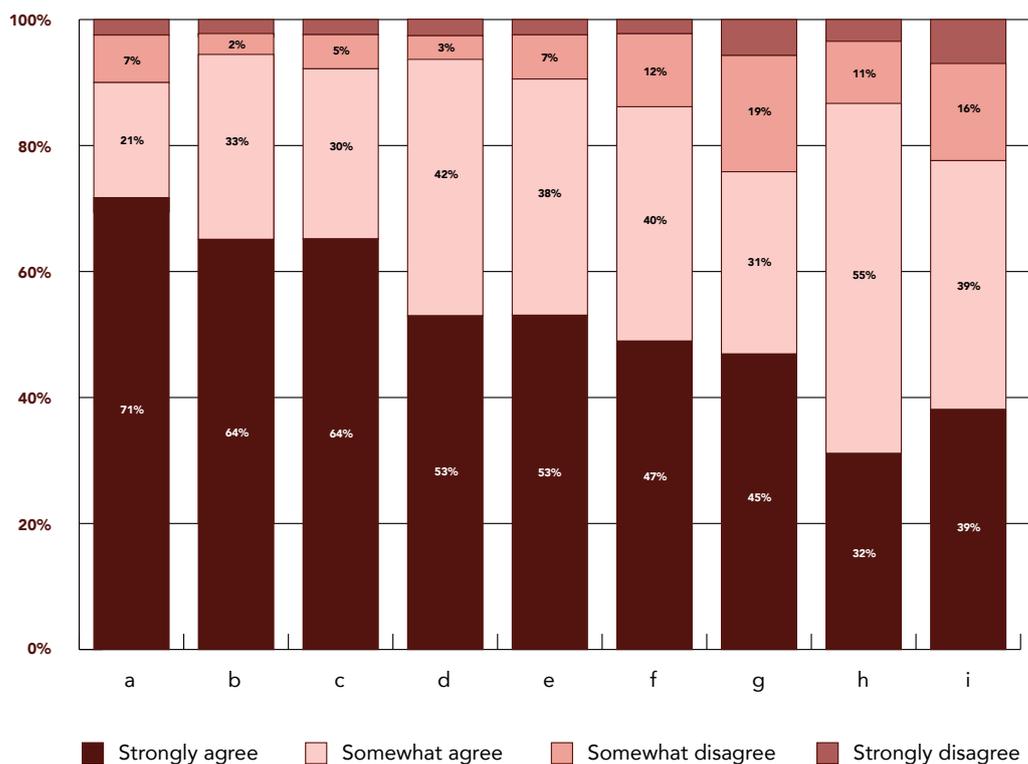
The most common reasons, according to the views of most survey respondents, why others in the community do not report a racist incident are:

- lack of awareness of existing services where they could report and seek support;
- no or not enough places where people could get the support they need or want;
- feeling that nothing would change;
- concerns they would not be taken seriously; and
- worried about negative consequences.<sup>11</sup>

Further, those organisations that do exist are often not regarded as sufficiently trustworthy or as being able to support those who don't speak English well enough (language barriers).

11. A large Europe-wide study ([Fundamental Rights Agency 2017](#)) found these concerns about negative repercussions applied to very different degrees to various social settings where racism and discrimination has occurred. These victimisation concerns were, for example, the main reasons for not reporting an incident of racism, assumedly involving one's children, to the school authorities.

**Figure 11: Reasons for non-reporting (general assessment)**



- a. People are not aware of existing services where they could report or seek support
- b. Many people feel nothing would change anyway
- c. Concerns they may not be taken seriously
- d. There are no (or not enough) places where people could get the support they needed
- e. Worried about negative consequences
- f. There is often a lack of trust in organisations or groups where people could report
- g. Language barriers
- h. The feeling that the incident was not serious enough
- i. It's not worth the time and hassle

Barriers to reporting racism were a central topic of discussion in all focus groups – and the findings of our analysis vastly dovetail with the community survey results. All of the above-mentioned factors that discourage people from reporting racism and seeking support were also expressed in one way or another during the focus groups.

The accounts of the focus group participants particularly highlighted their concerns that reporting could have negative repercussions for them, at the same time as they did not trust it to bring their desired changes and deliver justice. This mix of resignation, dissatisfaction with the processes and outcomes of reporting and fears of negative consequences appears to be a powerful deterrent for many in Wyndham's diverse communities.

# Concerns about negative repercussions and its silencing effects

A participant in the Multicultural Youth focus group explained how speaking out about racism makes their situation even worse: 'We're just so used to accepting... the racial slurs, the comments. I feel like, as a community, if we do speak up and go tell someone that something happens, we just feel like that issue is just going to become bigger than it was before, it's just going to cause more problems and more fights. So, I feel like we've just gotten ... quiet in keeping our head down whenever we do experience such racism.'

One participant in the Recent Arrivals focus group highlighted concerns of negative consequences in the context of her children's experiences with racism at school. She said: 'Their study will be affected. I know about the system and how [the school authorities] can be. They don't like for people to be against them. For that, we must be careful to protect our children, only because you can't go against them. It's very hard.' It is worth noting that, according to a pan-European study, reporting racism and discrimination in the context of schools was particularly often deterred by fears of negative repercussions (Fundamental Rights Agency [2017](#)).

Participants in the Indian focus group also discussed concerns about negative consequences, which was seen as a major factor in discouraging many within their community from reporting racism: 'The problem is our people are not reporting and they don't want to be in trouble.' Another participant in this focus group agreed: 'They don't want to get involved in anything, so they let it go.'

According to yet another person in this group, the insecure legal status of some in their community is an additional concern; some refrain from connecting with and reporting racism to a government organisation because they do not have permanent resident status: 'The majority of them don't complain.'

# Poor process and poor outcomes – no justice served

These concerns that reporting racism could have negative implications for the individual is in part also linked to perceived or actual shortcomings of the way the report is handled. Several participants across the different focus groups recalled that, once they reported, they felt cut out of the process and were not kept informed about the potential outcomes. This seems to have disempowering effects on some.

A participant in the Neighbourhood Hubs focus group recalled an incident where she reported a racist experience at work to senior management: 'What hurt me the most is that there was no sense of justice whatsoever, so there were no repercussions and instead it was turned back on me. It just put so much self-doubt in myself, my abilities and my skills... I was told I could go to different organisations and try to voice my concerns.'

Many expressed a sense of hopelessness and lack of trust in the efficacy of the process and dissatisfaction with the outcomes, including 'no tangible consequences' for the person responsible for the racist incident. A participant in the South Sudanese focus group, for example, noted: 'Not just that people don't know how to report, it's that they are not happy with the outcome of reporting.' Another participant in this focus group shared a similar view: 'Nothing will be done. I talk about it but I wouldn't report [anymore] because nothing will be done, regardless of what they say a service will do.'

Such assessments of poor processes were frequently linked to interactions with the police. A participant in Recent Arrivals focus group, for example, stated: 'The police need to show us that they believe in what we told them. Because so many times you tell the police and they are not doing anything or they are not coming back to you to tell you what is going on... For me, they didn't believe what I told them. That's why they are not doing anything, why they are not contacting me back.'

#### 4.4 Support and reporting services

Our survey among local organisations and community groups found that a significant number of surveyed organisations hear at least occasionally about racist incidents from their clients or community members. Almost half of the surveyed organisations, many of which work closely with members from diverse communities, come across such reported incidents several times a month; only very few never hear any such reports.

This suggests that Wyndham residents regularly turn to local organisations and community groups for support – an assessment that is also supported by the findings in our community survey that those who have reported experiences of racism often report to local organisations such as Wyndham City Council and community groups.

Others report racist incidents to organisations or community groups outside of Wyndham, for example, VEOHRC, which has a statutory mandate to provide assistance (conciliation) in cases of, among others, racially or religiously motivated cases of vilification, harassment, discrimination or victimisation<sup>11</sup>.

#### Insufficient support and reporting services

How do people from Wyndham's diverse communities perceive the services that are available to them, both locally and beyond, to report their experiences with racism?

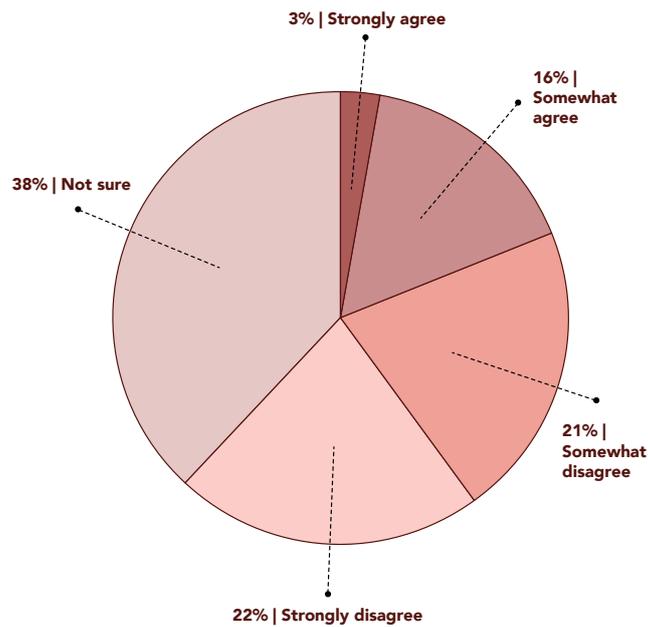
Only 19% of respondents in the community survey consider the existing reporting services to be appropriate (Figure 12), while 43% disagree or strongly disagree.

The remaining 38% were not sure and thus did not want to make a judgement on the availability of such services, which may indicate insufficient knowledge about such services.

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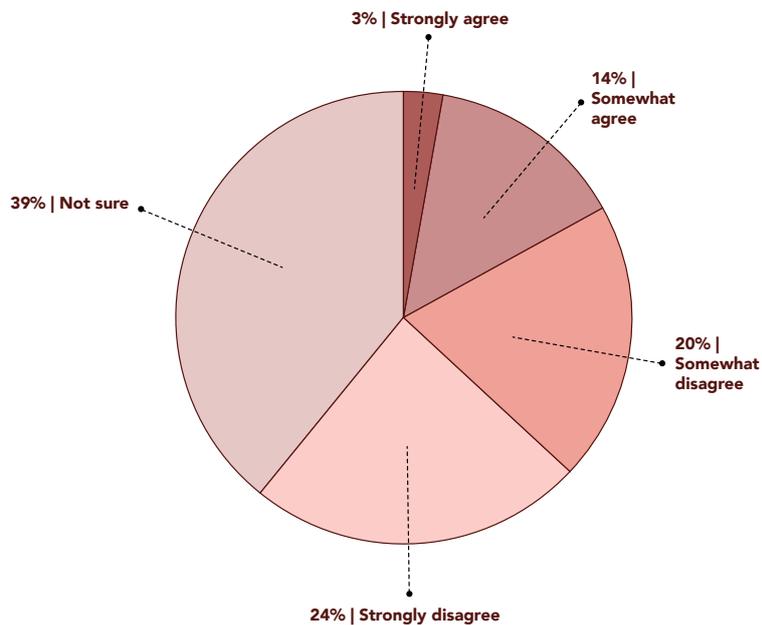
11. VEOHRC has responsibilities under three civil laws, and is able to 'receive and conciliate complaints of religious discrimination or vilification that arise under the Equal Opportunity Act or Racial and Religious Tolerance Act' (Australian Human Rights Commission and Victoria Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission [2020](#): 4).

**Figure 12: Are reporting services appropriate?**



A similar image emerges when asked about the availability of sufficient services and organisations that offer appropriate support for people from Wyndham who have experienced racism (Figure 13). Again, only a minority (17%) consider existing support services as sufficient, while the vast majority disagree (44%) or do not feel confident enough to make a judgment (39%) on the appropriateness of such services.

**Figure 13: Are support services appropriate?**



## How to improve support and reporting services

Members of Wyndham's diverse communities, who completed the survey and participated in the focus groups, made many valuable suggestions on how to improve support and reporting services in a way that would encourage their communities to come forward, speak up and receive the support they desire.

Their input provides crucial guidance for the development of the Wyndham Roadmap towards the development of more responsive, accessible and adequate reporting and support services, tailored to the specific needs and expectations of the diverse local communities.

Participants highlighted a variety of factors to consider (Figure 14). What almost all participants agreed on is that existing services need to be made more widely known and actively promoted within the community. Other suggestions focused on service provision. According to our community survey responses, more people would report racism if the services were:

- (more) culturally sensitive;
- offered in different community languages;
- better qualified to respond to the reports of racism;
- run by qualified people from the respective community; and
- provided locally, close to where people live.

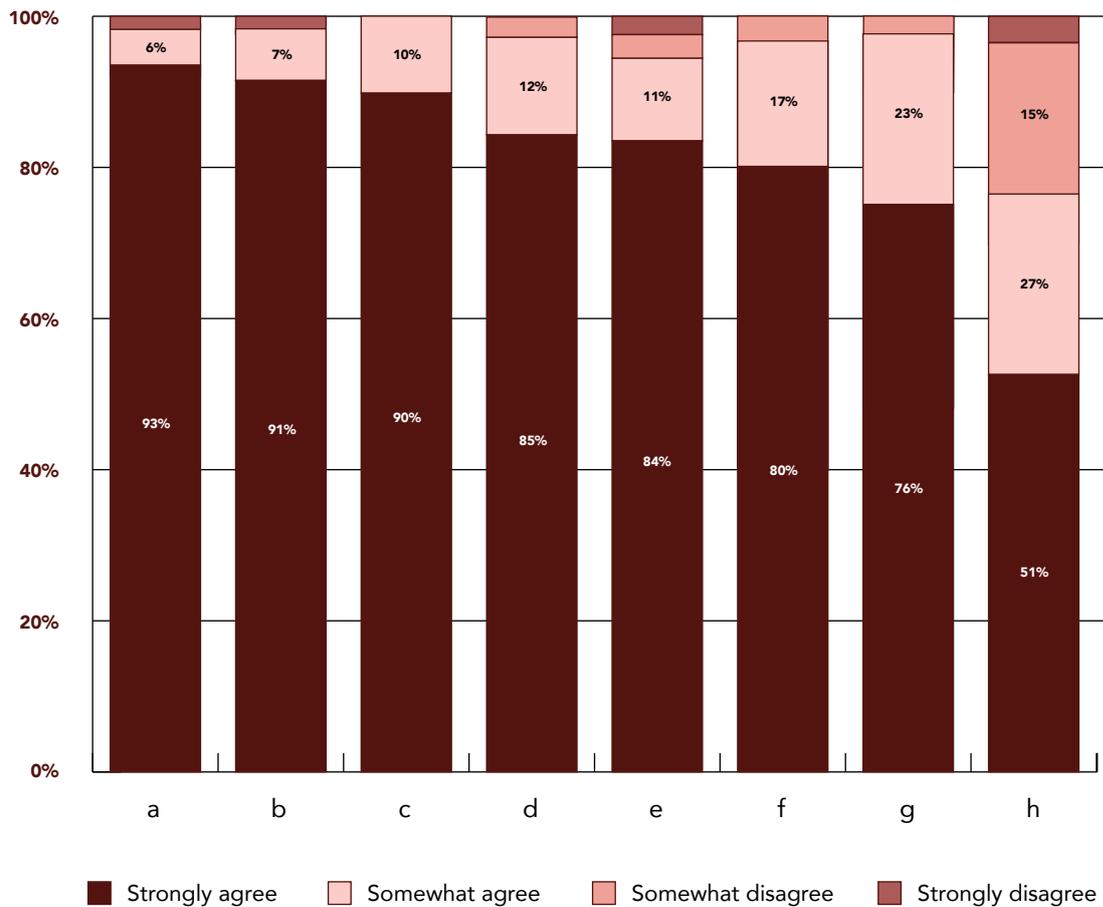
***'We don't want a support service to tell the victims what they should be feeling or what they should be doing. We need a support services that can understand, that also listens'***

**Participant in the Māori and Pasifika focus group**

Each of these factors were widely regarded as being important (see figure 14). Slightly fewer survey respondents – but still a majority – found it important that the person who reports the racist incident should remain in control over what happens after reporting or have a say in the decisions around next steps.

Moreover, the survey results as well as the insights from the focus groups strongly demonstrate that it matters which organisations provide these support services. The key here was trust – everyone found it important (and 73% considered it very important) that the services are offered by an organisation or group that 'I can trust.'

**Figure 14: Ways to make reporting of racism more likely**



- a. Making existing services widely known and promote them within diverse
- b. The services have to be culturally sensitive
- c. The services need to be offered by organisations or groups that I can trust
- d. Services should be provided in different community languages
- e. Services need to be better qualified to respond to incidents
- f. The services should be run by qualified people from the respective community
- g. Support services need to be provided locally, close to where I live
- h. The one who reports an incident needs to be the who who controls or decides what happens after

# A matter of trust

The personal accounts and perspectives of focus group participants highlighted that a trust deficit seemed to discourage them from reporting racism and seeking support. In particular, we identified two closely intertwined arguments: first, existing institutions were seen by some as being influenced by systemic racism, and second, and more commonly, many existing services were seen as being not culturally sensitive, mainly due to a lack of cultural representation among the staff but also due to the lack of multilingual support services.

One participant in the Māori and Pasifika focus group articulated his community's reluctance to report racism to certain organisations: 'We know that racism is systemic, so the last thing we want to do is tap into an organisation that follows those structures. I think that's why we don't report because that level of trust is just not there because those systems keep imposing those same traumas over and over again.'

In the same focus group, another participant said: 'Even within organisations that we think are safe places to go – they don't understand the institutional, the personal or the cultural and racial complications.' Calling for 'higher cultural competency and a bit more Māori and Pasifika representation', another participant added: 'You cannot support the community if you don't know the community.' However, there were also calls to connect community groups with the wider community to raise awareness about racism more broadly: 'Having our own representatives in that space is amazing, but that's still no good if only our people know what our people go through. Ensuring that that people that are involved with that service are connected with all the communities they're representing.'

The need for more culturally sensitive peer support was raised in other focus group. A participant in the Muslim Women's group, for example, said: 'If I have to go and tell someone [about my racist experience], even if I don't know that person, if that person physically looks like me, it's easy for me to talk about it.' Similarly, a woman in the Neighbourhood Hubs focus group noted: 'I know in the last few years that have been a few support services, created within the Muslim community, by Muslims. I think that just has encouraged more people to approach them and maybe report the incidents. There's a level of comfort knowing that it was created by a Muslim organisation, they're going to be a lot more sympathetic and understanding of your experience.'

A participant in the Recent Arrivals focus group also captured this sentiment by stating that some services 'are not culturally diverse and they should be'. The participant felt this would 'make people feel welcome and to make people want to engage with those services.' For some participants across several focus groups, providing these services in the respective community languages is part of increasing the cultural appropriateness of the service. As one participant in the Indian focus group explained: 'our community doesn't want much, we just want services that can be accessed in our language.'

# Which organisations?

In the survey, participants could choose from a list of local organisations in Wyndham who they considered to be trustworthy within larger parts of their respective community. The most commonly named organisation was Wyndham City Council, which was seen by 43 survey respondents as having trust in large segments of their community, followed by Wyndham Community and Education Centre (n=28), WEStjustice (n=27), local police (n=26) and the Centre for Multicultural Youth (n=24). These response patterns appear to be also influenced by how well known certain organisations are among Wyndham's diverse communities.

There were some marked community-specific differences when it comes to community trust in these organisations. Survey respondents from Wyndham's Indian community, for example, consider the local council particularly trustworthy, and they also mentioned local police proportionally more often than respondents from other communities. Respondents of African backgrounds (mostly South Sudanese, but also Ethiopian and others) consider civil society organisations such as WEStjustice and CMY, but also Wyndham Community and Education Centre, particularly trustworthy. Respondents who identify as Māori or Pasifika, or as Muslim, seem to have more trust in the council and much less (also compared to other respondents) in local police. While, according to survey respondents, WEStjustice seems to enjoy trust within the Maori or Pasifika communities, Muslims seem much less connected to WEStjustice.

Through the community focus groups and community survey we learned that many would like to see a local grassroots group, representing their cultural or religious community, play a more important role in the provision of services for their community members who have experienced racism and would like to report it.

These services could then be provided locally, in a trustworthy environment, in the respective community language and in a culturally sensitive way. In the Māori and Pasifika focus group, a participant reflected on how he responded to racism: 'When I've gone through some type of trauma like that, I have found the best medicine is for me to go back to my community.'

Overall, the focus group discussions highlighted that Wyndham's neighbourhood and community centres (many managed by the council) were regarded as trustworthy places where people would feel comfortable reporting racism.

A participant in the Neighborhood Hubs focus group made a concrete suggestion, emphasising the personal connections that would make reporting easier and more comfortable:

**'You report it to police and the police aren't going to do anything. Well, that's how I feel. They are such a big organisation, it's a faceless organisation, it's not one person or a group of people you can go and see, like having something within the community centre I think would help. You've got someone that can even speak their language.'**

Another participant in this focus group described the community centre she often goes to as 'safe' and 'supportive,' which resonates with the central purpose of these council managed local community and neighbourhood centres. Similarly, a participant in the Indian focus group referred to the community centres as 'safe and good.'

# Reporting to police

A number of participants, both in the survey and the focus groups, explained that the level of severity of their experience influenced their reporting behaviour. Some noted that they would only report more serious racist incidents such as physical attacks, but not verbal abuse. In some focus groups, this led to discussions about their views on barriers to reporting racism to police. Many regarded barriers to reporting to police to be particularly high due to a combination of factors.

The police is often not seen as a culturally sensitive institution and responses to personal reports of racism are thus not considered to be culturally adequate (e.g. in the respective community language). A participant from the Recent Arrivals focus group explained: 'Going to the police in itself is quite intimidating, with limited language, not being able to explain yourself properly, make things really difficult to report the matter to police.'

Lack of trust in police as an institution was expressed by a number of participants and sometimes this trust deficit was linked to fear. A participant in the Multicultural Youth focus group, for example, said that 'most people are afraid to just go to the police.'

Two main reasons for this trust deficit were prevalent. First, some participants referred to negative experiences with police in their country of origin. 'Going to police is not possible, especially when we are coming from a country like India, where police is not a good place for us to go and report. Things are different in this country but new people are hesitant [to go to police],' a participant in the Indian focus group explained. Similarly, a participant in the Neighbourhood Hubs focus group said: 'Individuals, especially when you take into consideration that some people have come from countries where the police are affiliated with so much fear and violence ... they still do not have the confidence or ability to speak up.'

The second reason underpinning the lack of trust in police is related to negative personal and community experiences in Australia. A participant in the South Sudanese focus group referred to experiences of what he felt was racial profiling, asking: 'What does that say? Who else can you trust if not the police? ... We've lost trust in the system. We've lost trust in services.' Reflecting on perceptions of racism within the police, a participant from the Neighbourhood Hubs focus group stated: 'Sometimes the police can be perpetrators as well. That sort of breaks a lot of trust within the community, and further cements the idea that police are not on your side.'

A participant in the Multicultural Youth focus group suggested that it would be positive if the police become more involved in the community: 'Have them talk about the opportunity [to report], if you experience racism, you are more than welcome. I don't think many people know that they can actually report racism or discrimination. Maybe having them to talk about that, educate the community, get people in the community to realise and understand that they can actually access them.'



Empowering,  
connecting and  
supporting  
communities  
in Wyndham

# Empowering, connecting and supporting communities in Wyndham

05

This project sought to pilot new ways to establish more adequate and accessible support and reporting services for those in Wyndham's diverse communities who have experienced racism.

In the following, we will outline how this has resulted in the development of the Wyndham Roadmap, a pathway towards improved locally provided support services that respond to the specific needs of ethnically, culturally and religiously diverse communities in the municipality.

In addition, we also reflect on the meaningful incidental consequences for many in the community who became actively involved in the project, enhancing their local connectedness, empowerment and agency both on an organisational and individual level. Some of these personal stories will be shared in the second part of this section.



### **5.1 Putting the learnings into practice: Wyndham Roadmap**

From the outset, this project was intended to be more than an empirical study. The research was conducted to provide a robust evidence base for addressing one key question: How can support services be made more accessible and responsive for people from Wyndham’s diverse communities who have experienced racism?

This required us to listen first and foremost to the views and experiences of those affected in Wyndham. We needed to understand why so many within these communities experience racism without reporting incidents or seeking support. What kind of outcomes would they hope to see when reporting? What would make it more likely for them to report next time, and how should more adequate support and reporting services look?

Our project delivered crucial insights in these and related issues, which subsequently guided us – in close collaboration with local communities, Wyndham City Council and other central local stakeholders – as we

co-designed the Wyndham Roadmap. This Roadmap proposes a structure for, and a pathway towards, a local support service network that meets the needs of people in Wyndham who have experienced racism. At the heart of this future support network is its responsiveness to, and alignment with, the specific expectations and needs of local communities, as identified in our project.

These include the following qualities:

- The organisation that offers support needs to enjoy community trust.
- The support and reporting services need to be promoted across local communities.
- Services need to be culturally sensitive and responsive.
- Support should be provided locally.
- People who have experienced racism expect support services that are empathetic, client-focused and not overly bureaucratic.
- A central motive for reporting racism is to ensure the incident is recorded and to contribute to raising awareness on the persistent problem of racism.

The municipality of Wyndham has a vibrant landscape of community organisations, grassroots groups, council managed services and other not-for-profit organisations.

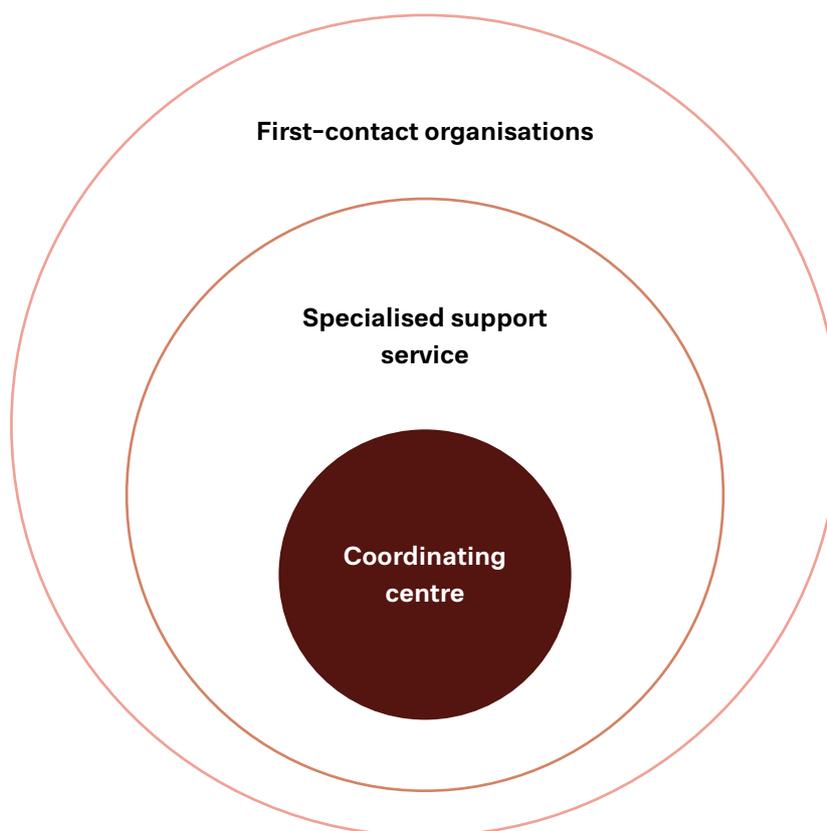
All of them have been crucial in supporting their clients and community members in a variety of ways, and many of them are already well connected with each other.

This constituted the starting point for the development of the Wyndham Roadmap. Leveraging their different areas of expertise and community trust, the Roadmap proposes to enhance the capacity of these existing local organisational structures and resources to enable them to provide adequate and accessible support and reporting services to those in the local community who have experienced racism.

To achieve this goal, we recommended a five-fold approach:

1. Identifying local organisations and community groups that (a) enjoy trust among (segments of) Wyndham's diverse communities and (b) are interested in enhancing their support for community members or clients who have experienced racism. These organisations are referred to as 'first-contact' organisations.
2. Building capacity in these community groups and organisations to provide adequate support, reporting and referral services to those who have experienced racism; taking into consideration their often limited resources. These 'first-contact' organisations would not provide specialised or legal advice but rather (a) provide initial emotional support, (b) offer an opportunity to report and record the incident, and (c) discuss options for further action, which may include referrals to more specialised services, if desired.
3. Promoting these newly established or enhanced support and reporting services among their community members or clients and across Wyndham's diverse communities.
4. Connecting these local community groups and organisations with each other in a local support network and linking them with already existing specialised support services (e.g. mental health services, community legal services, local police, VEOHRC and other relevant services).
5. Identifying one central (local) organisation ('coordinating centre') tasked with coordinating this local support network, to support its gradual expansion, promote its services, centrally collect the individual reports of racism (as recorded by the network organisations), and use this evidence for awareness raising campaigns and to inform prevention and intervention measures in the future.

**Figure 15: Proposed three-tier structure of local support service network in Wyndham**



## **5.2 Empowering individuals, connecting communities**

Racism often silences and disempowers those who experience it, which frequently manifests in a sense of helplessness and resignation to the persistence of racism. This project sought to help break this silencing effect, encouraging people from Wyndham's diverse communities to report their experiences and access adequate support.

In the long run, this is expected to contribute to raising awareness and ultimately to reducing racism. This constituted the rationale behind the project and its long-term aim.

As the project concluded in March 2021, it is too early to assess whether, and to what extent, this goal will be achieved. We have, however, noticed more immediate positive effects on many of those from Wyndham's diverse communities who were actively involved in this project as peer-facilitators of the community focus groups or through our community consultations.

These were secondary effects, incidental and not deliberately planned but very meaningful and important. The personal stories behind these effects deserve special attention as they illustrate how this project has already helped change the way Wyndham residents from diverse backgrounds think and talk about racism.

For some, the sense of resignation in the face of persistent racism has diminished and so have its disempowering effects. A number of local community members shared with us that they are now much more inclined to speak out against racism and no longer suffer in silence.

Others have highlighted how, through their project involvement, they have strengthened their existing connections within and beyond their community to build new relationships with a range of organisations and communities.

# Changing the conversation: speaking out, overcoming resignation

For Tyson Tuala, local resident and Vice-President of the local Māori community organisation Ngā Mātai Pūrua, involvement in the project was a wake-up call that fundamentally changed the conversation around racism:

**'Before this project we had not even talked about how to deal with a racist incident, and we had no idea what our community members thought about racism either. Not that it didn't happen, rather the opposite: but we had been so used to racism that we did not even realise that we should do something about. But that has changed... Without this project, it would probably have taken a really hardcore racist event for us to wake up and do something.'**

Similarly, a Wyndham local from the South Sudanese community noted that their involvement in the project has empowered them to become an active player in tackling racism in Wyndham:

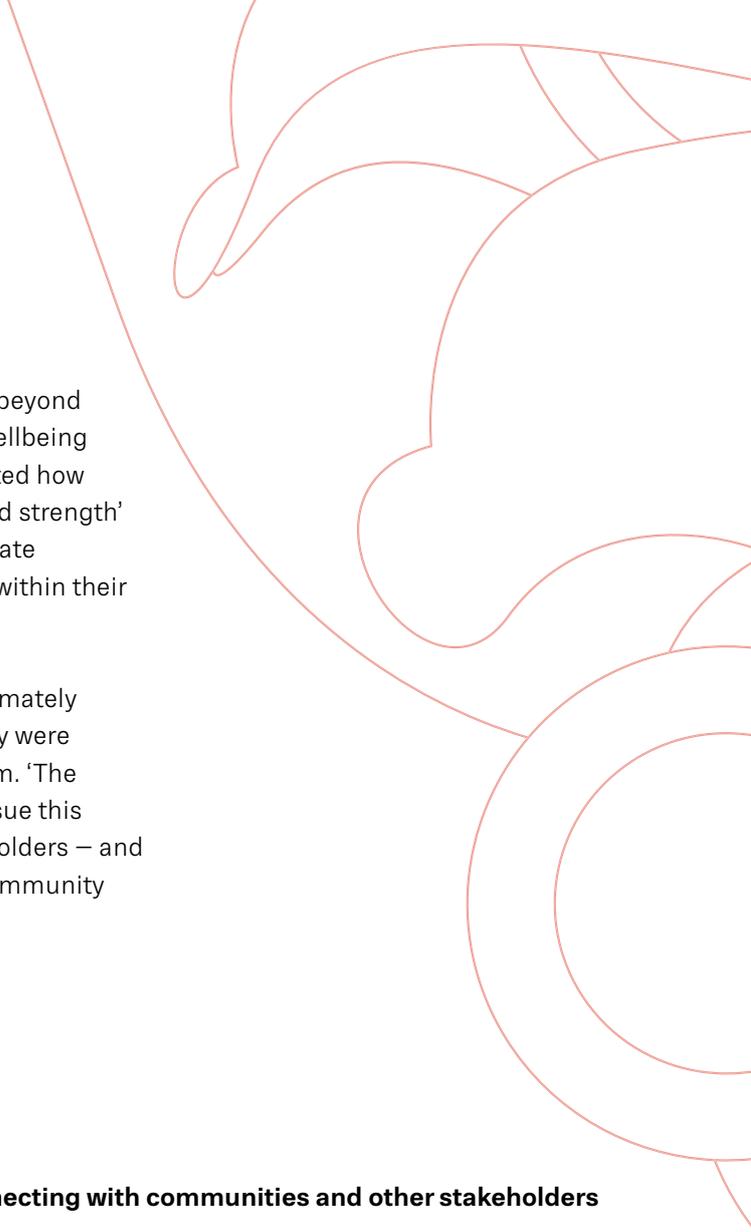
**'It has given us agency, the power has been put into our hands – and we feel like we as a community group are more in charge now. In the past we did not know where to go when we experienced racism, maybe we were told to call a certain phone number, but through this project we have been empowered to play an active role as a community group. We no longer simply hope that others do something about racism, and it has encouraged our community members to come to us. I can see that this is changing things for us in Wyndham.'**

For Jazeer Nijamudeen, local resident and founder of Active Youth, the project was an eye-opener as he realised that racism can be tackled effectively on the local level, which helped reduce the sense of resignation:

**'In the past I thought nothing can really be done about racism because it's a bigger problem. I had never really looked at racism through a local lens before, but now, after this project, I think actually there is a good chance to make a real impact on racism on the local level. There are better levers on the local level. And everyone can have an impact.'**

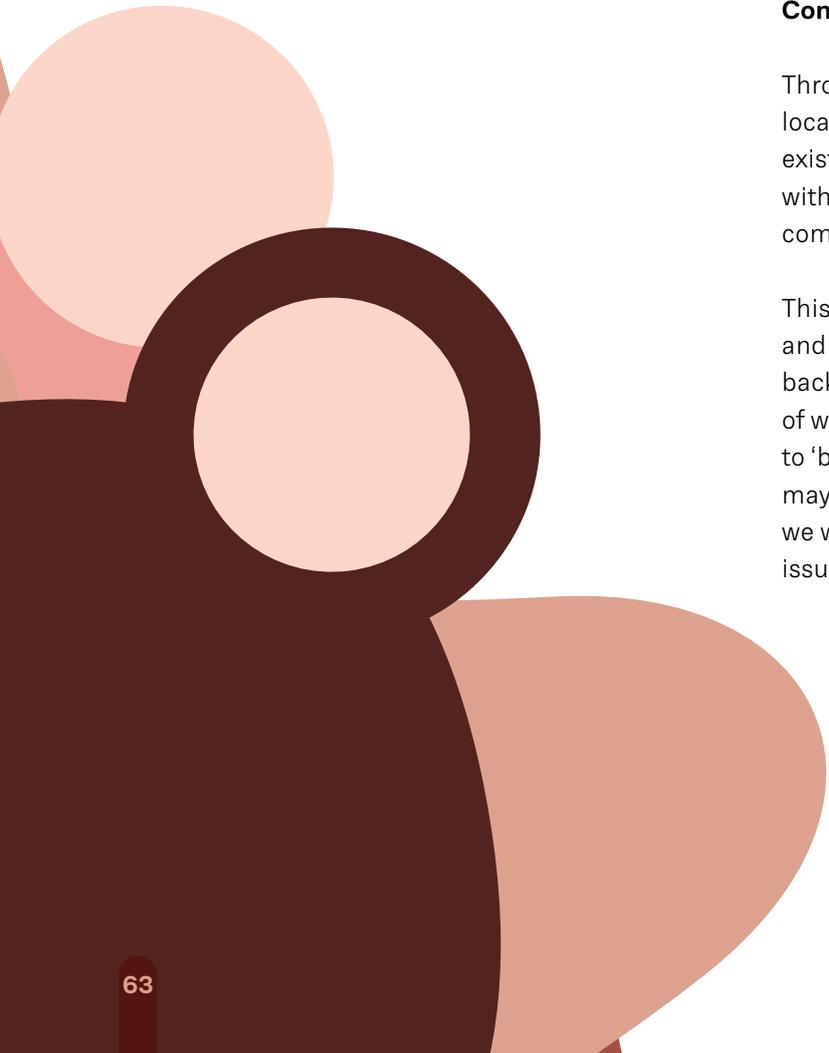
***'This project definitely helps people to have confidence to feel they belong and they have a voice to speak up. After this project, they'll be able to know that they can report incidents of racism. Another great thing about this project is that it helps bring people together to share their stories and understand that they're not the only one struggling with issues concerning racism.'***

Shemsiya Waritu, African Australian Muslim woman



The project has had empowering effects on communities also beyond the topic of racism and how to respond to it. Tonya, Pasifika Wellbeing Officer at Pasifika Community Australia, for example, highlighted how their involvement in the project has given them ‘confidence and strength’ to lobby for more culturally adequate support from local and state government during the COVID-19 related economic hardship within their community.

Their advocacy and discussions with the local council were ultimately successful as the Pasifika community group received what they were lobbying for: land for their own community garden in Wyndham. ‘The project has encouraged us and given us the confidence to pursue this goal, and it has assisted us in connecting with the right stakeholders – and all this was really important for us to secure this land for our community garden’, as Tonya stated.



### **Connecting with communities and other stakeholders**

Through extensive consultations and collaboration with local community groups, the project helped strengthen existing, and build new networks and connections, both within their respective community as well as with different communities and organisation in Wyndham.

This connectedness promoted a sense of joint commitment and purpose in tackling racism. A local resident of African background involved in the project stressed the importance of working together with different stakeholders and groups to ‘bring better outcomes and achieve the impossible. It may be slow but we will eventually achieve our goal. So, if we work together, we will be able to find solutions to the issues of racism.’

Tyson from the local Māori community highlighted that discussing racism has had positive effects on the connectedness within their own community:

**'Yes, the project helped us build connections with many local stakeholders like council and many others, but it also helped us create much stronger bonds within our own community as we have opened up the conversation about racism, simply by saying that we are here to listen and to assist when they experience racism. Many realised we are not just a sporting club, but that we really care about our community.'**

Tyson also stressed the importance of cross-community bridge-building experiences, which has further motivated him and his local Māori community members to speak up against racism:

**'We connected, since the first project information session, with so many other communities in Wyndham who also experience racism. And that created an immediate awareness that we actually have this issue too, and it almost forced us to do something about it. We didn't want to put up with it any longer. Thanks to the project many within our community have realised that they aren't the only ones who face racism, and that has made them more inclined to speak out against it. Before, there was a lot of like "this happened to me, but I didn't do anything about it, didn't want to make a fuss," but this attitude has started to change as we see how many have experienced similar things. And through our project involvement we are now better equipped to deal and respond to racism.'**

For some local grassroots groups this project was the first opportunity to connect with Wyndham City Council and other local community organisations and agencies. Many new relationships were formed and existing ones were strengthened, which further enhanced Wyndham community connectedness and cohesion.

Tonya from the Pasifika community, for example, emphasised that the project encouraged collaboration with many other communities 'instead of just looking within our own cultural bubble. We have been empowered to truly embrace the multicultural diversity around us in Wyndham and find common ground.'

In some instances, the new connections forged as a result of this project had tangible outcomes. A member of the local South Sudanese community highlighted that his involvement in the project has made him more committed to supporting other community members who have experienced racism. As a result, he subsequently connected and built relationships with several key stakeholders such as the VEOHRC and local police:

**'Through our involvement in the project, we have become more interested in the work of different agencies in this space, such as the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission. And not only that ... as a result of our focus group within this project, we decided to reach out to the Commission, and they then connected with us and spoke to us about what they can do to support us. We have actually a really good relationship with them now, and as a result of that we have then also been connected with local police who also joined a community meeting. We probably wouldn't have that if we hadn't been involved in this project.'**

Tonya from the Pasifika community also emphasised how the project put them in contact with representatives from Victoria Police, which has resulted in positive and continuous relationship: 'We now have ongoing connection with Victoria Police, and we are still connected with some of multicultural leaders in that group.'

These are only some of the stories from Wyndham residents that demonstrate how this local project has already affected many people's lives in positive ways. The conversation about racism and discrimination has started to shift in Wyndham, as the acknowledgment of the persistence of racism seems to have lost some of its paralyzing effects.

These are encouraging signs that more and more residents and communities feel empowered to jointly speak up against it and claim their rights to equal and fair treatment in Australia's multicultural society.

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