

# Enhancing the Capacity of Victorian Community Sport to Tackle Racism

Research summary

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The research team is extremely grateful to all the research participants who willingly shared their experiences and reflections. We are also grateful to all the individuals and sporting organisations who supported the research process and provided ongoing advice and guidance with this project.

We thank our partners VicHealth for their funding of this research and our research partners CMSport (Centre for Multicultural Youth) and Rob Hyatt from the Koorie Heritage Trust.



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The research team acknowledges, recognises and pays respect to the Traditional Owners of Country across Australia.

We acknowledge the ancestors, Elders and communities of the Boonwurrung/Bunurong, Wadawurrung and Wurundjeri/Woiwurrung peoples of the Kulin nation as the Traditional Owners of the lands on which our organisations are now situated and where the research was undertaken.

We recognise the continuing connection to land, waters and community of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia.

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## Introduction

This report presents summary findings from a research project funded by a VicHealth Impact Research Grant (2023–2025).

The research examined racism in Victorian community sport and identified evidence-based measures to address racism and promote anti-racism.

The research was led by Monash, Melbourne, and Victoria Universities in partnership with CMSport (Centre for Multicultural Youth) and Rob Hyatt from the Koorie Heritage Trust.

# Research context

Community sport is vital aspect of Victoria’s cultural fabric, providing numerous health and social benefits to communities.

Yet it is a site where racism remains pervasive at structural, organisational, and interpersonal levels.

The study aimed to deepen understanding of how racism manifests in community sport and to provide actionable guidance for sporting organisations, policymakers, and club leaders on how to manage and prevent racism.

# Methods

A mixed-methods approach that combined:

- Policy analysis of 49 anti-discrimination and sport policies (local, national, and international).
- 55 in-depth interviews and one focus group with people from across the community sport ecosystem, including those with lived experience of racism, volunteers, coaches, administrators, peak body and local government staff.
- Survey of 337 participants in community sport.
- Scoping review of international anti-racism practice in sport.



**49**

*POLICIES  
REVIEWED*



**55**

*IN-DEPTH  
INTERVIEWS*



**337**

*SURVEY  
PARTICIPANTS*



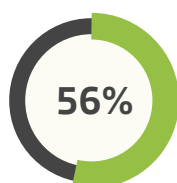
*SCOPING REVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE*

# Key findings

## 1. Racism in community sport is significant, entrenched, and multi-layered

*“Absolutely, there’s still experiences of racism. There is racism out there on every weekend...you’d be naive to think it’s not. I’ve seen it happening on a field every weekend.” (Lived experience participant)*

- **Structural Racism** was identified in the form of racial stereotypes, positional segregation, exclusion from leadership of culturally and racially minoritised (CARM) and Indigenous people, and barriers linked to cost or religious practices.
- **Interpersonal Racism** was identified in the form of overt vilification, microaggressions, biased treatment, and racial “sledging,” which was often normalised in competitive contexts.
- 56% of survey respondents experienced or witnessed racism in community sport.



**Experienced or witnessed racism in community sport**

*“When it comes to sports clubs, they feel it once they come through the door, they feel it when they miss a training session and everyone’s like, ‘Can’t trust these African boys.’ They feel it in every aspect in the sports club, they feel it in the same way Aboriginal kids might in the club, like ‘he’s a quick little player’. That type of stereotyping.” (Lived experience participant)*

## 2. Existing systems for reporting racism in community sport are failing

They are often complex, inconsistent, and can retraumatise victims. Many participants avoid reporting due to fear of retaliation or disbelief, with few receiving meaningful support.

*"I had the mindset of, why am I going to bother wasting my time reporting? It was back and forth, once with two-page reports that I've had to rebut with and reply. We've been supplying videos, evidence and photos of evidence and nothing eventuated from it." (Lived experience participant)*

**Survey Findings:** Only 35% of those experiencing racism reported incidents. Reasons for non-reporting included 'nothing would change if I reported it' (43%) and 'I felt I could not provide it was racism' (35%).

## 3. Policy frameworks addressing racism and guiding anti-racism are fragmented

Member protection policies are often legalistic, poorly understood at club level, and reactive rather than preventative. Policies frequently fail to name racism explicitly, leading to ambiguity and limited enforcement.

*"I found out that the policies that were in place didn't really address racism, so in the sense that they had a vilification policy, but then that policy didn't actually address racism, and there was no penalty for it. If you can't name the problem, you can't solve the problem." (Lived experience participant)*

## 4. Education is ad hoc

Education is ad hoc, underfunded, and not embedded into the core operations of sporting organisations and community clubs, resulting in low racial literacy across the sector.

CARM staff in sporting organisation and community clubs often face isolation, cultural burden, and subtle or systemic racism, with their skills undervalued and advancement limited to diversity-specific roles. Inconsistent support leaves many experiencing burnout from the ongoing need to advocate for racial equity.

*It's hard to be the person consistently advocating as well...And I just can't be having the conversation all the time, 'hey have we thought about including more multicultural communities? I'm tired. I don't really want to do it anymore. (Lived experience participant)*

*There was no place for me other than if there was an Aboriginal issue, and they needed advice on and that's it. (Lived experience participant)*

## 5. Positive action

Positive action includes grassroots, community-led initiatives by CARM and Indigenous leaders that create culturally safe environments and tackle barriers head-on.

Some state sporting organisations are diversifying leadership, delivering anti-racism training, and running targeted participation programs.

Positive environments in sporting organisations for CARM and Indigenous staff were built on strong peer support, embedded cultural safety and racial literacy, proactive and appreciative leadership, and tailored mentoring to meet the specific needs of CARM and Indigenous staff.

# Addressing Racism and Promoting Anti-Racism in Community Sport: Strategic Challenges

- Low prioritisation of anti-racism in funding and policy.
- Limited organisational capacity within sporting organisations and especially at club level to respond to racism.
- Low levels of racial literacy.
- Resistance to change in some clubs and organisations.
- Anti-racism work seen as optional rather than a strategic priority and core operational responsibility.

## Why this matters

For sports clubs, leagues, organisations and peak bodies, addressing racism is not only a legal and moral imperative, it is central to attracting and retaining members, growing volunteers, and building safe, inclusive and thriving sporting communities.

Current systems are reactive, fragmented, and under-resourced.

Without coordinated leadership and locally tailored resources, community sport will continue to be inequitable for CARM and Indigenous peoples.



# Priority Actions

The research has illustrated the need for:



**A coordinated, system-wide anti-racism framework** with shared accountability across government, sporting organisations, leagues and community clubs.



**Top-down policy leadership** coupled with education and support for leagues and community clubs to enact policies.



**Simplified, trauma- and violence-informed systems** for reporting racism with cultural safety built in.



**Sustained investment in developing racial literacy** across sporting organisations and community clubs.



**Support for and amplification of existing community-led anti-racism initiatives** without over-formalising or undermining their strengths.

# Recommendations

Addressing racism in community sport requires coordinated action across all levels, from government to local clubs, with some steps achievable quickly through policy, education, and reporting reforms, and others requiring long-term commitment, resources, and cultural change.

No single initiative is enough; sustained, shared effort is essential to create safe, inclusive, and equitable sporting environments where racism is actively prevented.



**Develop a coordinated state-wide framework for anti-racism in community sport.**



**Elevate lived experiences in addressing racism and anti-racism work.**



**Develop education and resources to improve racial literacy within the community sport sector.**



**Reform racism reporting and complaints systems.**



**Expand investment in leadership development and workforce diversity.**



**Embed anti-racism in policy and governance.**



**Consider anti-racism within other equity and inclusion priorities.**



**Monitor and evaluate anti-racism work.**



**Support and fund community-led and grassroots anti-racism initiatives.**



## Conclusion

Racism in community sport is systemic, but change is achievable.

Policy reform, leadership development, and targeted education can significantly improve the sector's ability to prevent and respond to racism.

With both the [National Anti-Racism Framework \(2024\)](#) and [Victoria's Anti-Racism Strategy \(2024–2029\)](#) identifying sport as a priority, now is the moment for coordinated, evidence-driven action.

The Australian Sports Commission's Play Well Strategy (2024) further reinforces the sector's obligation to create safe and equitable sporting environments.

Collectively there is an opportunity to create substantive changes in the ways in which racism is managed, addressed and prevented within Victorian community sport in the future and address some of the key issues raised within the research and ensure that all Victorian have culturally safe experiences within sport.

This summary is derived from the project research reports which are available on the [Monash University website](#).