Victorian Anti-Racism Alliance Networks Forum 2026 | Event Summary

Melbourne | 17 November 2026: Community organisations, researchers and stakeholders met at the Victorian Anti-Racism Support Networks Forum to share experiences, improve support for people affected by racism and identify opportunities for further action across Victoria.

Coordinated by **Victoria University** (VU) and hosted by **Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC)** on behalf of the Victorian Anti-Racism Alliance, the forum brought together representatives from the Whittlesea, Wyndham and South-East anti-racism networks.

The event formed part of a Victorian Government-funded project to tackle racism and vilification, with VU working alongside community organisations to improve local reporting and support pathways.

The forum opened with a Welcome to Country by Wurundjeri Elder Uncle Andrew Gardiner, who reflected on the enduring impacts of colonisation and the ongoing racism experienced by First Nations peoples. His message highlighted the importance of truth-telling, acknowledging historical injustices and working together to build more inclusive and equitable communities.

From research to local action

Research undertaken by VU across the state in recent years highlighted significant barriers to reporting racism.

The 2024 statewide study among over 700 people from various racialised communities found that **71% of survey respondents** had experienced racism themselves or had someone in their household experience racism, two-thirds of them also in the previous 12 months, yet only **15.5% had ever reported any such incidents to an organisation**.

Participants identified, among others, low trust in reporting systems, limited awareness of available services, fears of negative consequences, and concerns that reporting would not lead to meaningful action.

The community input collected through this research helped inform the establishment of several community-led local anti-racism support networks, which bring local organisations together to improve reporting, referrals and culturally safe support for people who face racism. The three networks currently operating are:

Whittlesea Anti-Racism Support Network, the Wyndham Anti-Racism Support Network and the Southeast Anti-Racism Support Network

Connecting communities across Victoria

Building on local initiatives, VU has coordinated the development of the **Victorian Anti-Racism Alliance**, connecting these three networks in Whittlesea, Wyndham and Melbourne's South-East to share research, experiences and practical approaches.

The forum brought these networks together, strengthened partnerships and discussed next steps to address racism across Victoria.

VU team leader Associate Professor Mario Peucker said:

“All these years of community-based research have highlighted over and over again that we can only succeed in tackling racism when we work together, guided by community members with lived experience, partnering with community organisations, local councils and other agencies. It is an incredible honour for our Victoria University team to see how our place-based research has contributed to building these unique anti-racism support services, provided by trusted organisations, tailored to community needs and where they are most needed - on the local level.”

In his keynote address, **Race Discrimination Commissioner Giridharan Sivaraman** highlighted the importance of community-led approaches, stronger reporting pathways and systemic accountability in tackling racism.

He emphasised that people experiencing racism often face significant barriers to reporting incidents, including a lack of trust in institutions, fear of retaliation and concerns about whether complaints will lead to meaningful outcomes.

“People experiencing racism shouldn't have to take on the responsibility of reporting it alone,” Commissioner Sivaraman said.

He acknowledged the important role of local anti-racism support networks in raising awareness, strengthening reporting mechanisms and providing culturally responsive support.

Sivaraman also called for coordinated action across governments, institutions and communities to advance the National Anti-Racism Framework and create lasting systemic change.

“We all deserve to live free from the harms of racism. We all deserve to feel safe, respected and able to belong,” he said.

Hiba Ayass, Multicultural Communities Lead at Whittlesea Community Connections, highlighted the importance of community-led approaches to addressing racism.

"What makes us unique is that we are a place-based organisation, rooted in the community we serve, and that we offer a safe space where people feel heard, supported and believed."

She also emphasised the importance of collaboration in creating lasting change.

"No single organisation can do this work alone. Together, we can build a Whittlesea where everyone feels valued, respected and supported."

Challenging organisations to think beyond reporting and support, Dalal Smiley, CEO of Wellsprings for Women, said:

"The challenge for us working in community-trusted organisations is how to help our communities impacted by the consequences of racism. Beyond listening, supporting, comforting and assisting with reporting, what is our role in helping make sense of racism and the power that uses it as a tool of control? It is incumbent upon us to create safe spaces where dissenting and disruptive voices can be heard, even when they make those in power uncomfortable."

Pointing to the power of local action in driving systemic change, and drawing on Wyndham's experience, Dr Jennie Barrera, CEO of Wyndham Community and Education Centre (Wyndham CEC), said:

"We know racism is systemic, complex and deeply entrenched. At times, the challenge can seem overwhelming. Yet our experience shows that meaningful change begins locally. When communities, organisations and institutions work together to create practical pathways for people to be heard, supported and empowered, we can challenge racism where it occurs and steadily dismantle the barriers that allow it to persist."

WCC has played a key role in coordinating the Whittlesea network, engaging local communities and working with partners to turn research findings into practical support.

Continuing the work

While the networks have made progress, partners have identified a need for further training and capacity building within community organisations, schools and sporting clubs.

A key priority is bystander-to-upstander training, helping people to not just recognise racism but also build their capacity to respond when they witness discrimination.

Partners are actively seeking additional funding to continue this work, improve reporting pathways, and support local organisations in responding effectively to racism.

The forum highlighted the importance of continued investment and collaboration to ensure people experiencing racism can access the support they need.

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