GARI YALA
SPEAK THE TRUTH

Full report

Centreing the Work Experiences of Aboriginal
and/or Torres Strait Islander Australians

Report embargoed until 17 November 2020.

An electronic executive summary of this research can be found on the DCA website.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Kirsten Gray is a Yuwalaraay/Muruwari woman living on Dharawal country and raising two small children. Her artworks are a contemporary and vibrant reflection of her passion for her Aboriginal culture.

'Speaking truth' explores the nature and extent of the contributions made by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in this land for millennia. Long before the birth of the Australian nation, our people were already making significant contributions to their families and communities.

It was the contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people upon the arrival of the British, which helped transform our country into what it is today. Much of this labour was often unpaid, unrecognised and undertaken in discriminatory and harsh conditions. Nonetheless, it is these ongoing contributions of our people which keep each other, our communities and this country, strong.

ABOUT JUMBUNNA

The Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research aims to produce the highest quality research on Indigenous legal and policy issues and to develop highly skilled Indigenous researchers.

In March 2019, UTS Jumbunna launched the world first Indigenous Peoples and Work, Research and Practice Hub (the Hub) to specifically explore the participation of Indigenous people in the workplace and the broader employment market.

The Hub drives meaningful change in Indigenous employment by working across the research, employment and diversity sectors. It provides a strength-based focal point that defies the deficit discourse in this space.

A centrepiece of the Hub is to undertake regular surveys of Indigenous peoples in the employment market to:

· emphasise Indigenous experiences

· complement existing knowledge

· identify key barriers and aspirations

· improve workplace outcomes, training and cultures

· provide strong qualitative evidence.

This approach provides a barometer of the workplace situations of Indigenous peoples, including highlighting the unique and vast contributions that they make to Australian workplaces.

ABOUT DIVERSITY COUNCIL AUSTRALIA.

Diversity Council Australia (DCA) is the only independent, not-for-profit workplace diversity advisor to business in Australia. We offer a unique knowledge bank of research, practice and expertise across diversity dimensions developed over 30 years of operation. In partnership with our members, our mission is to: lead debate on diversity in the public arena; develop and promote the latest diversity research, thinking and practice; and deliver innovative diversity practice resources and services to enable our members to drive business improvement. DCA works in partnership with members to generate groundbreaking, high impact diversity research that drives business improvement through providing evidence-based guidance on how to fully leverage the benefits of a diverse talent pool.

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UTS Jumbunna
Institute for Indigenous
Education and Research

Indigenous-led research of Indigenous people has always been a central and leading principle of Jumbunna Research's work. Now, through our Indigenous People and Work Research and Practice Hub, in collaboration with Diversity Council Australia, we have the opportunity to undertake research in the employment sphere.

Jumbunna, as a leading Indigenous research and thought-leadership entity, is proud to have co-led this important national research on the employment experiences of Indigenous people. Our people's history in the employment context since colonisation has been fraught with the excesses of colonial injustice and it is well past time that this is rectified.

Through listening to Indigenous people, employers can begin to tailor their employment programs to address what is needed. This research work provides that opportunity. I'd like to thank the Indigenous People and Work Research Hub for their vision in conceptualising this project, and Diversity Council Australia for lending their employment research skills.

Distinguished Professor Larissa Behrendt, Chair of Indigenous Research, Jumbunna Institute of Indigenous Education and Research

DIVERSITY COUNCIL AUSTRALIA

Diversity Council Australia has been proud to work with the Jumbunna Institute on Gari Yala.

This report lays out just some of the issues that Aboriginal and ⁄ or Torres Strait Islander people face in Australian workplaces each day. We hope Gari Yala will begin a conversation in Australian organisations about how to make workplaces safer, more welcoming and more inclusive of Aboriginal and ⁄ or Torres Strait Islander people.

As this report makes clear, this work must start with Australian businesses speaking with, and truly listening to, your First Nations staff.

We would like to thank the 1000 people who generously spoke the truth and shared your insights with us. We hope that the report does justice to your experiences.

Lisa Annese, CEO, Diversity Council Australia

nab

We're pleased to be working closely with the Diversity Council Australia and Jumbunna Institute of Indigenous Education and Research on the Gari Yala Project, to help us to gain a first-hand understanding of Indigenous workers' experiences. This research project is an important initiative within our Reconciliation Action Plan, with one of our key pillars focused on how we provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees with clear pathways and

development opportunities through a supportive, inclusive and engaged workplace. We hope this research can help continue the important conversation of how we increase Indigenous employment both within NAB and the community.

Susan Ferrier, NAB Group Executive People and Culture

coles

Coles is proud to partner with Diversity Council Australia and Jumbunna Institute of Indigenous Education and Research on the *Gari Yala* Project, which is the first research project of its kind in Australia. As Australia's largest private employer of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, we understand the importance of working better together and creating safe, welcoming and inclusive work environments.

We trust this research will make a positive contribution to increasing employment opportunities for Indigenous Australians and enhance their experience in the workplace.

Coles CEO – Steven Cain

Acknowledgement of Country

The authors and partners of this report wish to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the nations across Australia and pay our respect to Elders past, present and emerging. We recognise that all Elders and mobs in locations across Australia have their own experiences with 'work'. We hope this report enables our mob to tell our own stories. *Gari Yala,* speak the truth.

Our thanks

We thank and acknowledge the project's Expert Panel. The project has benefited immensely from panellists generously sharing their expertise and insights.

Panellist	Role and Organisation	Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
Kedea Atherton	ACCOR, Indigenous Programs Manager, QLD/NT	Yes
Lani Blanco	Director, LBF Consulting	Yes
Dr Olivia Evans	University of Newcastle	Yes
Associate Professor Paul Gray	Jumbunna Institute, University of Technology Sydney (UTS)	Yes
Kirsten Gray	Research Fellow, Jumbunna Institute, UTS	Yes
Tanja Hirvonen	Director of Research and Policy, Indigenous Allied Health Australia Ltd	Yes
Kara Keys	Consultant	Yes
Eveanne Liddle	Head of Indigenous Affairs and Strategic Inclusion, NAB	Yes
Kristy Masella	CEO, Aboriginal Employment Strategy	Yes
Topaz McAuliffe	Indigenous Business Development Manager, Coles	Yes
Katie Moore	Project Manager, Strategic Collaborations, The University of Sydney	Yes
Amber Roberts	Senior Manager, PwC Indigenous Consulting	Yes
Professor Yin Paradies	Alfred Deakin, Chair in Race Relations, Deakin University	Yes
Charles Prouse	Initiative Lead – Indigenous Supplier Diversity, Lendlease	Yes
Dr Deen Sanders	Partner, Governance, Regulation and Conduct, Deloitte	Yes
Phil Sillifant	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Manager, Corporate Affairs, Wesfarmers	Yes
Matthew Walsh	Lecturer, Faculty of Law, UTS	Yes
Sheena Watt	Executive Manager – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Programs, AFL SportsReady	Yes
Associate Professor Megan Williams	National Centre for Cultural Competence and Sydney Institute of Criminology, The University of Sydney	Yes

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Indigenous employment is a growing, vital area of focus within the employment and diversity, inclusion and human resources landscapes. But, until now, the Indigenous employment narrative has been informed by limited research, primarily conducted by non-Indigenous people and narrated by non-Indigenous voices.

To address this gap, we created *Gari Yala* – which means 'speak the truth' in Wiradjuri language – to:

- provide a voice for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers

- capture the state of play when it comes to workplace cultural safety, inclusion, and exclusion and racism.

The *Gari Yala* project is influenced by the framework of Indigenous Standpoint Theory.[1] It has been designed and informed by Indigenous academics and practitioners and prioritises Indigenous perspectives. It is Indigenous led and has been overseen by a panel of distinguished Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander academics and employment practitioners.

The report seeks to capture the voices of over 1,000 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers (N=1,033) from across Australia, who generously agreed to complete the survey and share their experiences and insights. To us, the high survey uptake underscores the importance of Indigenous-led solutions in the Indigenous employment landscape.

Gari Yala is a research partnership between University of Technology Sydney's Jumbunna Institute of Indigenous Education and Research and Diversity Council Australia. The *Gari Yala* project concept was developed in the early stages of 2020, and we cannot ignore the impacts of COVID-19 and, more significantly, the Black Lives Matter movement.

Sharing your Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background at work can be complicated, but it's vitally important

We asked over 1,000 employed Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander survey respondents about their experiences sharing their Indigenous background at work.

- **Over three-quarters (78%) said it was important for them to identify as Indigenous within their workplace,** with a similar number (72%) feeling it was safe for them to do so.

- Of note, **87% of respondents stated that they openly shared their Indigenous background at work,** meaning that some people are sharing their Indigenous identity even when it is not safe to do so.

As workplaces encourage their staff to bring their 'whole selves' to work, for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers this is often met with mixed feelings. For some people, identity is straightforward – it is passed through culture and an enduring family connection with Country. But, for people whose connection with family or Country has been broken by deliberate government policies of assimilation (such as the Stolen Generations), sharing your identity can be complex and sometimes traumatic.

Being an Indigenous person is a source of pride, however, many respondents felt they had to make calculated decisions about who they identified to. For some people, sharing their Indigenous identity at work exposed them to racism, as well as additional (unrecognised and unrewarded) workplace demands.

Over a quarter of the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people surveyed work in culturally unsafe workplaces

Cultural safety means being able to practise your culture free of ridicule or condemnation.[2] It occurs when a workplace acknowledges, respects and accommodates difference.[3]

In all, 28% of respondents reported that their workplace was culturally unsafe. Lack of cultural safety came in the form of, for instance:

- **racial slurs and unfair treatment** – 73% of Indigenous workers in culturally unsafe workplaces had heard racial or ethnic slurs or jokes in the past year, compared to 21% of workers in culturally safe workplaces.

- **low representation in Indigenous-focused roles** – 50% of all respondents reported Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people were never, rarely or only sometimes appointed in any internal roles with an Indigenous focus in their organisation.

- **not feeling comfortable expressing cultural beliefs** – 37% of all respondents were never, rarely or only sometimes comfortable expressing their cultural and personal beliefs at work.

Almost two-thirds of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers surveyed experience high identity strain – and it comes at a cost

'Identity strain'[4] (a term coined by the research team) refers to the strain employees feel when they themselves, or others, view their identity as not meeting the norms or expectations of the dominant culture in the workplace. The concept draws on literature investigating the efforts and energies members of minority groups expend negotiating and managing their identity in the workplace to avoid the negative consequences of discrimination, harassment, bias and marginalisation. It also draws on other identity literature that demonstrates employees can feel pressure to change how they present themselves at work if they feel their identity and values do not conform with those of the organisation.

Identity strain is very common – almost two-thirds (63%) of respondents reported feeling a high level of identity strain. This came in forms such as:

- **working harder** – 65% reported having to work harder to prove that an Indigenous person can do the job sometimes, often or all the time

- **compromising cultural integrity** – 44% reported being asked to do things that made them feel they were compromising their cultural identity sometimes, often or all the time

- **'toning it down'** – 33% reported being told to 'tone it down' or be less outspoken about Indigenous issues sometimes, often or all the time.

Identity strain also has a cost. Workers with high identity strain were 3 times less likely to always be satisfied with their job and to recommend their workplace to other Indigenous people, compared to those experiencing low identity strain. Moreover, they were 3 times more likely to intend to leave their employer in the next year.

Well over a third of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers carry the burden of high cultural load

Cultural load is the (often invisible) additional load borne by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at work, where they are the only Indigenous person or one of a small number of Indigenous people.[5] Well over a third (39%) of respondents reported having a high cultural load in their workplace. This came in the form of, for instance:

- **extra work demands** – 66% reported having extra Indigenous-related work demands placed upon them that non-Indigenous colleagues do not sometimes, often or all the time

- **expectation to educate others** – 71% reported being expected to educate their non-Indigenous colleagues about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and racism sometimes, often or all the time

- **expectation to represent all Indigenous people** – 69% reported being expected to talk on behalf of all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people sometimes, often or all the time.

Cultural load is a heavy burden. Workers with high cultural load were 2 times less likely to always be satisfied with their job and to recommend their workplace to other Indigenous people, compared to those experiencing low cultural load. They were also 2 times more likely to intend to leave their employer in the next year.

Indigenous employees face significant workplace racism and exclusion

Our survey revealed that racism is having a real and dramatic impact on Indigenous employees.

- **Unfair treatment and racist slurs are all too common** – 38% reported being treated unfairly because of their Indigenous background and 44% reported hearing racial slurs sometimes, often or all the time.

- **Racism manifests in different ways, but one of the most common was appearance racism** – 59% reported receiving comments about the way they look or 'should' look as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person.

- **Racism impacts wellbeing and job satisfaction** – Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers who experienced racism reported anxiety and stress, lower job satisfaction, and were less likely to intend to stay with their employer or recommend them to Indigenous friends and family.

- **Workplace supports are ineffective** – 32% of respondents who reported experiencing unfair treatment or racial slurs or jokes at work strongly disagreed or disagreed that they had the workplace support required when they experienced racism.

Anti-discrimination compliance training and formal racism complaint procedures are key to addressing racism – but they are not common

Concerningly, only a fifth of respondents worked in organisations with both anti-discrimination compliance training that included reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander discrimination and harassment, and a racism complaint procedure. Yet these initiatives make a real difference when it comes to reducing racism at work. Those whose workplaces included these initiatives were:

- **half as likely to experience unfair treatment at work** because of their Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity (21% with both initiatives, compared to 42% with neither)

- **far less likely to hear racial or ethnic slurs or jokes at work** because of their Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity (28% with both initiatives, compared to 51% with neither).

Organisational authenticity makes a difference but is not common

Organisational authenticity stems from a genuine support within the workplace to be inclusive and treat Indigenous people and employees equitably.

Authenticity is not common. Only a quarter (26%) of respondents felt they worked in a truly authentic organisation.

But authenticity matters. Compared to those in organisations with low authenticity, workers in highly authentic organisations were:

- 5 times more likely to always be satisfied with their job

- 8 times more likely to recommend their workplace to other Indigenous people

- 2.5 times less likely to intend to leave their employer in the next year.

Organisations with lower authenticity overpromise and underdeliver. Thirty-eight per cent of respondents felt their workplace overpromised to Indigenous staff, with a lack of career progression a key driver for workplaces to likely lose an employee.

When organisations are active, outcomes improve

Organisations across Australia are actively engaging in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-focused initiatives, such as celebrating NAIDOC Week, National Reconciliation Week and having a Reconciliation Action Plan.

Introducing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-focused initiatives in the workplace can **reduce racism, build authenticity, build cultural safety** and **reduce attrition.**

Compared to those in low-activity organisations, respondents in high-activity organisations were:

- more than 2 times less likely to be treated unfairly because they are Indigenous, or to hear racial or ethnic slurs or jokes about Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people at work

- 2 times more likely to strongly agree or agree that their organisation genuinely supports the inclusive and equitable treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees

- 2 times more likely to report that their organisation was culturally safe

- almost 3 times less likely to be looking for a new employer in the next year.

However, these activities can also place further pressures on Indigenous staff, adding to their cultural load at work.

10 TRUTHS
to centre Indigenous Australians' voices to create workplace inclusion

1.
Commit to unearthing and acting on workplace truths – however uncomfortable this may be.

2.
Ensure any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-related work is Indigenous led and informed.

3.
Develop organisational principles to make it clear how Indigenous community engagement and employment should work in practice.

4.
Focus on workplace readiness (cultural safety) rather than worker readiness.

5.
Recognise identity strain and educate non-Indigenous staff about how to interact with their Indigenous colleagues in ways that reduce this.

6.
Recognise and remunerate cultural load as part of an employee's workload.

7.
Consult with Indigenous staff on how to minimise cultural load while maintaining organisational activity.

8.
Focus on sustainable careers and career development, rather than just short-term appointments.

9.
Take action to address workplace racism.

10.
Look to high-impact initiatives – those that research shows are linked to better wellbeing and retention for Indigenous staff.

WHY THIS PROJECT?

Centreing the workplace experiences of Indigenous Australians

The employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is a growing, vital area of focus within the employment and diversity, inclusion and human resources sectors. But, until now, there has been a glaring omission. In short, the Indigenous employment narrative has been informed by limited research, primarily conducted by non-Indigenous people and narrated by non-Indigenous voices. Much of this conversation has been told with a deficit lens, underpinned by lack of data on Indigenous workers' experiences of and insights about work.

Although well-meaning, the Indigenous employment narrative has also been based largely on assumptions, capturing what non-Indigenous voices think is best. While there is a raft of information regarding the employment status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including employment rates and gaps and opportunities for change,[6] little information is available about their firsthand employment experiences. Most of the research is derived from non-Indigenous and governmental sources and exists as either statistics against employment targets or comparative information alongside non-Indigenous datasets.[7] Where such research has been undertaken, it has tended to be either a one-off study (for example, DCA's *Close the Work Gap*), or employment experience has not been its primary focus (for example, *Reconciliation Australia's Reconciliation Barometer*).[8]

There is a notable lack of research that asks Aboriginal and/ or Torres Strait Islander people about what they want and need from workplaces to flourish within them. To improve the experience of Indigenous people at work, we need to stop asking non-Indigenous people about Indigenous people at work. Instead, we need to hear directly from Indigenous people so we can centre and respond directly to their employment needs and experiences. This lens has the power to transform the existing narrative, ensuring the employment approach going forward is Indigenous led.

Speaking the truth: Insights from Indigenous workers

We created *Gari Yala* — which means 'speak the truth' in Wiradjuri language — to gain a firsthand understanding of the diversity of Indigenous workers' experiences. The project is Indigenous led and has been overseen by an Expert Panel of distinguished Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander academics and employment practitioners.

This report aims to be an educational resource for human resources, diversity and employment practitioners and business leaders, providing Indigenous perspectives and ideas for change.

This *Gari Yala* survey is the first step in biennially measuring Indigenous people's real experiences of work from across the country. The survey, currently in its first year, seeks to:

- be a voice for the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers

- capture the state of play when it comes to workplace cultural safety, inclusion, and exclusion and racism.

To do this, we drew on the insights and experiences of over 1,000 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait workers. Their insights and recommendations for organisational action are presented in this report, which details their narratives and experiences.

It is our hope that this project will make a vital contribution by providing a vehicle for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to share their firsthand experiences of work and thus ensure diversity and inclusion practice is founded on Indigenous voices.

SOME IMPORTANT BACKGROUND

Who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in contemporary Australia?

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples constitute 3.3% of Australia's total population.[9] For over 60,000 years prior to colonisation in 1788, Indigenous Australians had their own governance systems and understanding of 'work' and how this was organised in communities. The British, after proclaiming ownership,[10] used Indigenous labour to help build the colonial structures within Australia. Often, this was done with limited acknowledgement and through indentured processes.[11] This background continues to inform relationships and workplace mentality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees. Indigenous people still suffer profound injustices within Australia.[12]

Today, over 65% of Indigenous people in Australia have secured employment,[13] with a growing Indigenous middle class who are 'largely overlooked'.[14] With growth in the number of Indigenous professionals, it is even more critical that Indigenous perspectives are heard and respected within the context of work.

Our standpoint

This report has been influenced by the framework of Indigenous Standpoint Theory.[15] Standpoint theory recognises that *"members of marginalized groups have valuable insights… [and] that attempts to construct knowledge are partial unless they incorporate experiences of nondominant groups."*[16]

In this report, we have deliberately prioritised the perspectives of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers, because they know and understand the experience of work for Indigenous people in ways that non-Indigenous people cannot.

The project was designed and informed by Indigenous academics and practitioners, placing Indigenous understanding and priorities at the forefront of the research and reporting.

We also sought to ensure that Indigenous values shaped the work. The project team drew on Williams's approach,[17] applying the following (adapted) principles to this project:

- We used Indigenous people's definitions of racism, cultural safety and cultural load.

- We were 'trauma-informed' and acknowledge that abuses Indigenous people have experienced from past policies have an effect across generations.

- We recognise that inclusion for Indigenous people requires action by individuals, services, policies and society – 'multi-level empowerment'.

- We acknowledge that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' solution because Indigenous people, communities and their experiences are diverse.

- We know Indigenous culture is a strength to draw on in employment.

- We know Indigenous people have the right to shape how decisions are made.

ABOUT THE TEAM

This project was designed and undertaken by Diversity Council Australia and the University of Technology Sydney's Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research. As experts and practitioners in the diversity and Indigenous employment fields, the project team brings a longstanding understanding of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employment experiences and engagement. Two of the team identify as Aboriginal.

The report has been supported by NAB and Coles, both of whom are acknowledged as leaders in the Indigenous employment space. Both parties have played an active role in supporting this project, providing their insights and perspectives throughout.

A note on language

Indigenous. In this report, we use the terms 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' and 'Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people' (where the and/or recognises that some individuals belong to both groups) interchangeably with 'Indigenous' to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia. However, we recognise that this approach is not without contention. First, these terms do not reflect the diversity of Indigenous Australians, and it is important to

remember that many Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people prefer to be known by their specific group or clan names, and some by 'First Nations'. Second, we acknowledge that some Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people do not like being referred to as Indigenous, as this is deemed a catchall term often used by government to include all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia. We have therefore, wherever possible, referred to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples or Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people but, where appropriate and sometimes for brevity, we have used 'Indigenous'. We apologise if this causes any offense – this is not our intention.

Respondents. Where the report refers to 'respondents' it is referring to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander respondents only.

Community. Where the report refers to 'community' it is referring to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities.

Racism. This report recognises that for many Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, racism at work is endemic. It manifests in structural and interpersonal ways, and has a real and dramatic impact on Indigenous employees. For Indigenous people reading this report, the experiences relayed by our respondents may be distressing. However, we felt that this behaviour needed to be named and so we made a conscious choice to call out racism where we heard it from our respondents.

A note on the findings

The views and experiences of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people are diverse, with each person experiencing their own history of being Indigenous at work across a variety of workplaces. Throughout this report, we share the views of Indigenous people who responded to the *Gari Yala* survey. However, we note that each person's experience is different, and we have made no attempt to address these experiences or make judgement on the findings. This report does not purport to represent the experiences of all Indigenous people, but rather, the experiences of those who participated in the survey.

A note on context

Gari Yala was begun in late 2019 and developed in the early part of 2020. At this time, Australia was experiencing a series of devastating droughts, bushfires and floods. Indigenous people were dramatically impacted by these events and heavily relied upon as first responders. In the aftermath, Indigenous knowledge has been increasingly sought to aid recovery and future management for the environment.

We also cannot ignore the impacts of COVID-19 and, more significantly, the Black Lives Matter movement on this project. Within Australia, Black Lives Matter has created heightened publicity around Indigenous issues. COVID-19 has drawn attention to existing social inequalities, but it has also shown the resilience of Indigenous communities, who were some of the first to respond to the pandemic.

As with all societal discussions and movements, these reach into the workplace and have the ability to inform organisational culture.

Our sample

The intent of *Gari Yala* is to provide a national survey to gain perspectives from employed Indigenous people. We surveyed Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Australians who were employed at the time of the survey or had been employed in the past 2 years.

Various sampling methods were used, including accessing Polity Research & Consulting's Indigenous research panel, as well as snowball convenience sampling through DCA members, social media channels and community groups. This generated 1,033 (N) completed survey responses, with distribution of respondents as detailed in the image below.

Indigenous people live and work right across Australia. Our respondent sample sought to reflect this. While many respondents were from urban and regional centres, this is in keeping with Indigenous population distributions, with over a third (37%) of Indigenous people living in major cities and about a quarter (24%) living in regional areas.[18] Just one-fifth (19%) of Indigenous people live in remote (7%) or very remote areas (12%). Future *Gari Yala* surveys may investigate any differences in the employment experiences of urban, regional and remote Indigenous workers.
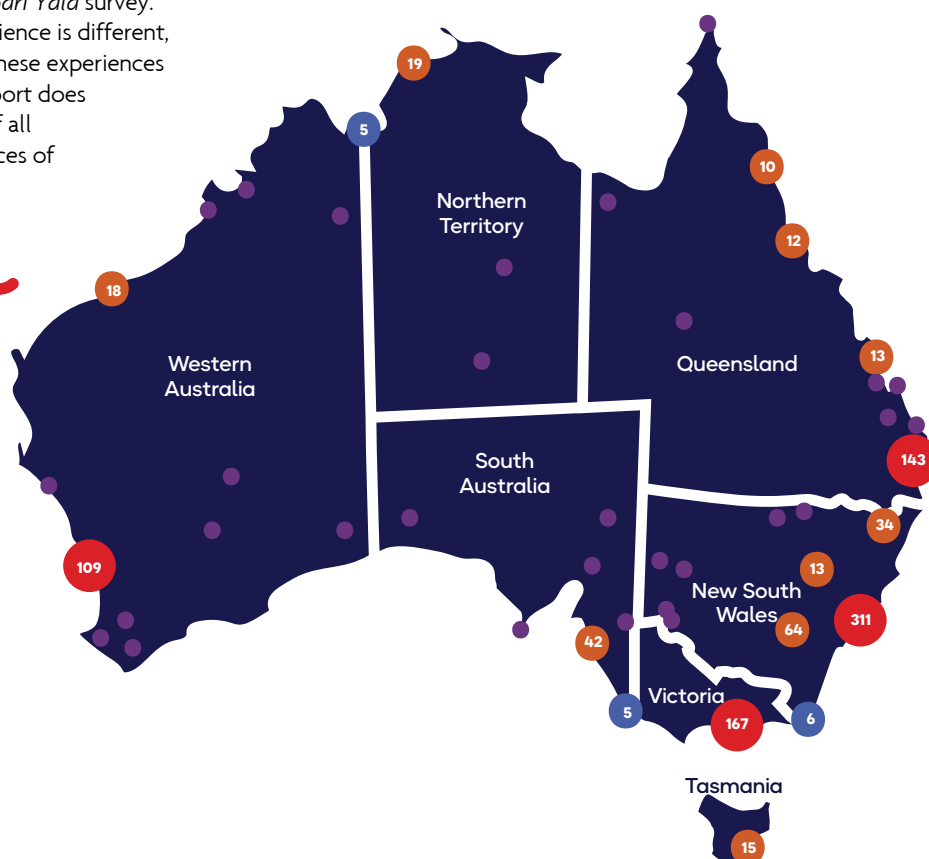
1. ABORIGINAL AND/OR TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER IDENTITY AT WORK

Chapter snapshot

We asked 1,033 employed Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people about their experiences sharing their Indigenous background at work. Over three-quarters of them (78%) stated it was important for them to identify within their workplace, with a similar number (72%) feeling it was safe to do so. Qualitative comments revealed that Indigenous workers' experiences of identity differed markedly. While identity is straightforward for some, it can be complex and sometimes traumatic for people whose connection with family or Country has been broken by, for example, government policies of assimilation, such as the Stolen Generations. This has led to an evolving identity of self, particularly at work. Regardless of whether and how they had shared their identity at work, respondents were also keen to discuss the benefits of sharing their background within the workforce, including local community connection and local knowledge, diversity of perspectives, connection to the land and cultural awareness.

Diversity in experiences of identity

Identity is an individual journey, and often foundational to a person's ability to belong. As workplaces encourage their staff to 'bring their whole selves to work' or be authentic within the workplace, it is important to understand that Indigenous Australians' experiences of identity at work differ markedly and are impacted by a range of considerations.

Connection to Country and community is important, but individual ties are often complex and fragmented due to historical activities

For some Indigenous people, identifying as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person is straightforward. Identity is passed through culture and family connection, shared through a continuing bond. These people may be born on Country or have strong family ties, roots or connections. While each individual story is different, there are Indigenous people who are able to continue to identify based on their connection to Country, due to having unbroken or rediscovered pasts.

My colleagues, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, are happy to hear about my Aboriginal background and my connection to Country – that I am so lucky to have.

For others, the understanding of their past or connection to identity is uncertain and at times difficult. It often involves stories driven by government policies, fractured families and a limited understanding and written history of identity.

It is hard when you aren't sure about your mob or where your Country is. When I attended Indigenous-specific training at the workplace this was very anxiety provoking, but the group were amazingly accepting and understanding. I guess the shame of being raised off Country with little information about my background and family history is more about me and not others.

I work with/for a not-for-profit First Peoples' Arts group, so we talk about our background all the time. Whilst this is great, it can be challenging as we all have different experiences growing up as blackfullas. For example, some are born on Country with strong family kinship and cultural knowledge. Others were stolen from their black Mothers by their white fathers and/or gubbahment. Others waited till they turned 18 to change their surname and identify.

Historic factors often mean that many Indigenous people are still on a journey to better understand their identity. For many, the ability to identify as being from another background for acceptance was easier that identifying as Indigenous. I don't share it, as my ancestors were part of the Stolen Generations and I have little knowledge of culture etc.

I was culturally displaced when growing up and am fair(ish) skinned. I try to talk about my experiences growing up and currently, and educate others on issues affecting our community.

Being an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person is a source of pride

For many respondents, their identity is a source of pride, rooted in a love of their family and culture.

I love my culture, my blackness, my black husband, my black kids, my black grandkids. I love my culture.

Love it. Makes me proud. People know I identify so respect that.

But that pride didn't mean respondents were immune to having to make calculated decisions about where, when and with whom they could share their identity at work. For example, one respondent told us that they felt comfortable talking about their background with other Indigenous people, but not with 'white Australians'.

I always share my background with my Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander work mates. But it's rarely talked about it with white Australians. I'm not sure why.

Some identified that discrimination and workplace hierarchies silenced people from talking about their identity and being able to raise issues in the workplace.

For the most part, I am always proud to share my identity but, in answering these survey questions, I think you need to consider that for some circumstances it really depends on who is around us in the workplace. When you work in a redneck office full of white Australians that were brought up in rural townships, the likelihood of them being open-minded and accepting of Aboriginal culture and our rights is pretty low, let's be honest. So, in those circumstances I have definitely seen Aboriginal staff silenced and made to feel uncomfortable about speaking up as to who they are and how they feel about matters of cultural safety in the workplace.

Senior Indigenous leaders also felt that they had a responsibility to encourage Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people to speak up.

I am an Aboriginal in a senior position. I do not feel threatened or intimidated when I talk of culture and protocols and just the way things are done. In fact, I believe I have a duty to share and encourage younger staff members to speak up.

It's not always respected within workplaces

For several respondents, identifying was complicated by a recognition or concern that they would not be treated respectfully, or that their organisation would use their identity in a tokenistic way.

After 10 years working in the same organisation, the first time I shared my Aboriginal background in the workplace was last year during NAIDOC Week. There wasn't a 'need' or a way in which to share this previously. It was a positive experience and warmly embraced as part of the NAIDOC Week events. But later it felt a little tokenistic. I generally keep it private.

Unfortunately, my non-Aboriginal colleagues (often in higher positions) do not understand the importance of respecting the lived expertise of Aboriginal people within the organisation.

Identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander at work matters

Approximately three-quarters of respondents (78%) wanted to identify as Indigenous in their workplace, and a similar number felt it was safe for them to do so (72%).

I work for an Indigenous organisation. Sharing a bit of my story and who I am has been a fundamental part of working here. In a leadership position, my identity has been important in guiding and leading the team.

I work in a safe and diverse environment. I am encouraged by my manager and workplace to openly share my views and beliefs and talk about my Aboriginality.

It is important to me to identify as an Indigenous person in the workplace

| 4.2% | 4.0% | 14.0% | 28.3% | 49.6% |

■ Strongly agree ■ Disagree ▥ Neither Disagree of Agree ▦ Agree ▨ Strongly Agree

My current workplace has been a safe space to share my culture. Previous workplaces I experienced insensitive jokes and comments – to the point where I wouldn't share my culture.

It is safe for me to share my Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background with people at work

| 4.8% | 9.1% | 14.3% | 40.3% | 31.5% |

■ Strongly agree ■ Disagree ▥ Neither Disagree of Agree ▦ Agree ▨ Strongly Agree
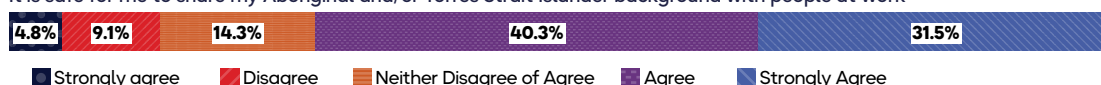
Indigenous workers share their identity – even when it isn't safe to do so

The vast majority (87%) of respondents indicated that they were comfortable sharing their identity at work, with more than half (51%) actively talking about their identity, and more than a third (36%) not trying to keep it private.

- 3%
- 10%
- 51%
- 36%
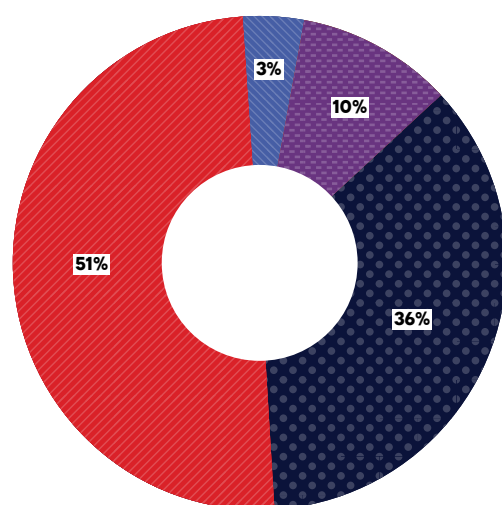
▨ I try very hard to keep it private
▦ I try somewhat hard to keep it private
■ I don't try to keep it private
■ I actively talk about it to others

Interestingly, a higher proportion (87%) of respondents stated they openly shared their Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background at work, than the proportion of respondents who felt safe to do so (72%). This suggests there is a portion of Indigenous workers – between 14% (strongly disagree or disagree) and 28% (strongly disagree, disagree or neutral) – who share their background with people at work even though they may not feel it is safe to do so.

I believe that it is important for me to be able to share my culture and background. Work-wise, there are definitely times when sharing your background can be a disadvantage as people can become argumentative, opinionated and at times racist. But if you don't share you don't change the narrative and/or help make the path a little bit easier for someone else.

I feel nervous to do it, because I have fair skin, that there will be follow up questions about how I can be. But I push though the discomfort because in sharing I know that I will not accidentally find myself in the middle of racist conversations with colleagues.

It is safe to share my background at work (% strongly agree + agree) — 71.8%

To what extent do you share your Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background with other people in your current/most recent workplace? (% I actively talk about my identity + I do not try to keep it private — 87.0%

2. HOW CULTURALLY SAFE ARE AUSTRALIAN WORKPLACES?

Chapter snapshot

While more than three-quarters (78%) of respondents told us it was important for them to identify in the workplace, 28% reported that their workplace was culturally unsafe. Not surprisingly, we found racist behaviour such as unfair treatment and racial slurs played a particularly significant role in creating culturally unsafe workplaces. In fact, 73% of respondents in culturally unsafe workplaces had heard racial or ethnic slurs or jokes in the past year, compared to 21% of workers in culturally safe workplaces. Culturally unsafe workplaces significantly decreased Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander worker wellbeing and retention, leaving these workers much less likely to be satisfied with their job or to recommend their employer, and much more likely to intend to leave.

How common are culturally safe workplaces?

I have definitely seen Aboriginal staff silenced and made to feel uncomfortable about speaking up as to who they are and how they feel about matters of cultural safety in the workplace.

Cultural safety means being able to practise your culture free of ridicule or condemnation.[19] It occurs when a workplace acknowledges, respects and accommodates difference. Unsafe cultural practice is any action which diminishes, demeans or disempowers the cultural identity and wellbeing of an individual.[20]

Cultural safety in the workplace plays a significant role in an employee's experience of racism, exclusion, wellbeing and retention. While over a third (39%) of respondents reported being in a culturally safe workplace, a third (33%) reported that their workplace was only somewhat culturally safe and a concerning 28% reported that their workplace was culturally unsafe.

27.9%	33.2%	38.9%

■ Culturally unsafe workplace ■ Somewhat culturally safe workplace ■ Culturally safe workplace
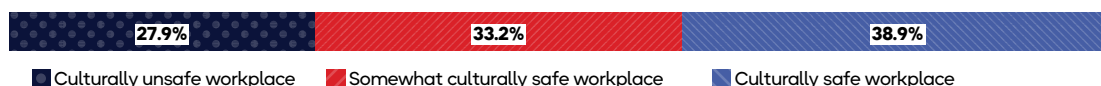
CULTURALLY SAFE WORKPLACES

Culturally safe = Respondents scored their workplace on average 4 or more out of 5 on questions asking how often their workplace was culturally safe (where 5 = all of the time and 1 = never).

Somewhat culturally safe = Respondents scored their workplace on average between 3 and 4 out of 5.

Culturally unsafe = Respondents scored their workplace on average 3 or less out of 5.

Experiences of culturally unsafe workplaces

An individual's cultural safety is compromised when a single or series of workplace experiences trigger them to feel unsafe due to their Indigenous background. Respondents experienced a lack of cultural safety in many ways, from a lack of respect when sharing their identity or experience, to historic and present events creating unease.

I don't feel safe always sharing my story as I feel it is dismissed and not respected.

It is incredibly unsafe for me to talk about anything negative in regards to colonisation, invasion, politics and racism. In general, I tend not to talk about myself and my experiences too much even with my own cultural perspectives. It's exhausting trying to maintain the identity I 'need' to survive in those environments on a daily basis.

Different forms of racism — including commentary, offensive jokes and continued targeting — were a common cause of lack of cultural safety for respondents.

In my previous role I encountered casual racism regularly. I still spoke openly about my Aboriginal culture, however avoided talking to this colleague in most situations as it opened up the opportunity for them to say something racist — though they would often start by saying 'No offense, but …'

Other respondents told us about how Indigenous knowledge, engagement and lived experience were not respected by non-Indigenous colleagues and were sometimes mocked.

Some non-Indigenous co-workers don't understand or are accustomed not to respect the beliefs and traditional ways of many different Indigenous cultures. As you explain, or if they hear or see Indigenous cultures, they tend to mock and characterise the Indigenous cultures, making me not want to share because you know what they really think.

Unfortunately, my non-Aboriginal colleagues (often in higher positions) do not understand the importance of respecting the lived expertise of Aboriginal people within the organisation.

What was clear, though, was that some organisations need to more deeply explore the practice of inclusion. Many respondents felt there was not a genuine attempt to understand Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers' needs or to create a genuinely culturally safe environment.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in majority-white workplaces are saddled with the responsibility of teaching and explaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander topics, opinions, anecdotes and culture when it pops up. People don't understand this varies person to person and community to community. Co-workers often say hurtful things without knowing they are hurtful. It is insulting but I cannot be offended because they didn't know. Managers and/or media teams will often try to 'parade' you on media in attempts to show they are a diverse workplace without knowing or caring about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural needs or safety within the workplace.

[Workplaces say they are] 'culturally safe workplaces' whereby our voices and solutions are welcome. That is until what we have to say does not fit within the Western system. Our approaches aren't evidence-based enough and our ways of communicating don't reflect the status quo.

Experiences shared in survey comments were echoed in the statistical findings. These revealed that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in culturally unsafe workplaces experienced:

- **not feeling skills, perspectives and experiences are valued** – 45% felt their workplace never, rarely or only sometimes values the skills, perspectives and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

- **not feeling valued** – 42% felt they were never, rarely or only sometimes valued and supported as an Indigenous member of their workplace

- **low representation in Indigenous-focused roles** – 50% reported Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people were never, rarely or only sometimes appointed in any internal roles with an Indigenous focus in their organisation

- **not feeling comfortable expressing cultural beliefs** – 37% never, rarely or only sometimes felt comfortable expressing their cultural and personal beliefs at work

- **not feeling safe to take cultural leave** – 22% reported their co-workers often or all the time reacted negatively to people accessing leave for cultural reasons.

My workplace provides a culturally safe place of work for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

| 3.3% | 9.9% | 25.1% | 32.9% | 28.8% |

I am comfortable expressing my cultural and personal beliefs at work

| 3.3% | 8.3% | 26% | 29.3% | 33.0% |

I feel valued and supported as an Indigenous member of my workplace

| 4.0% | 10.6% | 27.2% | 31.5% | 36.8% |

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples are appointed in any internal roles with an Indigenous focus

| 6.3% | 12.8% | 31.3% | 33.0% | 16.7% |

My workplace values the skills, perspectives and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

| 4.0% | 12.1% | 28.9% | 30.2% | 24.8% |

Co-workers react negatively to people accessing leave for cultural reasons

| 18.3% | 17.7% | 27.5% | 14.6% | 6.9% |

■ Never ■ Rarely ■ Sometimes ■ Often ■ All the time

Racist behaviours are linked to culturally unsafe workplaces

I have experienced casual racism in the workplace when discussing my heritage. Comments such as, 'You're pretty for an Aboriginal', 'You don't have the nose', 'But you're not really black, are you?', etc.

Not surprisingly, we found that racist behaviours, such as unfair treatment and harassment based on race, were strongly associated with culturally unsafe workplaces.

Respondents in culturally unsafe workplaces were:

- **4 times more likely to have been treated unfairly at work because of their background** in the past year (64%) compared to those who work in culturally safe workplaces (16%)

- **3 times more likely to have heard racial or ethnic slurs or jokes at work** in the past year (73%) compared to those who work in culturally safe workplaces (21%).

How often are you treated unfairly because you are Indigenous at work or on the job (% very often, often, sometimes)

| 63.9% |
| 42.0% |
| 15.9% |

How often do you hear racial or ethnic slurs or jokes about Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people at work? (% very often, often, sometimes)

| 73.3% |
| 47.3% |
| 20.6% |

■ Culturally unsafe workplace ■ Somewhat culturally safe workplace ■ Culturally safe workplace
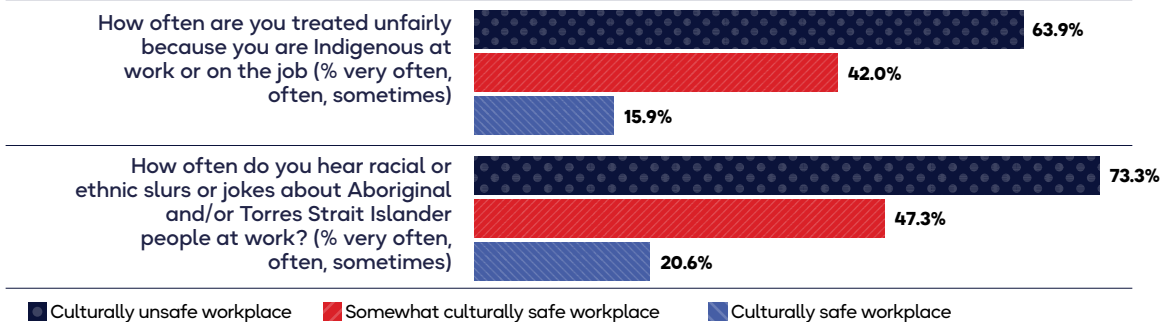
What is racism?

Racism happens in *many* places, including in workplaces.

Racism can be *intentional or unintentional* – sometimes well-intentioned people can do or say something racist even though they do not see themselves as racist.

Racism can be conscious or *unconscious* – sometimes people may not be aware that what they said or did is racist.

For Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in the workplace, racism manifests in 2 primary ways: *institutional* (or systemic) racism and *interpersonal* racism.

Racism has the *same effect,* whatever form it takes – it excludes, marginalises, and/or disadvantages Indigenous Australians compared to non-Indigenous Australians.

	Institutional Racism	Interpersonal Racism
Description	Happens when unfair organisational policies and practices, result in different access to opportunities based on someone's race/cultural background.[21]	Happens between individuals. It is the expression of stereotypes, dislike or disdain for a race of people other than a person's own, or the dominant or majority race.
Examples	An Indigenous person can't apply for a job because the *job requires an educational qualification.* Indigenous Australians are statistically less likely than non-Indigenous Australians to have educational qualifications due in part to their historical exclusion from the education system. Workplace issues raised by Indigenous employees are treated less seriously and less likely to be investigated than workplace issues raised by non-Indigenous employees. Using *'cultural fit'* when hiring – that is, how well a person is viewed as 'fitting in to' and 'contributing to' an existing workplace. Non-Indigenous employers are more likely to see non-Indigenous employees than Indigenous employees as being a good 'cultural fit'.	Examples of this include *social exclusion* (such as actively avoiding a person or ignoring requests to help or participate), racial *stereotypes* (such as those about competency or honesty, which block career opportunities), racist *harassment* (such as name-calling, jokes or comments) and racial *threats.*
Effect	Indigenous people being kept in low-skilled, low-paying jobs, despite them possibly having the skills to perform at the higher classification.	Indigenous people feeling unwelcome, undervalued, excluded, and humiliated, because of their cultural background.
Linked	Interpersonal and institutional forms of racism are linked. When organisations address cultural safety at an institutional (organisation-wide) level and deal with incidents of interpersonal racism through effective policies and practices, this creates a positive workplace culture in which interpersonal racism is less likely to occur.	

Why is cultural safety important?

The fact that people only receive cultural training if they are looking for it or when they do something wrong just goes to show that making sure we are safe in the workplace is an afterthought.

All employees want to work in a safe workplace, and Indigenous employees feel no different.

Culturally unsafe workplaces significantly decrease workers' personal wellbeing, as well as their connection to their organisation. Overall, we found that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in culturally unsafe workplaces were **less satisfied, less likely to recommend** and **more likely to leave.**

Respondents in culturally unsafe workplaces were:

- **6 times less likely to always be satisfied with their job** (7%) compared to those in culturally safe workplaces (45%)

- **10 times less likely to always recommend their workplace to other Indigenous people** (5%) compared to those in culturally safe workplaces (53%)

- **2.5 times more likely to be looking for a new employer in the next year** (39%) compared to those in culturally safe workplaces (14%).

I am very satisfied with my job (% always)	
6.9%	
15.5%	
45.0%	

I would recommend my workplace to other Indigenous people (% always)	
4.9%	
20.4%	
53.2%	

I am likely to make a genuine effort to find a new job with another employer within the next year (% very likely)	
38.5%	
19.5%	
13.5%	

■ Culturally unsafe workplace   ■ Somewhat culturally safe workplace   ■ Culturally safe workplace
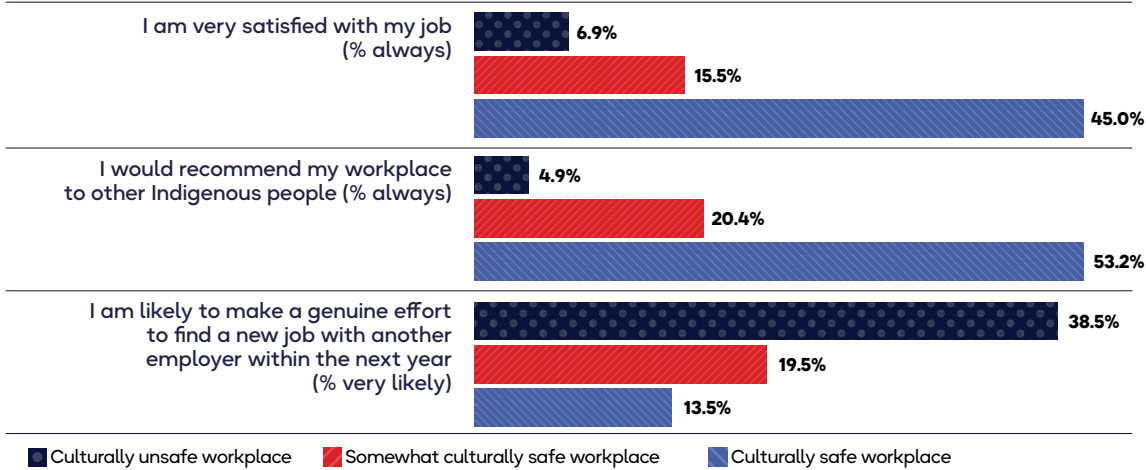
What builds culturally safe workplaces?

While many factors build cultural safety at work, 3 notable ones we identified in this survey were:

1. addressing racist behaviour effectively

2. encouraging respectful dialogue, and the mutual learning that comes from that

3. ensuring your organisation is authentic when it comes to 'walking the talk'.

ADDRESSING RACIST BEHAVIOUR EFFECTIVELY

As noted earlier, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait islander people in culturally safe workplaces were **3–4 times less likely to experience racist behaviour** such as unfair treatment or harassment based on race.

Concerningly, a third (32%) of the respondents who had experienced unfair treatment or racial slurs and jokes at work because of their Indigenous background strongly disagreed or disagreed that they had the workplace support required when they experienced this racism.

Moreover, only one-fifth (21%) of respondents worked in organisations that had implemented both anti-discrimination compliance training that included reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander discrimination, and a racism complaint procedure.

Clearly, there is much work to do in Australian organisations when it comes to fostering cultural safety through preventing racism and addressing it effectively.

RESPECTFUL DIALOGUE AND MUTUAL LEARNING

Building culturally safe workplaces is a responsibility of all staff. Respondents indicated that respectful dialogue between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff is key to creating cultural safety. Such dialogue enables staff to share and learn from each other and to engage in open and transparent conversations which build cultural safety into workplace culture.

What I see when Aboriginal people are empowered and feel safe in their workplaces is the ability to argue and thrash things out and feel safe that arguing is an ok and safe part of the process.

In recent years I have embraced my responsibility to lead the dialogue for my workplace. As a cultural person it is my responsibility to educate others and be available to others who feel less strong. This was not true of my past work experiences, where I have felt unsafe and unable to share my identity. The change is a product of age and cultural training that asks more of me in terms of bravery and responsibility.

ORGANISATIONAL AUTHENTICITY

Working in an organisation that was authentic about the inclusive and equitable treatment of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people had an immensely positive effect on cultural safety.

Respondents in highly authentic organisations were 6.5 times more likely to feel their workplace was culturally safe (74%) compared to those in organisations low in authenticity (11%). Importantly, even moderate organisational authenticity had a positive influence on feeling culturally safe at work.

High Organisational Authenticity

5.7%	20.5%	73.8%

Moderate Organisational Authenticity

16.9%	46.0%	37.0%

Low Organisational Authenticity

67.1%	21.4%	11.4%

■ Culturally unsafe workplace   ■ Somewhat culturally safe workplace   ■ Culturally safe workplace

Respondents who perceived their organisation to be authentic experienced significantly more cultural safety across all the cultural safety questions. Again, even moderate perceptions of organisational authenticity had a positive impact on cultural safety.

Respondents in highly authentic organisations:

· **felt more culturally safe** – 89% felt their workplace provides a culturally safe place of work for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples often or all the time, compared to only 25% in organisations low in authenticity

· **felt more comfortable expressing cultural beliefs** – 85% felt comfortable expressing their cultural and personal beliefs at work often or all the time, compared to 37% in organisations low in authenticity

· **felt more valued** – 89% felt valued and supported as an Indigenous member of their workplace often or all the time, compared to only 24% in organisations low in authenticity

· **had higher Indigenous representation** – 74% reported Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people were often or always appointed in any internal roles with an Indigenous focus in their organisation, compared to only 26% in organisations low in authenticity

· **felt their skills, perspectives and experiences were more valued** – 87% felt their workplace values the skills, perspectives and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people often or all the time, compared to only 19% in organisations low in authenticity.

My workplace provides a culturally safe place of work for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (% often + all of the time)
- 24.8%
- 68.6%
- 89.0%

I am comfortable expressing my cultural and personal beliefs at work (% often + all of the time)
- 36.6%
- 66.6%
- 85.1%

I feel valued and supported as an Indigenous member of my workplace (% often + all of the time)
- 23.9%
- 63.2%
- 89.4%

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples are appointed in any internal roles with an Indigenous focus (% often + all of the time)
- 25.8%
- 51.0%
- 74.1%

My workplace values the skills, perspectives and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (% often + all of the time)
- 19.0%
- 58.9%
- 86.7%

■ Low Organisational Authenticity   ■ Moderate Organisational Authenticity   ■ High Organisational Authenticity

3. WHAT IS THE STATE OF EXCLUSION FOR ABORIGINAL AND/OR TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER WORKERS?

Chapter snapshot

Our survey revealed that Indigenous employees face a significant amount of racism, with 38% of respondents reporting being treated unfairly and 44% reporting hearing racial slurs sometimes, often or always. The source of this racism is most often people in their own team (26%) or other teams (25%). Racism manifests in different ways, but one of the most common was appearance racism, with 59% of respondents indicating they received comments about the way they look or should look as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person. Concerningly, workplace supports appear to be ineffective, with a third of respondents disagreeing that they had the workplace support they needed when experiencing racism at work. Racism can have a real and dramatic impact on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees. Survey findings revealed it generates feelings of anxiety and stress, drives down job satisfaction, and reduces people's intention to stay with their employer or recommend them to Indigenous friends and family.

How common is racism towards Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers?

I have been subjected to racist remarks statements and slurs in the name of 'funny jokes'.

My organisation is very progressive and has lots of Aboriginal employees – but still there is racism and prejudiced points of view put forward regularly.

Many respondents experienced racism at work in the forms of:

- **unfair treatment** – 38% reported being treated unfairly because they are Indigenous sometimes, often or very often

- **hearing racial or ethnic slurs** – 44% heard racial or ethnic slurs or jokes about Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people sometimes, often or very often.

How often are you treated unfairly because you are Indigenous at work or on the job?
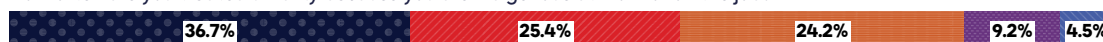
36.7%	25.4%	24.2%	9.2%	4.5%

How often do you hear racial or ethnic slurs or jokes about Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people at work?

25.9%	29.9%	27.4%	10.3%	6.5%

■ Never ■ Hardly ever ■ Sometimes ■ Often ■ Very often

These findings are congruent with recent health workplace research from the Lowitja Institute, which found that one-fifth of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff members 'experienced racism and opposition from colleagues'.[22]

Who does racism come from?

I'm experiencing racism now with one of the top managers. I've also had it said by one of the secretaries. That if they were to go out in the sun they would be darker than me.

When I was a student nurse I was told by senior staff not to tell anyone I was Aboriginal and to pretend I was some other nationality.

The sources of unfair treatment and racial slurs and jokes at work mainly came from inside the workplace. Of the Indigenous workers who reported experiencing unfair treatment or racial slurs and jokes at work, the most common reported internal sources were team members (26%) and workers in other teams or departments (25%), followed by senior managers (14%), other supervisors or managers (13%) and their own immediate supervisor or manager (11%).

The most common reported external source of racism was customers, clients or patients (17%).

A co-worker in my team/department	25.8%
A worker in another team/department	24.7%
A customer/client/patient	16.7%
Someone from senior management	13.7%
Another supervisor/manager	12.6%
My immediate supervisor/manager	11.1%
A supplier	4.2%
Other source	3.3%
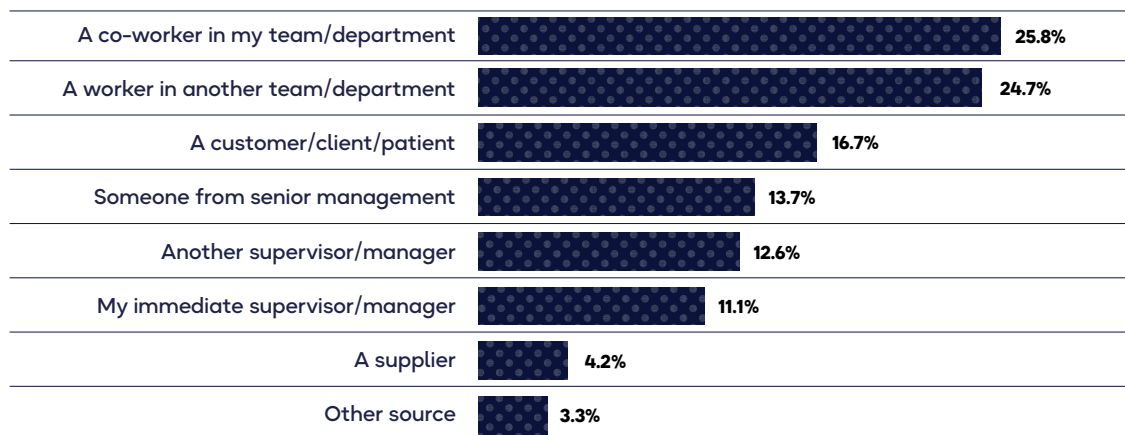
■ Yes

What does racism look like?

For Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, racism manifests in many ways, as detailed below.

BEING TOLD HOW THEY SHOULD LOOK (APPEARANCE RACISM)

Reconciliation NSW Community Awareness Social Media Post

We asked respondents to share their experiences identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, and there was a worrying trend regarding appearance racism and non-universal acceptance.

Appearance racism is comments or actions based on a perpetrator's stereotypical perception of what constitutes an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person. Appearance racism challenges the notion of Indigenous identity and how Indigenous people are acknowledged within Australia. Appearance is not an accurate indicator of a person's Indigenous heritage.

A concerning 59% of respondents reported sometimes, often or always receiving comments about the way they look or should look as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person.

There is a tendency for non-Indigenous Australians to view this type of casual commentary as acceptable, but it is deeply offensive and hurtful to Indigenous people. The offensiveness of appearance racism is complex, but is significantly attributable to denying someone's identity based solely on others' preconceived ideas of how they should look.

When Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are told they are 'too white to be Indigenous' or that they don't have stereotypical Indigenous physical features it is particularly distressing, because it raises the trauma that they and their families have been subjected to through government policies of forced assimilation that aimed to eradicate their Indigeneity.

Equally, comments based on appearance often trigger intergenerational trauma and the associated complexities surrounding identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. These comments can also perpetuate stereotypes of Indigenous people living in remote areas being incapable of joining the corporate world.

> *Because Nan is Stolen Generation and I'm white, some people don't believe me or teased me growing up because we have olive skin. Mum just said to tell people we're Spanish … Interestingly, no one ever questioned that.*

> *Colleagues like to say to me, 'But you're only half Aboriginal, right?' As I'm from Tasmania they also like to tell me, 'There's no more Aborigines left in Tasmania'.*

The clear theme raised by respondents was how others made decisions about their identity based on their appearance. For some, this meant that sharing their Indigenous background at work simply wasn't a choice, as colleagues made assumptions about them because of their appearance.

> *It was kind of hard not to share as people would see me and my physical appearance and already have assumptions about who I am.*

> *I was recently told not to encourage people to 'tick the box' … Ahhh, if you're a Murri, why wouldn't you? My organisation can't even tell you how many Indigenous staff we have. And that it's a choice if we want to identify. Well! I'm black, my skin colour is black, my looks, my style is all BLACK! Do you think I get the choice to identify?*

Appearance racism was also experienced by other respondents who had their identity erased by colleagues based on assumptions purely on physical appearance. This created unease for respondents.

> *Every day I feel like I have to prove my identity – that it needs to be justified to people.*

> *I've had certain people question my heritage/ background and one told me I have to prove it by showing her a certificate.*

> *I have light-coloured skin and I was at a training session once and I had my Aboriginality questioned. She did this in front of the entire group. I also find that people will say stuff in front of me not realising that I am Aboriginal and then they get very embarrassed when I pull them up on their racism.*

> *In previous workplaces due to having fairer skin I've been told I'm not a real Aborigine or that the real Aborigines live in the Top End.*

You get comments about the way you look or should look as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person
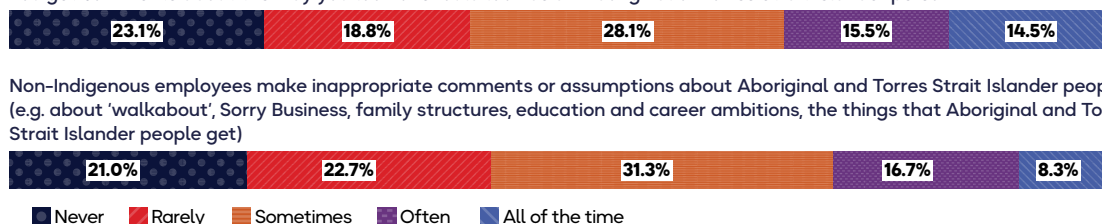
| 23.1% | 18.8% | 28.1% | 15.5% | 14.5% |

Non-Indigenous employees make inappropriate comments or assumptions about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (e.g. about 'walkabout', Sorry Business, family structures, education and career ambitions, the things that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people get)

| 21.0% | 22.7% | 31.3% | 16.7% | 8.3% |

■ Never ■ Rarely ■ Sometimes ■ Often ■ All of the time

Aborigine or that the real Aborigines live in the Top End.

When I first began, there were often looks and questions because I am fair. There was an attitude among some that I was a 'Johnny-come-lately' and had very distant connections — neither of which was the case. I also heard, 'You don't look Aboriginal'.

I experience disbelief from colleagues … Colleagues try to say things like, 'Oh, you must only have a little bit of Aboriginal heritage'. They try to dilute my identity.

Notably, when sharing examples of appearance racism, respondents often used language of non-universal acceptance, and caveated their descriptions of positive experiences with language like 'fairly welcomed', 'generally people are receptive' or 'usually positive'. Many also compared their current workplace to a previous one, noting different experiences.

Indigenous staff are also impacted by appearance racism at an organisational level, where comments are made when Indigenous staff are placed in identified positions or their identity is alluded to but not confirmed by managers due to privacy reasons. This friction between privacy concerns and identity is difficult, but is more complicated due to appearance racism.

My manager asked me, 'Why do you even identify?', referring to my lighter skin colour.

HEARING RACIST SLURS AND JOKES

Almost half (44%) of the respondents reported hearing racial or ethnic slurs or jokes about Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people at work sometimes, often or very often, while almost one-fifth (17%) heard this often or very often.

In some work situations there has been blatant racism — being called a 'mongrel breed', or 'You Abos get everything for free', 'How did you get this job?' and more.

I am floored by the ignorance and rudeness of non-Aboriginal people — they feel it is ok to openly discriminate and speak hatefully of my people.

I have been embarrassed when going to the bathroom — a staff member stated I was 'going walkabout' in front of everyone.

I've had racial jokes made in front of me [by clients], and a co-worker said to me 'Oh, so you're half-caste!' I was the only Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person employed at this particular job, so it made me feel isolated.

BEING LOOKED DOWN ON

More common than racial slurs, however, was the experience of being looked down upon by non-Indigenous co-workers. More than half of the respondents reported feeling as though, because they were Indigenous, colleagues thought they were better than them sometimes, often or all the time.

If I share my heritage, then every error or mistake I make comes under scrutiny and I become attached to stereotypes. If I do well, then I am an 'exceptional Aboriginal' who is out of the ordinary.

I have experienced direct and indirect racism — despite having a range of skills and qualifications, managers tend to typecast you as only being capable of certain tasks, or they question your Indigeneity. It's a constant battle in mainstream workplaces countering everyday racism.

When I was living in WA, my workplace had a high number of Indigenous customers and I used to like to talk with them and get to know them, identifying as a Wiradjuri woman. When my workplace found this out, they automatically said that it was a shame that I was Aboriginal since I looked so white. When I asked why, they said, 'Because clearly you are going to end up on the dole — I thought you were worth something.'

I have white colleagues tell me that I shouldn't tell people I'm Aboriginal, I could get away with being white.

BEING SUBJECTED TO ASSUMPTIONS AND STEREOTYPES

Assumptions about Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people can lead to their exclusion in the workplace. These assumptions are often based on generalisations and combined with further racism. The risk is that this interpersonal racism can inform institutional racism towards Indigenous employees.

I have experienced some racism and assumptions about Aboriginal people earlier in my career.

Over half (56%) of respondents reported hearing non-Indigenous employees make inappropriate comments or assumptions about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples sometimes, often or all the time (for example, comments about 'walkabout', Sorry Business, family structures, education and career ambitions).

> *I get the, 'You get more money from the government if you say you're Aboriginal, right?'*

> *It was my manager in my most recent job that said, 'You people don't work, do you?'*

NOT BEING TAKEN SERIOUSLY

In all, 40% of respondents reported feeling that they were ignored or not taken seriously by their boss because they are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander sometimes, often or all the time.

> *There are some things that are worse than an offensive joke. That is when people have low expectations of Indigenous people and think that we are under-performers compared to others – lazy or not motivated. I would prefer to have someone make a racist joke to my face than engage in sly behaviour or have low expectations of me or our people.*

> *When I have shared my identity with people in the workplace, I have received remarks back such as, 'You only got the job because you're black'.*

> *I have also had overtly racist conversations occur close to me, full well knowing my identity. Treated as being less capable than other staff. I was actually told I speak really well – 'Did you go to a boarding school or a private school? Because you speak and write really well.'*

BEING SEEN AS A THREAT OR AS DISHONEST

Well over a third (37%) of Indigenous workers surveyed felt that people acted as if they were afraid of them because they are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander sometimes, often or all the time, while a similar proportion (36%) felt people acted as if they thought they were dishonest because they are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

People act as if they think you are not smart

28.2%	19.7%	28.0%	13.9%	10.3%

People act as if they are afraid of you

38.9%	24.2%	21.9%	9.1%	5.9%

People act as if they think you are dishonest

40.1%	23.9%	20.2%	8.9%	6.9%

People act as if they're better than you are

24.4%	17.9%	30.3%	15.7%	11.7%

You feel that you are ignored or not taken seriously by your boss

38.2%	20.7%	22.2%	10.5%	8.4%

■ Never　■ Rarely　■ Sometimes　■ Often　■ All of the time

What is the impact of racism?

Racism can impact Indigenous people differently, causing anxiety and stress, a lack of sense of belonging and cultural safety, as well as reduced job satisfaction and a greater intention to leave.

ANXIETY AND STRESS

Others' racist actions can significantly impact the receiver, from triggering general anxiety to survival instincts, as the following comments shared by respondents reveal.

> *I can get nervous and anxious about the point of my Aboriginality being brought up, as the conversation can either go one of two ways – supported or casual racism leaks in.*

> *It is incredibly unsafe for me to talk about anything negative in regards to colonisation, invasion, politics and racism. In general, I tend not to talk about myself and my experiences too much, even with my own cultural perspectives. It's exhausting trying to maintain the identity I 'need' to survive in those environments on a daily basis.*

LACK OF BELONGING

Humans have an inherent need to belong. Whether it is a sporting club, community or workplace, we are driven to connect with each other, be included and belong.

So those who don't get to know me, they can think I'm there for the money or call me a 'Johnny-come-lately' behind my back. It can feel like I don't belong and shouldn't speak, etc. This isn't true for everyone I work with, but there are a few, and that impacts significantly on my identity and anxiety at times if I'm not feeling strong within myself.

Exclusion can have a dramatic impact on Indigenous employees, who may often be facing their own journey of inclusion within the Indigenous community as well. Significantly, racism in its many forms can have a significant impact on an individual and their attitudes towards work and the workplace.

I used to hide my identity, or I was unsure about talking about it until 7 years ago when I said no more hiding. I am light skinned, and I hate seeing the racism around me and I hate people saying that I am not Indigenous.

LACK OF CULTURAL SAFETY

I witness and hear ignorant comments that negatively impact cultural safety.

Racist behaviour and lack of cultural safety for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers are inextricably intertwined. Our survey results found that racist behaviours such as unfair treatment or harassment based on race were strongly linked with culturally unsafe workplaces.

Respondents who work in culturally unsafe workplaces were:

- **4 times more likely to have been treated unfairly because of their background** in the past year (64%) compared to those who work in culturally safe workplaces (16%)

- **3 times more likely to have heard racial or ethnic slurs or joke**s in the past year (73%) compared to those who work in culturally safe workplaces (21%).

LESS JOB SATISFACTION

I freely identified in my previous job, but felt typecast and was seen as only suitable for Indigenous-related work. So I left and went sideways into mainstream work in another organisation. Now I keep my Aboriginal background quiet. And now I'm not so typecast.

Survey findings revealed that Indigenous workers experiencing unfair treatment at work because of their Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity were **2.5 times less likely to always be satisfied with their job** (13%), compared to those who rarely or never experienced it (32%).

LESS LIKELY TO RECOMMEND THEIR WORKPLACE

I would certainly not recommend this workplace to any Aboriginal person without very thick skin.

Respondents who experienced unfair treatment at work were also **3 times less likely to always recommend their workplace to other Indigenous people** (12%) compared to those who rarely or never experienced it (39%).

LOWER RETENTION

I eventually left that organisation, as I worked hard for 2 years without any success and it took its emotional toll on me.

Indigenous workers who experienced unfair treatment at work were **2 times more likely to be looking for a new employer** in the next year (36%) compared to those who rarely or never experienced it (15%).
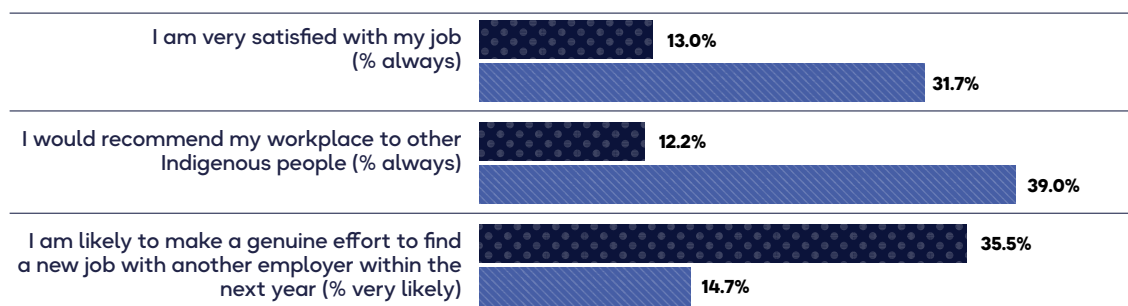
I am very satisfied with my job (% always)	13.0% / 31.7%
I would recommend my workplace to other Indigenous people (% always)	12.2% / 39.0%
I am likely to make a genuine effort to find a new job with another employer within the next year (% very likely)	35.5% / 14.7%

■ Unfair treatment because of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity (% all of the time, often + sometimes)

■ Unfair treatment because of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity (% never + hardly ever)

I am very satisfied with my job (% always)	14.7%
	32.4%
I would recommend my workplace to other Indigenous people (% always)	16.2%
	38.8%
I am likely to make a genuine effort to find a new job with another employer within the next year (% very likely)	34.2%
	13.3%

■ Hearing racial/ethnic jokes/slurs because of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity (% all of the time, often + sometimes)

■ Hearing racial/ethnic jokes/slurs because of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity (% never + hardly ever)

Do Indigenous workers have effective workplace support for racism?

They simply don't know how to deal with it. They have no mechanisms in place, just these fake accountabilities

A third (32%) of the respondents who reported experiencing unfair treatment or racial slurs and jokes at work because of their Indigenous identity strongly disagreed or disagreed that they had the workplace support required when they experienced this racism.

I had the workplace support I needed when I experienced unfair treatment and/or racial slurs or jokes at work because of my Indigenous identity

11.7%	19.6%	36.1%	23.7%	9.0%

■ Strongly Disagree　■ Disagree　■ Neither Disagree of Agree　■ Agree　■ Strongly Agree
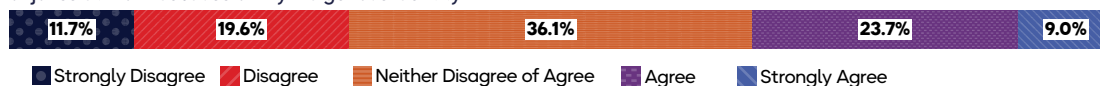
Concerningly, only a third of respondents worked in organisations with anti-discrimination compliance training that included reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander discrimination and harassment (33%), or an organisation with a racism complaint procedure (33%). Even more concerningly, only a fifth (21%) of respondents worked in organisations that had both initiatives in place.

Many respondents talked of how they turned to their Indigenous friends and family for support when dealing with racial discrimination and harassment at work.

I can express and seek support more readily from my external network, family and friends.

Didn't even bother to access support. Not a fan of 'HR' versions of support. I prefer my community support tools,

They turned to Indigenous family and friends for a variety of reasons. Most commonly, many had raised issues before and had not been believed, or the issues had been dismissed, minimised, or just ignored and 'swept under the carpet'.

They just put it under the carpet and act like nothing happened.

When I told the manager what my co-worker had said, they just turned their head and looked like they were laughing.

Commonly, respondents described being told to ignore racial discrimination or harassment as the perpetrator did not mean any harm, or that it was just a joke.

I had a colleague that would ask me inappropriate questions like, 'Why do Aboriginal people always ask me for money at the shops? Why don't they just get a job?', and … why we always get special treatment. I told my manager about it and they said that the person wasn't trying to be rude and that is just the way they have always been. My manager told me to laugh it off …

Although it was acknowledged, there was also the 'They didn't mean it' and 'It wasn't racially motivated' and 'That's just them and the era they are from'!

The perpetrator would say that it was taken out of context, a misunderstanding, because of oversensitivity, I was playing the race card, etc …

Comments are put aside as, 'That's not what I meant', or, 'You've taken this the wrong way'.

Non-Aboriginal people tend to stick with each other and pretend the racism was 'unintentional', so not worth worrying about.

Ineffective workplace support was usually attributed to managers' inability to resolve workplace conflict, as well as a general lack of cultural awareness and cultural capability – something that was exacerbated by lack of Indigenous staff.

My previous manager did not want to 'make them feel awkward' by confronting them about it. So I had to put up with it.

I confronted the slur myself. I feel management should have reminded the team that this type of behaviour within the workplace is not to be tolerated.

Managers never follow up on complaints, so you stop complaining and stop identifying as Aboriginal.

When support is needed or required, the organisation puts in no time or effort to ensure that provisions are in place for their Aboriginal staff – like appropriate counselling or cultural supervision in all levels in all workplaces.

The organisation did not have the cultural awareness/understanding to really engage properly with the issue and understand why it was wrong. It makes it incredibly hard when the HR team and senior management lack basic cultural awareness.

Mainstream management don't know how to deal with Aboriginal issues.

They simply don't know how to deal with it.

The counselling company that the place of employment uses doesn't have Indigenous counsellors.

The odd success story was recounted, but this was by far the exception rather than the rule.

I was told the person who had made jokes about the laziness and Stone Age intelligence of my culture would be spoken to by higher management and I ended up receiving a written and verbal apology from both management and the uneducated person who made such claims.

I was given the opportunity to address the issue and I was listened to and my feedback was accepted and taken on board. The person was extremely remorseful.

The Indigenous section in my workplace are very supportive and helpful. They address any issues promptly and discreetly.

In general, however, respondents stated that no meaningful action was taken – other than perhaps against them.

When I used to work for this company, the environment was extremely toxic and a complaint to upper management would have almost guaranteed termination of employment or no shifts.

The process to report behaviour is arduous and historically fruitless.

Made my first formal complaint in July 2019 and STILL waiting for mediation 12 months on!

I raised the issue with senior management and expected that he would take action on it. There was no follow up to say that he had spoken to my immediate supervisor and colleague and asked them to stop using a term I found derogatory. There was no apology from my supervisor. So I assume it was not addressed.

How can racism be reduced?

THE IMPORTANCE OF ANTI-DISCRIMINATION COMPLIANCE TRAINING AND FORMAL RACISM COMPLAINT PROCEDURES

Our survey findings revealed that 2 very basic initiatives were most strongly linked to lower levels of workplace racism:

1. Anti-discrimination compliance training that includes reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander discrimination and harassment.

2. A racism complaint procedure.

Respondents who worked in organisations with both initiatives in place were:

- **half as likely to experience unfair treatment at work** because of their Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity (21% with both initiatives, compared to 46% with neither)

- **far less likely to hear racial or ethnic slurs or jokes at work** because of their Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity (28% with both initiatives, compared to 51% with neither).

Importantly, even having one of these initiatives helped.

How often are you treated unfairly because you are Indigenous at work or on the job (% very often, often + sometimes)
- 46.1%
- 35.1%
- 21.4%

How often do you hear racial or ethnic slurs or jokes about Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people at work? (% very often, often + sometimes)
- 51.1%
- 43.3%
- 28.2%

■ Neither Racism Complaint Procedure nor Anti-Discrimination Training

■ Either Racism Complaint Procedure or Anti-Discrimination Training

■ Both Racism Complaint Procedure and Anti-Discrimination Training

Respondents who worked in organisations with both initiatives in place were also **significantly more likely to feel they had the support they needed during their experience with racism** (53%) compared to those in organisations without the initiatives (27%). Again, even having one of these initiatives made a difference.

I had the workplace support I needed when I experienced unfair treatment and/or racial slurs or jokes at work because of my Indigenous identity (% strongly agree + agree)
- 27.2%
- 33.1%
- 52.9%

■ Neither Racism Complaint Procedure nor Anti-Discrimination Training

■ Either Racism Complaint Procedure or Anti-Discrimination Training

■ Both Racism Complaint Procedure and Anti-Discrimination Training

THE IMPORTANCE OF COLLEAGUE SUPPORT

Bringing one's whole self to the workplace can place tremendous pressure on the individual. Colleagues can play an important part in stepping in to provide support when racism at work occurs.

I had a colleague step in and call out the wrong and not leave it up to me to defend. I have also received an apology when I have called out that I found their comments unfounded and offensive.

I was in a position where I was being unfairly treated and I was on the verge of being terminated and management offered very little help. It was only when another Aboriginal colleague from a different section advised his director and that director offered to be my support person that I got the help I needed, and my job was saved and I was moved to a more culturally appropriate section within my organisation.

4. THE BURDEN OF IDENTITY STRAIN AND CULTURAL LOAD

Chapter snapshot

Many Indigenous employees reported they have extra (usually unrecognised and unrewarded) demands placed on them at work because they are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. **Cultural load** and **identity strain** represent two such additional, often invisible, demands. Almost two-thirds (63%) of respondents reported a high level of identity strain, while 39% indicated they carried a high level of cultural load. These further accountabilities can take a significant toll on employees and their wellbeing and retention. Workers with high identity strain were 3 times less likely to be satisfied with their job than those with low identity strain, and 3 times more likely to intend to leave their employer in the next year. Similarly, workers with high cultural load were half as likely to be satisfied with their job than those with low cultural load, and twice as likely to intend to leave their employer in the next year.

In addition to completing their day-to-day work, many Indigenous employees also have extra demands placed on them because they are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. We refer to these additional workplace demands as **identity strain** and **cultural load.** Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers can experience both of these pressures, sometimes concurrently, and it has a big impact on their workplace experiences.

Identity strain is the term we use to refer to the strain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees feel when they or others view their identity as not meeting the norms or expectations of the dominant (non-Indigenous) culture in the workplace.[23]

Each time I share different parts of me to the same people or re-share to new people, it always changes the relationship and I am then required to adjust how and why we interact to help them feel comfortable. Keeping mental notes and constantly assessing how safe the space is depending on who is the room.

Cultural load is the (often invisible) load borne by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the workplace, where they are either the only Indigenous person or one of a small number of Indigenous people.[24] This creates an additional workload associated with, for instance, being consistently expected to respond to all things relating to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in the workplace and speak on behalf of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.[25]

Once I share my background, there's an automatic assumption that I must bear all Aboriginal work and educate people, or that I'm a cultural authority. Some tasks are fair and I'm happy to assist by providing a cultural lens etc. Others (in my opinion) are expected unreasonably and are virtually never distributed to non-Aboriginal staff, such as organising briefings and presentations on Reconciliation Week, Mabo day, NAIDOC and suchlike. It'd be less emotionally burdensome and more reflective of a genuine desire to act towards reconciliation to ask non-Aboriginal staff to research history and do this labour with some input from me.

How common is identity strain at work?

An alarmingly high number of respondents experienced identity strain in their day-to-day work. Close to **two-thirds (63%) reported dealing with high identity strain,** and 18% reported moderate strain. Only 20% of respondents had low identity strain. These results show that for many Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers, identity strain is an everyday reality.

63.0%	17.5%	19.5%

■ High identity strain   ▨ Moderate identity strain   ▨ Low identity strain

IDENTITY STRAIN

High identity strain = Respondents scored on average 3 or less out of 5 on questions asking about how often they experienced identity strain at work (where 5 = never and 1 = all the time).

Moderate identity strain = Respondents scored on average between 3 and 4 out of 5.

Low identity strain = Respondents scored on average 4 or more out of 5.

What does identity strain look like?

I declined to ask her for support because she often asks me to tone it down or makes excuses for other people's behaviours.

Identity strain showed up in different ways for respondents, including:

- **working harder** – 65% reported having to work harder to prove that an Indigenous person can do the job sometimes, often or all the time

- **avoiding social situations** – 60% reported trying to avoid certain people, social situations and places at work sometimes, often or all the time

- **compromising cultural integrity** – 44% reported being asked to do things that made them feel they were compromising their cultural integrity sometimes, often or all the time

- **'toning it down'** – 33% reported being told to 'tone it down' or be less outspoken about Indigenous issues sometimes, often or all the time.

I am asked to do something that has made me feel I am compromising my cultural integrity

32.0%	25.0%	25.0%	13.0%	6.0%

I am told to 'tone it down' or be less outspoken about Indigenous issues

43.0%	24.0%	17.0%	10.0%	6.0%

I have to work harder to prove that an Indigenous person can do the job

22.0%	14.0%	23.0%	20.0%	22.0%
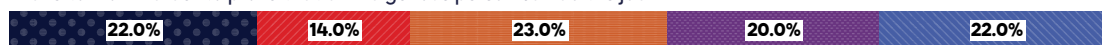
I try to avoid certain people, social situations and places at work

21.0%	20.0%	31.0%	19.0%	10.0%

■ Never ■ Rarely ■ Sometimes ■ Often ■ All of the time

What is the impact of identity strain?

Survey findings revealed that identity strain had significant negative effects on the wellbeing and retention of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees. Those experiencing high identity strain were significantly less satisfied, **less likely to recommend** their workplace and **more likely to leave.**

Respondents experiencing high identity strain were:

· **3 times less likely to always be satisfied with their job** (14%) compared to those with low identity strain (42%)

· **3 times less likely to always recommend their workplace to other Indigenous people** (15%) compared to those with low identity strain (50%)

· **3 times more likely to be looking for a new employer in the next year** (36%) compared to those with low identity strain (11%).

Importantly, even moderate identity strain significantly impacted the wellbeing and retention of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees.

I am very satisfied with my job (% always)
- 42.0%
- 16.2%
- 13.5%

I would recommend my workplace to other Indigenous people (% always)
- 50.4%
- 19.4%
- 14.5%

I am likely to make a genuine effort to find a new job with another employer within the next year (% very likely)
- 11.1%
- 17.8%
- 36.4%
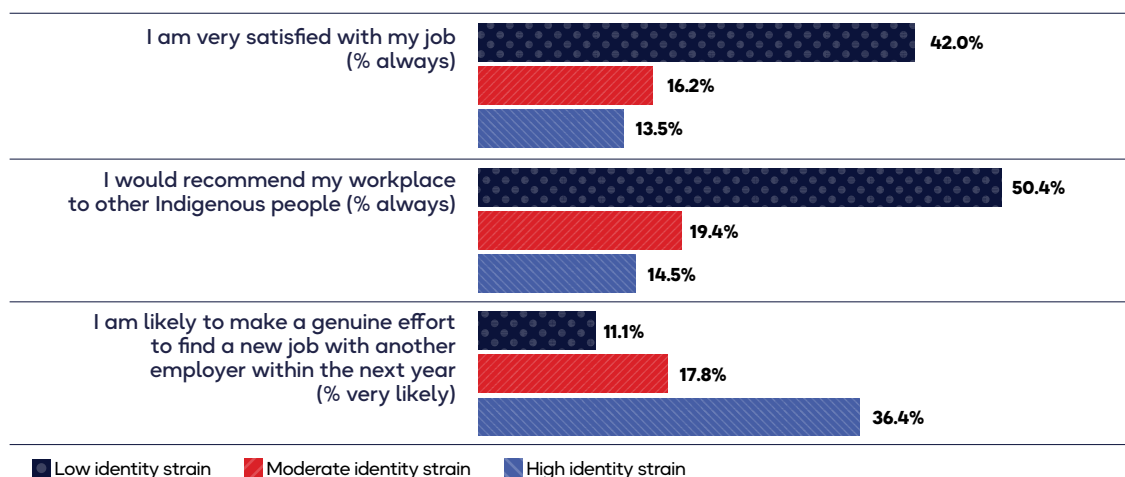
■ Low identity strain ■ Moderate identity strain ■ High identity strain

These findings were illustrated by the stories and experiences that respondents shared, revealing the significant impact identity strain can have an Indigenous person's ability to belong in the workplace.

I often looked for support in my other Aboriginal colleagues, which is not fair on any of us, as we are all then left carrying each other's trauma and it becomes more of the increased 'Aboriginal' workload that is often invisible to our white colleagues.

Indigenous employees typically work harder to prove their self-worth and make a difference, especially to combat a negative stereotype.

How common is cultural load?

Along with identity strain, respondents carried the extra burden of cultural load in their workplace. This came in the form of additional demands and expectations, placing the onus of making workplaces more equitable, inclusive and culturally safe largely on the shoulders of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers themselves. In some ways, cultural load can be easier to identify or measure as it commonly manifests in additional activities being placed upon individuals by others.

While a third (37%) of respondents reported a low cultural load, more respondents (39%) reported carrying a high cultural load in their workplace.

38.8%	24.5%	36.7%

■ High Cultural Load　■ Moderate Cultural Load　■ Low Cultural Load
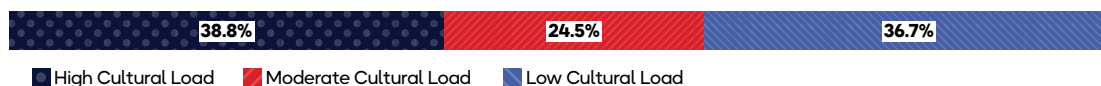
CULTURAL LOAD

High cultural load = Respondents scored on average 3 or less out of 5 on questions asking how often they experienced cultural load (where 5 = never and 1 = all the time).

Moderate cultural load = Respondents scored on average between 3 and 4 out of 5.

Low cultural load = Respondents scored on average 4 or more out of 5.

What does cultural load look like?

I'm asked to be the 'token' [Indigenous person] or help them do their job because it's too hard for them...

I do take it on to answer any questions my colleagues have in order to educate and inform others. This can sometimes become tiring and mentally draining, but the benefit of more informed colleagues outweighs the negatives.

Respondents reported having extra Indigenous-related education, knowledge and representative demands placed on them because of their Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity. This came in the form of:

- **expectation of knowledge** – 74% reported being expected to know everything about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures sometimes, often or all the time

- **expectation to educate others** – 71% reported being expected to educate their non-Indigenous colleagues about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and racism sometimes, often or all the time

- **expectation of representative** – 69% reported being expected to talk on behalf of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples sometimes, often or all the time

- **extra work demands** – 66% reported having extra Indigenous-related work demands placed upon them that non-Indigenous colleagues do not sometimes, often or all the time.

I have extra Indigenous-related work demands placed upon me that non-Indigenous colleagues don't
(e.g. organise NAIDOC Week, do cultural awareness training)

18.9%	15.2%	24.6%	19.3%	22.1%

I am expected to educate my non-Indigenous colleagues about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and racism

14.3%	13.9%	26.2%	23.1%	22.4%

I am expected to know everything about Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures

12.8%	13.6%	23.8%	25%	24.8%

I am expected to talk on behalf of all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples

16.4%	14.1%	26.3%	24.2%	19.0%

■ Never　■ Rarely　■ Sometimes　■ Often　■ All of the time
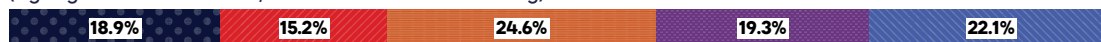
What is the impact of cultural load?

Cultural load can have a dramatic impact on Indigenous people's work experience and careers. Throughout the survey, respondents described how cultural load was added to their day-to-day work, without being reflected in their key performance indicators, making their workloads disproportionately greater than the workloads of co-workers, who were not expected to take on these added responsibilities.

It's not our job to be the educators and make the workplace more inclusive. That just gives us more of a workload than anyone else and puts our jobs and career at risk for not meeting normal work KPIs. Otherwise, recognise and reward differently the load that we carry on behalf of everyone else.

Survey findings revealed the significant negative repercussions of cultural load on the wellbeing and retention of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees. Those experiencing high cultural load were significantly **less satisfied, less likely to recommend their workplace** and **more likely to leave.**

Respondents with a high cultural load placed on them were:

· **half as likely to always be satisfied with their job** (18%) compared to those with a low cultural load (43%)

· **half as likely to always recommend their workplace to other Indigenous people** (21%) compared to those with a low cultural load (51%)

· **twice as likely to be looking for a new employer in the next year** (27%) compared to those with a low cultural load (14%).

Importantly, even moderate cultural load significantly lessened wellbeing and retention.

I am very satisfied with my job (% always)	42.8% / 29.3% / 17.7%
I would recommend my workplace to other Indigenous people (% always)	51.2% / 32.0% / 21.0%
I am likely to make a genuine effort to find a new job with another employer within the next year (% very likely)	13.9% / 15.5% / 27.2%

■ Low Cultural Load ■ Moderate Cultural Load ■ High Cultural Load
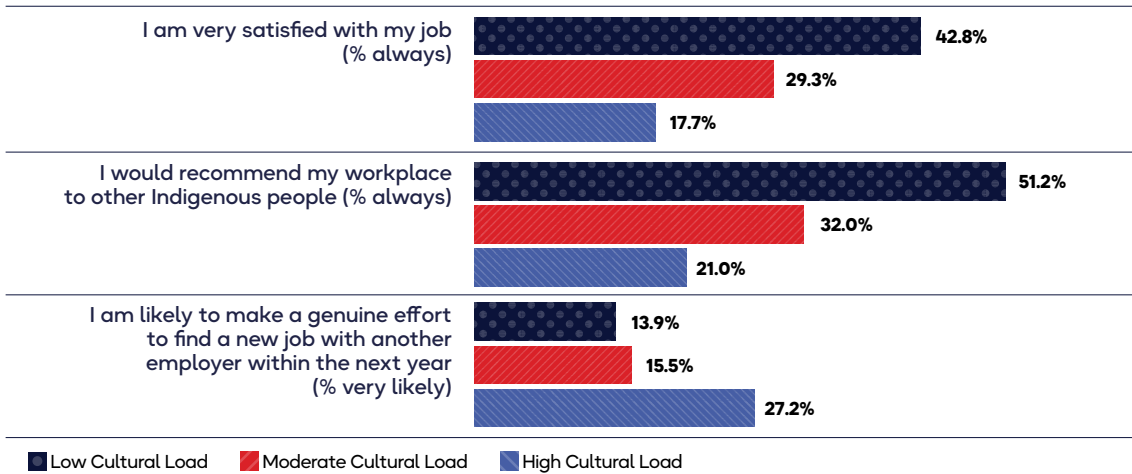
5. HOW AUTHENTIC ARE AUSTRALIAN ORGANISATIONS?

Chapter snapshot

Organisational authenticity matters. Workers in organisations with high authenticity were 5 times more likely to be satisfied with their job and 8 times more likely to recommend their workplace to other Indigenous people, compared to those in organisations with low authenticity. They were also 2.5 times less likely to intend to leave their employer in the next year. Yet concerningly, only a quarter (26%) of respondents felt they worked in a highly authentic organisation. The big issues concerning authenticity were tokenism felt by employees, along with organisations overpromising and underdelivering. A significant number of respondents (38%) felt their workplace overpromised to Indigenous staff, with a lack of career progression a key reason for employees to seek other employment opportunities.

How authentic are Australian organisations?

My current boss is amazing and has given me a job in our workplace because she embraces Aboriginal culture and encourages me and supports me to share culture within our workplace and wants to ensure it is done authentically.

Organisational authenticity stems from a genuine support within the workplace to be inclusive and treat Indigenous people and employees equitably. Only a quarter (26%) of respondents indicated they worked in an organisation that was truly authentic when it comes to the inclusive and equitable treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees. Most respondents (43%) worked in moderately authentic organisations, while a fifth (20%) were in workplaces that were low in authenticity.
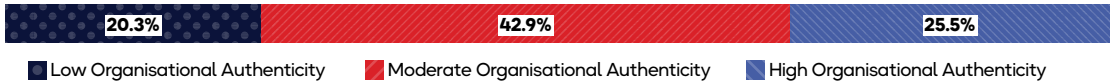
20.3%	42.9%	25.5%

■ Low Organisational Authenticity   ■ Moderate Organisational Authenticity   ■ High Organisational Authenticity

ORGANISATIONAL AUTHENTICITY

High organisational authenticity = Respondents scored their organisation on average 4 or more out of 5 on questions asking how authentic their organisation is (where 5 = highly authentic and 1 = not authentic at all).

Moderate organisational authenticity = Respondents scored their organisation on average between 3 and 4 out of 5.

Low organisational authenticity = Respondents scored their organisation on average less than 3 out of 5.

Respondents who had a composite score of exactly 3 (at the midpoint of the scale) were removed from further analysis, as they were considered not to have a leaning in either direction.

What does organisational authenticity look like?

Organisational authenticity involves the genuine commitment of an organisation to move from words to action, and visible commitment from leadership to lead by example.

- **Genuine support** – 61% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that their organisation genuinely supports the inclusive and equitable treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees.

- **Genuine leader commitment** – 60% strongly agreed or agreed that organisational leaders are committed to the inclusive and equitable treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees.

- **Equitable policies** – 57% strongly agreed or agreed that organisational policies are inclusive and equitable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees.

- **Quality careers** – 45% strongly agreed or agreed that their organisation focuses on quality careers for Indigenous staff, not just short-term appointments.

My organisation genuinely supports the inclusive and equitable treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees

4.7%	9.9%	24.1%	39.1%	22.2%

The leaders of my organisation are committed to the inclusive and equitable treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees

6.4%	10.2%	23.5%	37.2%	22.7%

The policies of my organisation are inclusive and equitable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees

4.2%	10.7%	28.4%	37.9%	18.9%

My organisation focuses on quality careers for Indigenous staff – not just short-term appointments

10.1%	15.5%	29.1%	29.3%	16.0%

■ Strongly Disagree   ■ Disagree   ■ Neither Agree or Disagree   ■ Agree   ■ Strongly Agree

Authenticity was demonstrated to respondents through non-Indigenous colleagues, particularly those in senior leadership positions, making a genuine effort to connect with and show interest in Indigenous cultures and the strengths that Indigenous people offer.

The team I work in are supportive and interested in understanding my culture and my connection to culture. I've noticed that they've become more sensitive to First Nations issues over time.

BEYOND TOKENISM: ACTIONING MEANINGFUL COMMITMENTS WITH INDIGENOUS EMPLOYEES

For workplaces to be authentic, they needed to ensure that actions are not being taken for tokenistic reasons, instead showing genuine respect for Indigenous cultures, and valuing the contributions of staff.

For our workplace, it's not 'inclusion' but respect for our experiences and gaining our valid input (not tokenism) to legitimate issues.

For some respondents, inauthentic attempts to understand or engage with issues impacting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples was a further sign of tokenism. An example of this is a willingness to discuss the Black Lives Matter movement in an American context but ignore or dismiss what the movement means for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Staff don't know how to deal with or talk about Aboriginal issues, so they say nothing at all. They would rather talk about something like the death of George Floyd in America but won't acknowledge what happens in Australia. Aboriginal strategic frameworks aren't followed and any attempts are tokenistic.

Tokenism was also evident to respondents where organisational or leadership commitments failed to involve real action.

Move beyond tokenism and symbolic gestures. Being supportive of Aboriginal people is more than hanging pretty dot paintings around the building or saying the right things but not making progress. Companies create targets for women, yet Indigenous people remain undervalued, as evidenced by their lack of career progression in the private sector to leadership roles.

BEYOND OVERPROMISING AND UNDERDELIVERING

Part of the problem with authenticity was a propensity to overpromise the potential benefits of working in an organisation, then underdelivering on these promises.

Organisations need to actually support a Career Development Program and live up to its promises of career development instead of making a person do the program for nothing.

More than a third (38%) of Indigenous workers strongly agreed or agreed that their organisation overpromises to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people the benefits of working there.

My organisation focuses on quality careers for Indigenous staff – not just short-term appointments

8.9%	17.8%	36.1%	24.7%	12.5%

■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neither Agree or Disagree ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree
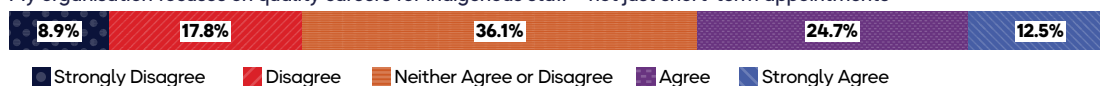
Underdelivering on these promises was one of the main reasons Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders workers gave for intending to leave their employer in the next year, with the most common issues being **lack of career opportunity and development, conflicting values** and **lack of meaningful work.**

Of the respondents seeking to leave their employer in the next year:

- 21% cited lack of career opportunities or promotion as the main reason for leaving

- 19% cited lack of career development

- 13% cited conflict between their cultural values and workplace values

- 12% cited lack of meaningful work.

Lack of career opportunities/promotion	21.1%
Lack of career development	19.3%
Career change	16.1%
Conflict between my cultural values and my workplace values	13.4%
Lack of meaningful work	12.4%
Further study	11.8%
Insufficient remuneration	10.2%
Racism, discrimination and/or harassment from supervisors/managers	9.3%
Lack of training	8.9%
Racism, discrimination and/or harassment from co-workers	8.7%
Social exclusion from co-workers	8.4%
Lack of flexibility	7.6%
End of contract/dedicated position	7.5%
Racism, discrimination and/or harassment from customers/clients/patients	4.5%
Racism, discrimination and/or harassment from suppliers/external contractors	3.3%
Retirement	3.2%

Why is organisational authenticity important?

Organisational authenticity has a profound impact on the wellbeing and retention of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers. Notably, even moderate perceptions of organisational authenticity had a positive impact on wellbeing and retention. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers in organisations with high authenticity were significantly more satisfied, **more likely to recommend their workplace** and **less likely to leave.**

Respondents who viewed their organisation as authentic were:

· **5 times more likely to always be satisfied with their job** (48%) compared to those with low perceptions of authenticity (9%)

· **8 times more likely to always recommend their workplace to other Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people** (61%) compared to those with low perceptions of authenticity (7%)

· **2.5 times less likely to be looking for a new employer in the next year** (41%) compared to those with low perceptions of authenticity (14%).

Clearly, being genuinely authentic is good for both Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers and their organisations.

I am very satisfied with my job (% always)	8.6%
	21.9%
	47.5%
I would recommend my workplace to other Indigenous people (% always)	7.1%
	24.8%
	60.5%
I am likely to make a genuine effort to find a new job with another employer within the next year (% very likely)	41.0%
	18.1%
	14.4%

■ Low Organisational Authenticity ■ Moderate Organisational Authenticity ■ High Organisational Authenticity
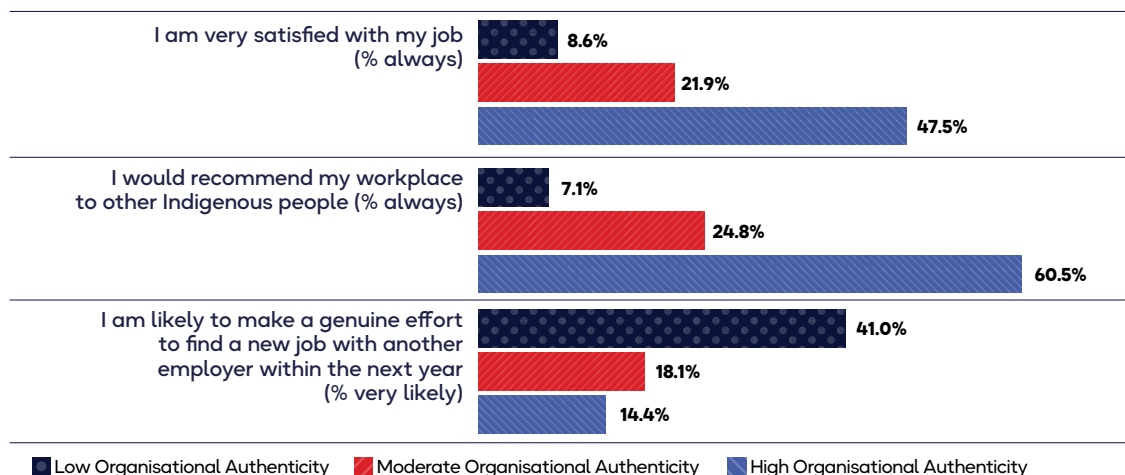
6. THE IMPORTANCE OF ORGANISATIONAL INITIATIVES AND ACTIVITY

Chapter snapshot

Organisations across Australia are actively engaging in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-focused initiatives, with only 6% of respondents stating their organisation was yet to commence any such initiatives. Regardless of which initiatives were in place, respondents in high-activity organisations reported less racism and greater cultural safety, organisational authenticity, job satisfaction, intention to recommend and intention to stay compared to those in organisations without such initiatives. There was, however, a clear downside to working in high-activity organisations – the associated extra work falls disproportionately to Indigenous staff, adding to their cultural load at work.

How active are Australian organisations?

Encouragingly, only 6% of respondents reported that their organisation had no Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-focused initiatives. However, a significant number worked in low-activity organisations (29%) and moderate-activity organisations (38%). A third of respondents (32%) reported working in high-activity organisations.

| 29.2% | 38.2% | 32.4% |

■ Low-activity Organisations　■ Moderate-activity Organisations　■ High-activity Organisations

ORGANISATIONAL ACTIVITY

High-activity organisation = An organisation with 9 or more of 16 possible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-focused initiatives.

Moderate-activity organisation = An organisation with 4 to 8 possible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-focused initiatives.

Low-activity organisation = An organisation with 3 or fewer possible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-focused initiatives.

The impact of high activity

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers in high-activity organisations were experiencing the benefits of these initiatives. Respondents appreciated their organisations participating in these initiatives and praised the work organisations were doing.

Our organisation is working on the process and great progress is being made. Yarning circles are being had, cultural training provided to our organisation, we have employed a RAP Business Manager and our organisation is moving forward, building policies and principles in Employment and Retention Policy and reporting community engagement, etc.

In my traineeship I am seen as a representative for Indigenous students struggling with personal matters. I also help with events such as Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week, often giving speeches and Acknowledgments of Country. I believe my employer understands the value of Indigenous workers, particularly within my workplace.

After 10 years working in the same organisation, the first time I shared my Aboriginal background in the workplace was last year during NAIDOC Week. There wasn't a 'need' or a way in which to share this previously. It was a positive experience and warmly embraced as part of the NAIDOC Week events.

While less common statistically across respondents' organisations, many respondents commented that having a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) provided a great opportunity for companies, and particularly their staff, to connect.

For the most part it has been positive. I am lucky to be in a very inclusive workplace. I am a member of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander network, which has had quite a lot of input into our RAP and strategies of engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

HIGH ACTIVITY IS LINKED TO LOWER RACISM

Respondents in organisations with a high number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-focused initiatives were:

- **2.5 times less likely to be treated unfairly at work because they are Indigenous** sometimes, often or very often (20%) compared to those in low-activity organisations (50%)

- **2 times less likely to hear racial or ethnic slurs or jokes at work** sometimes, often or very often (26%) compared to those in low-activity organisations (62%).

How often are you treated unfairly because you are Indigenous at work or on the job (% very often, often + sometimes)
- 50.0%
- 19.7%

How often do you hear racial or ethnic slurs or jokes about Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people at work? (% very often, often + sometimes)
- 61.6%
- 26.3%

■ Low-activity Organisations　■ High-activity Organisations
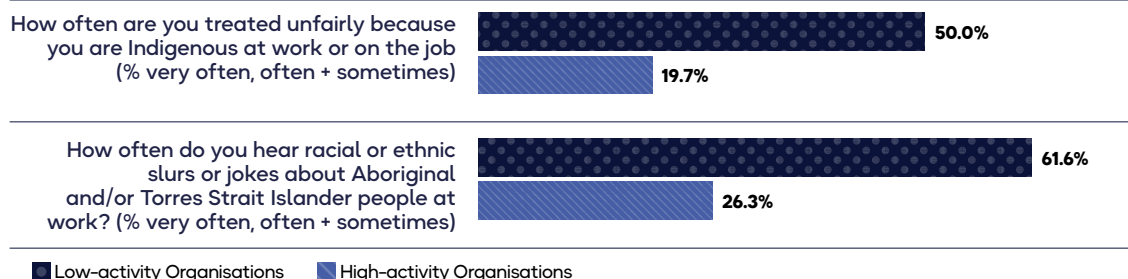
HIGH ACTIVITY IS LINKED TO HIGH ORGANISATIONAL AUTHENTICITY

My current boss is amazing and … wants to ensure it is done authentically. Most staff are interested and actively engage with me … We are slowly having a positive impact within the workplace. 'From little things big things grow.'

Being in a high-activity organisation has a big impact on employees' perceptions of organisational authenticity. Respondents working in high-activity organisations were significantly more likely to view their organisation as authentic and genuine in its commitment to the inclusive and equitable treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees.

Respondents in high-activity organisations were twice as likely to strongly agree or agree that:

· **their organisation genuinely supports the inclusive and equitable treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees** – 82% compared to 46% of those in low-activity organisations

· **the leaders of their organisation are committed to the inclusive and equitable treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees** – 80% compared to 41% of those in low-activity organisations

· **the policies of their organisation are inclusive and equitable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees** – 79% compared to 41% of those in low-activity organisations

· **their organisation focuses on quality careers for Indigenous staff, not just short-term appointments** – 64% compared to 31% of those in low-activity organisations.

Respondents in low-activity organisations were statistically more likely to believe their organisation overpromises to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people the benefits of working there.

	Low-activity Organisations	High-activity Organisations
My organisation genuinely supports the inclusive and equitable treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees (% strongly agree + agree)	45.7%	81.5%
The leaders of my organisation are committed to the inclusive and equitable treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees (% strongly agree + agree)	41.1%	79.7%
The policies of my organisation are inclusive and equitable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees (% strongly agree + agree)	41.0%	79.4%
My organisation over-promises to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people the benefits of working here (% strongly agree + agree)	37.1%	23.9%
My organisation focuses on quality careers for Indigenous staff – not just short-term appointments (% strongly agree + agree)	31.1%	64.2%

HIGH ACTIVITY IS LINKED TO HIGH CULTURAL SAFETY

Only about 5 years ago, when the company started developing a Reconciliation Action Plan, did I feel more supported in sharing my story. Initially, I didn't feel that the workplace was culturally safe.

Respondents working in organisations with a high number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-focused initiatives were 2 times more likely to report that their organisation was culturally safe (56%) compared to those in low-activity organisations (25%).

Conversely, respondents working in low-activity organisations were 4 times more likely to report working in a culturally unsafe workplace (42%) compared to those in high-activity organisations (9%).

High-activity organisations

Culturally Unsafe Workplace	Somewhat Culturally Unsafe Workplace	Culturally Safe Workplace
9.3%	34.3%	56.4%

Low-activity organisations

Culturally Unsafe Workplace	Somewhat Culturally Unsafe Workplace	Culturally Safe Workplace
41.7%	33.8%	24.5%

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people working in high-activity organisations reported feeling **more culturally safe, more comfortable in expressing cultural beliefs, more valued,** had **higher Indigenous representation** and felt their **skills, perspectives and experiences were more valued.**

Respondents in high-activity organisations were:

- **1.5 times more likely to feel that their workplace provided a culturally safe place of work for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples** often or all the time (79%) compared to those in low-activity organisations (51%)

- **1.5 times more likely to feel comfortable expressing their cultural and personal beliefs at work** often or all the time (79%) compared to those in low-activity organisations (49%)

- **1.5 times more likely to feel valued and supported as an Indigenous member of their workplace** often or all the time (77%) compared to those in low-activity organisations (44%)

- **1.5 times more likely to report that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people were appointed in any internal roles with an Indigenous focus** in their organisation often or all the time (67%) compared to those in low-activity organisations (only 35%)

- **1.5 times more likely to feel that their workplace values the skills, perspectives and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people** often or all of the time (74%) compared to those in low-activity organisations (40%).

My workplace provides a culturally safe place of work for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (% often + all of the time)
- Low-activity: 51.3%
- High-activity: 79.4%

I am comfortable expressing my cultural and personal beliefs at work (% often + all of the time)
- Low-activity: 48.7%
- High-activity: 79.1%

I feel valued and supported as an Indigenous member of my workplace (% often + all of the time)
- Low-activity: 43.7%
- High-activity: 76.7%

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples are appointed in any internal roles with an Indigenous focus (% often + all of the time)
- Low-activity: 34.8%
- High-activity: 66.6%

My workplace values the skills, perspectives and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (% often + all of the time)
- Low-activity: 40.4%
- High-activity: 73.7%

■ Low-activity Organisations ■ High-activity Organisations

HIGH ACTIVITY IS LINKED TO WELLBEING AND RETENTION

There are opportunities to attend external events that may not be related my role (I'm not in an identified position) but assist in my culture strengthening that I would love to feel more able to participate in. In general, though, I am included in more than my role requires.

Being in an organisation with a high number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-focused initiatives had a profound impact on employees' wellbeing and retention. Compared to those working in low-activity organisations, respondents in high-activity organisations were significantly **more satisfied, more likely to recommend** and **less likely to leave.**

Respondents in high-activity organisations were:

- **1.5 times more likely to always be satisfied with their job** (33%) compared to those in low-activity organisations (19%)

- **2 times more likely to always recommend their workplace to other Indigenous people** (45%) compared to those in low-activity organisations (19%)

- **almost 3 times less likely to be looking for a new job with another employer within the next year** (12%) compared to those in low-activity organisations (32%).

I am very satisfied with my job (% always)
- Low-activity: 19.2%
- High-activity: 33.1%

I would recommenc my workplace to other Indigenous people (% always)
- Low-activity: 19.2%
- High-activity: 45.4%

I am likely to make a genuine effort to find a new job with another employer within the next year (% very likely)
- Low-activity: 31.5%
- High-activity: 11.9%

■ Low-activity Organisations ■ High-activity Organisations

The flipside of high activity

Being called upon to be the expert on all things Aboriginal, being called upon to do extra work because of my Aboriginality, to take on the Aboriginal portfolio as well my other work leads to feelings of tokenism.

While increased numbers of cultural initiatives provided greater cultural safety for Indigenous employees, these initiatives also came with additional (usually unrecognised and unrewarded) work for Indigenous staff. Many respondents commented on the cultural load that was placed upon them due to these initiatives, as they were often relied on to develop or attend cultural awareness-related sessions.

I am included in more than my role requires, but I don't feel that I am adequately remunerated for this involvement.

Respondents in high-activity organisations reported equal or higher levels of cultural load compared to those working in low-activity organisations. So, while our research suggests high activity may boost wellbeing and retention, this can be counteracted if Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers are expected to carry the entire burden of organising, delivering and participating in these initiatives.

I have extra Indigenous-related work demands placed upon me that non-Indigenous colleagues don't (e.g. organise NAIDOC Week, do cultural awareness training) (% often + all of the time)	34.4% / 43.0%
I am expected to educate my non-Indigenous colleagues about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and racism (% often + all of the time)	39.4% / 42.7%
I am expected to know everything about Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures (% often + all of the time)	46.3% / 46.0%
I am expected to talk on behalf of all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples (% often + all of the time)	38.7% / 43.6%

■ Low-activity Organisations   ■ High-activity Organisations

How common are different initiatives?

A wide range of initiatives were implemented in the workplaces of the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people we surveyed. The most commonly reported organisational initiatives were:

· celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander days or weeks of significance (70%)

· Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge sharing and cultural awareness training (53%)

· identified Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander positions (52%).

Initiative	Percentage
Celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander days/weeks of significance e.g. NAIDOC Week and Reconciliation Week	70.3%
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge sharing and cultural awareness training	53.0%
Identified Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander positions	52.4%
Using Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suppliers/contractors (i.e. to conduct Welcome to Country and smoking ceremony or to run workshops etc.)	49.1%
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander network groups (may be named differently)	48.7%
A Reconciliation Action Plan	48.6%
Cultural leave policies	46.8%
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cadetships/internships/traineeships	45.6%
A formal recruitment program for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees	37.2%
Data on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander demographics, engagement or other HR related metrics	36.3%
Anti-discrimination compliance training that includes reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander discrimination and harassment	35.9%
Racism complaint procedure	32.8%
An Indigenous Strategy (other than a RAP)	31.4%
A formal career development program for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees	24.6%
Indigenous (Leader/Elder) support or sponsorship of new and young staff	20.3%

What initiatives build wellbeing and retention?

I'm very lucky, my workplace is very supportive and interested in the Indigenous space. It makes it easy for me to have conversations in the space.
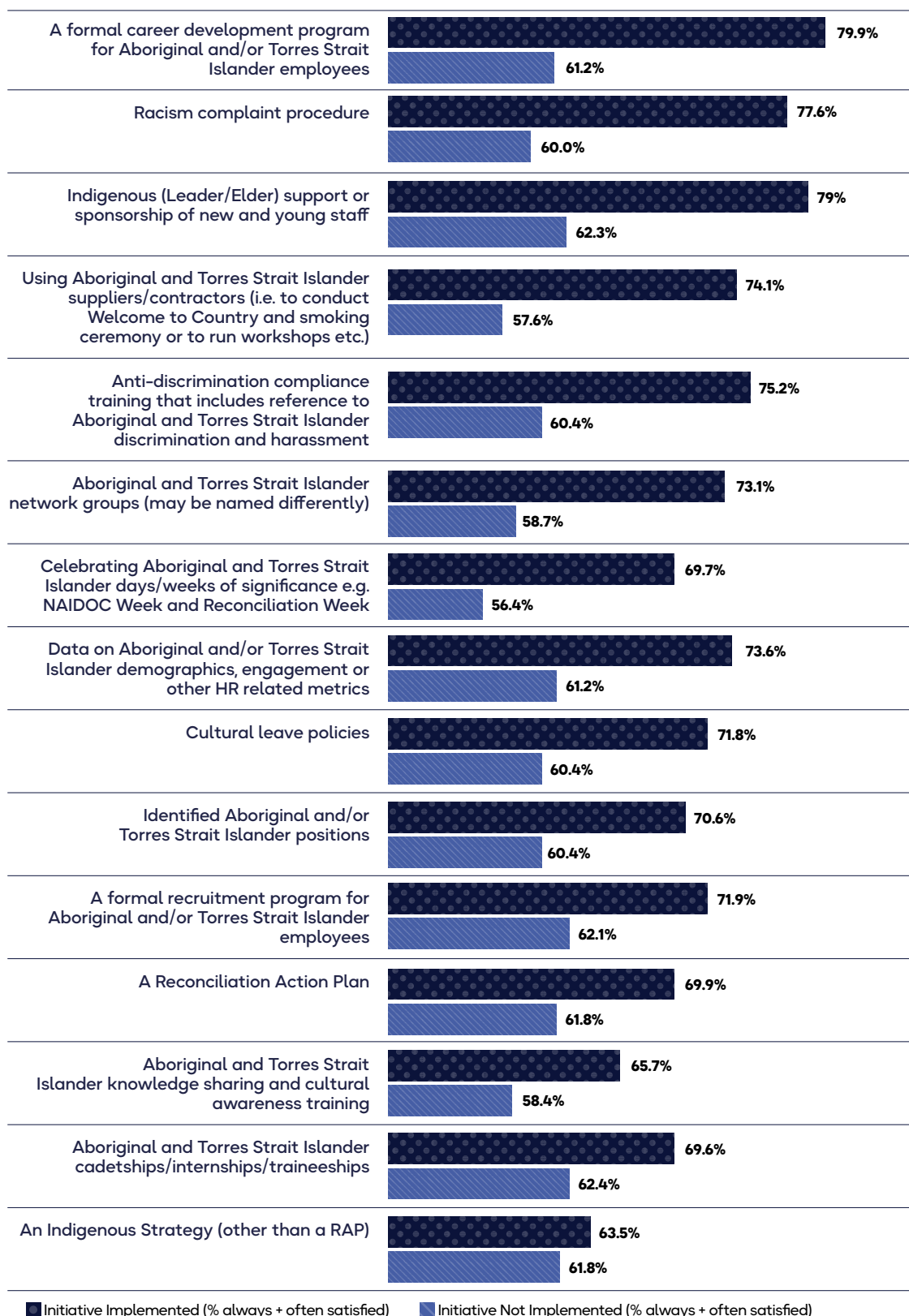
I think the company/district I work for do an incredible job at including Indigenous people in all activities in the workplace. I have never felt left out. I have always been invited to things.

We found 5 workplace initiatives were consistently associated with better wellbeing and retention of Indigenous staff:

1. Formal career development programs for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees.

2. Racism complaint procedures.

3. Indigenous (Leader/Elder) support or sponsorship of new and young staff.

4. Anti-discrimination compliance training that includes reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

5. Celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander days or weeks of significance.

Yet, apart from celebrating days or weeks of significance, **these initiatives were some of the least common** in respondents' organisations, as the following 3 figures show.

IMPACT OF DIFFERENT INITIATIVES ON INDIGENOUS WORKERS' JOB SATISFACTION

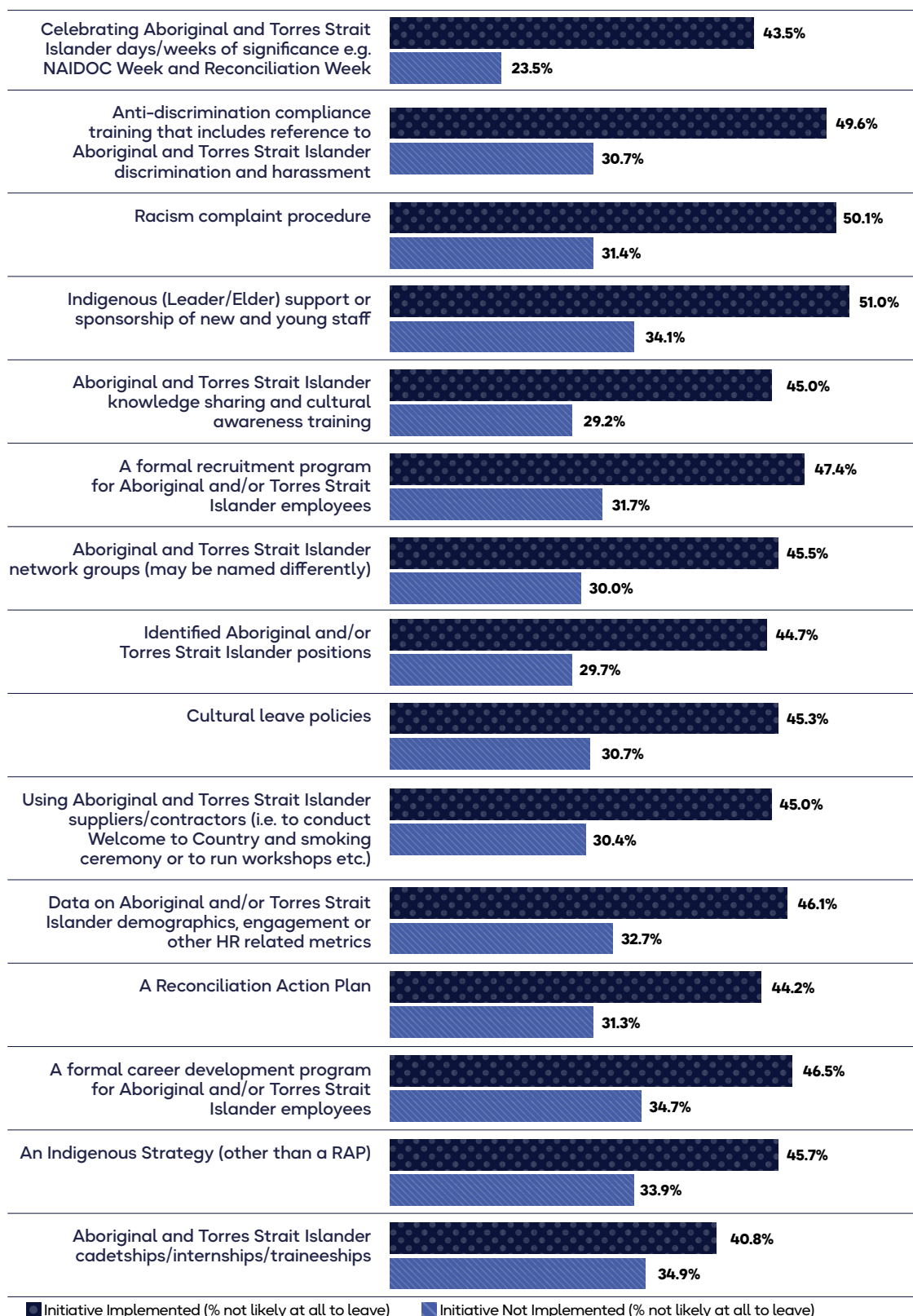**A formal career development program for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees**
- 79.9%
- 61.2%

Racism complaint procedure
- 77.6%
- 60.0%

Indigenous (Leader/Elder) support or sponsorship of new and young staff
- 79%
- 62.3%

Using Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suppliers/contractors (i.e. to conduct Welcome to Country and smoking ceremony or to run workshops etc.)
- 74.1%
- 57.6%

Anti-discrimination compliance training that includes reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander discrimination and harassment
- 75.2%
- 60.4%

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander network groups (may be named differently)
- 73.1%
- 58.7%

Celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander days/weeks of significance e.g. NAIDOC Week and Reconciliation Week
- 69.7%
- 56.4%

Data on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander demographics, engagement or other HR related metrics
- 73.6%
- 61.2%

Cultural leave policies
- 71.8%
- 60.4%

Identified Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander positions
- 70.6%
- 60.4%

A formal recruitment program for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees
- 71.9%
- 62.1%

A Reconciliation Action Plan
- 69.9%
- 61.8%

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge sharing and cultural awareness training
- 65.7%
- 58.4%

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cadetships/internships/traineeships
- 69.6%
- 62.4%

An Indigenous Strategy (other than a RAP)
- 63.5%
- 61.8%

■ Initiative Implemented (% always + often satisfied)   ■ Initiative Not Implemented (% always + often satisfied)

IMPACT OF DIFFERENT INITIATIVES ON INDIGENOUS WORKERS' INTENTION TO RECOMMEND THEIR EMPLOYER

Initiative	Initiative Implemented	Initiative Not Implemented
Indigenous (Leader/Elder) support or sponsorship of new and young staff	79.5%	53.2%
A formal career development program for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees	78.0%	52.2%
Racism complaint procedure	75.5%	50.3%
Anti-discrimination compliance training that includes reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander discrimination and harassment	73.3%	50.4%
Celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander days/weeks of significance e.g. NAIDOC Week and Reconciliation Week	63.9%	46.0%
A formal recruitment program for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees	69.8%	52.0%
Using Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suppliers/contractors (i.e. to conduct Welcome to Country and smoking ceremony or to run workshops etc.)	67.2%	50.2%
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge sharing and cultural awareness training	66.5%	49.6%
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cadetships/internships/traineeships	67.5%	51.1%
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander network groups (may be named differently)	66.2%	51.3%
Data on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander demographics, engagement or other HR related metrics	67.4%	53.9%
Cultural leave policies	65.9%	52.1%
A Reconciliation Action Plan	64.6%	53.0%
Identified Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander positions	64.0%	52.7%
An Indigenous Strategy (other than a RAP)	66.0%	59.2%

■ Initiative Implemented (% always + often recommended)   ■ Initiative Not Implemented (% always + often recommended)

IMPACT OF DIFFERENT INITIATIVES ON INDIGENOUS WORKERS' INTENTION TO STAY IN THEIR JOB

Celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander days/weeks of significance e.g. NAIDOC Week and Reconciliation Week
43.5%
23.5%

Anti-discrimination compliance training that includes reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander discrimination and harassment
49.6%
30.7%

Racism complaint procedure
50.1%
31.4%

Indigenous (Leader/Elder) support or sponsorship of new and young staff
51.0%
34.1%

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge sharing and cultural awareness training
45.0%
29.2%

A formal recruitment program for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees
47.4%
31.7%

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander network groups (may be named differently)
45.5%
30.0%

Identified Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander positions
44.7%
29.7%

Cultural leave policies
45.3%
30.7%

Using Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suppliers/contractors (i.e. to conduct Welcome to Country and smoking ceremony or to run workshops etc.)
45.0%
30.4%

Data on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander demographics, engagement or other HR related metrics
46.1%
32.7%

A Reconciliation Action Plan
44.2%
31.3%

A formal career development program for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees
46.5%
34.7%

An Indigenous Strategy (other than a RAP)
45.7%
33.9%

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cadetships/internships/traineeships
40.8%
34.9%

■ Initiative Implemented (% not likely at all to leave) ■ Initiative Not Implemented (% not likely at all to leave)

7. WHAT ORGANISATIONS CAN DO: 10 TRUTHS TO CENTRE INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS' VOICES TO CREATE WORKPLACE INCLUSION

Chapter snapshot

This section provides 10 truths about how organisations can centre the workplace experiences of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, and so create more equitable and inclusive Australian workplaces. These recommendations have been drawn from survey findings and respondents' recommendations and are provided in the spirit of *Gari Yala* – to speak the truth.

1. Commit to unearthing and acting on workplace truths – however uncomfortable this may be

Talk to us, engage in conversation to see how we are and what our experiences are.

Before anything else, organisations must be prepared to interrogate and understand their own current truths when it comes to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees' experiences at work. This involves working with trusted Indigenous-led partner organisations to talk with, listen to and believe Indigenous employees when they tell you about their workplace experiences. Hearing home truths can be an uncomfortable experience, but meaningful organisational change can only begin when this happens.

If the word 'Aboriginal' is on the table white fragility is ramped up.

If organisations seek to engage in this process, not only must they be prepared to hear the truths, but they must be willing to listen with an open heart, not get defensive and act on what they hear. As this research has shown, it is not uncommon for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers to share experiences of workplace racism – and even ask for assistance in addressing this – and for these experiences to be dismissed, minimised or just ignored and 'swept under the carpet'.

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WHAT THIS MIGHT LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE

A construction company had issues with their Indigenous staff feeling culturally unsafe in the workplace when interacting with clients and suppliers. The company brought an Indigenous consultant in to interview Indigenous staff across their workplace to explore this theme, working with them to identify points of friction and potential opportunities to address cultural safety concerns. Using an Indigenous consultant meant that Indigenous staff felt comfortable talking about their experiences.

Following the consultant's report detailing culturally unsafe incidents that Indigenous employees had experienced, the organisation publicly admitted it had a problem and committed to continuing to work with Indigenous staff on these issues.

This action developed trust and enabled Indigenous staff to work with the company to build cultural safety across the broader organisation. This work also made non-Indigenous colleagues aware of what their Indigenous colleagues might experience and how to play their part in combatting it.

2. Ensure any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-related work is Indigenous led and informed

Value the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers and enable us to see these voices are translated into meaningful organisational action.

It is critical that any and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-related activities, strategies and work is led and/or informed by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. This means putting Indigenous voices and perspectives at the centre of any work you do.

It's often the case that Indigenous people have a strong view that things are done 'to' them rather than 'with' them, with very good reason. It is important that employers understand the value of talking to Indigenous people about employment, rather than making assumptions based on incorrect or outmoded stereotypes.

Centreing Indigenous voices cannot be done in a tokenistic way. Often organisations can, in their rush to make a difference, fall into the trap of finding one Indigenous staff member and requiring them to sign off on an organisational initiative. Unfortunately, this is a tokenistic approach and not one which could, in good faith, be seen as centreing Indigenous voices or being Indigenous led or informed. Instead, the approach needs to be genuinely participatory and involve engaging and working with multiple Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander stakeholders (from within and/or outside the organisation).

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WHAT THIS MIGHT LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE

A large consulting company has adopted a workplace principle that states, 'Nothing about us without us'. For them, this principle encourages and asserts Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices within Indigenous strategic discussions and places Indigenous perspectives and experiences front and centre when developing documents or implementing strategies.

A hotel chain commissioned Indigenous researchers to conduct a survey and yarning circles (an Indigenous research method) in a variety of rural, regional and metropolitan locations. In commissioning this work, a 'listening' approach was negotiated between the organisation and the researchers. The researchers' report has resulted in a much-enhanced Indigenous engagement strategy that is based on employees' experiences and recommendations to enhance cultural safety.

3. Develop organisational principles to make it clear how Indigenous community engagement and employment should work in practice

Our organisation is moving forward by building operating principles with us, which show how employment and retention and community engagement policies are meant to work day to day.

Consider developing specific principles for your own organisation, which guide how Indigenous community engagement and employment should work in day-to-day practice.

Make sure you work in a participatory way with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and community members to develop these principles. You can then be confident that the principles have been Indigenous led and informed and are culturally appropriate. Consider looking beyond Indigenous staff to include the broader community that your organisation serves or is situated within.

Your organisation may also look to tie these principles back to broader social and human rights frameworks, such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) or the Uluru Statement From the Heart.

WHAT THIS MIGHT LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE

A financial services institution worked with an Indigenous consulting firm to align their internal principles and policies, including their Reconciliation Action Plan, with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

4. Focus on workplace readiness (cultural safety) rather than worker readiness

Organisations need to work on creating environments where we feel we belong.

To date, much of the dialogue in the Indigenous employment sector has focused on building Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff capacity and capability.

What is often missing is a focus on workplace readiness — that is, how culturally safe and inclusive the workplace is for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff. Organisations need to work with their staff to:

- identify and baseline current cultural safety levels

- determine how to improve these results.

This approach has been compared to establishing a campsite.[26] First, you would consider conditions such the location, weather, and activities you want to engage in. Then you think about meals, and clothing and camping equipment required. When the conditions have been planned and prepared for, the camper has a happy stay. When the conditions have been overlooked and ignored, the camper has a bad time and wants to leave.

WHAT THIS MIGHT LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE

An organisation has regular touchpoints with its Indigenous staff, testing their experiences within the company and asking how safe the workplace is for them to identify at work. This allows staff to provide regular feedback and enables the organisation to benchmark their experiences at work. It also provides the company's leadership with the ability to make decisions and determine how these impact their staff.

5. Recognise identity strain and educate non-Indigenous staff about how to interact with their Indigenous colleagues in ways that reduce this

An important element of creating a culturally safe and inclusive workplace is taking into account the identity strain that close to two-thirds (63%) of respondents reported dealing with at work. Instances of identity strain can include an Indigenous person having to work harder to prove that they can do the job, being asked to do something that compromises their cultural identity, or being told to 'tone it down' or be less outspoken about Indigenous issues.

I am somewhat afraid that I will be belittled or picked on by those in my workplace for being Indigenous.

WHAT THIS MIGHT LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE

A senior Indigenous man is a partner of a large corporation. He has shared his experiences with Indigenous colleagues, discussing the friction he experiences walking in two worlds and the impact of this. He notes that this is particularly the case at work. His work objectives are, at times, incongruent with his cultural views, and friction is created when he shares this with other partners of the firm. He finds the strain of navigating his identity at work difficult, meaning he has to return to Country regularly and connect with his family. He uses this experience to guide younger Indigenous staff, providing cultural and career advice in tandem to help them belong in the workplace.

6. Recognise and remunerate cultural load as part of an employee's workload

I think recognising the work that they require me to do on top of my regular job when it comes to promotion or just recognising the workload would be amazing.

Cultural load is the (often invisible) additional workload borne by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the workplace, where they are either the only Indigenous person or one of a small number of Indigenous people.[27] Well over a third (39%) of respondents reported having a high cultural load in their workplace. Cultural load can come from, for instance, extra Indigenous-related work demands that non-Indigenous colleagues do not have, expectations to educate non-Indigenous colleagues about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and racism, and expectations to talk on behalf of all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

This cultural load, often experienced in addition to identity strain, places a significant burden upon Indigenous employees, who must balance specific work requirements with these additional duties. Often, neither these additional duties nor the time spent on this work is fairly recognised or remunerated.

Organisations need to understand cultural load, and recognise and reward it in job descriptions. This provides Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees with the opportunity to spend time on and be fairly compensated for this important aspect of their work.

WHAT THIS MIGHT LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE

A large consulting company has hired a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) Manager to take on work related to the RAP and to participate in other organisational activities. This provides the organisation with a dedicated person and point of contact for Indigenous-related activities, while reducing the cultural load for other Indigenous staff. The RAP Manager has a set of metrics, set out in the RAP, to complete and is rewarded for their activity in this space.

Organisations also need to acknowledge the difficult and tokenistic position they inadvertently place Indigenous staff and suppliers in when they expect them to be comfortable being profiled in reporting and marketing materials as the token Indigenous employee or supplier. Often, these requests result in the individual feeling under pressure to comply due to the power imbalance between the organisation and themselves.

7. Consult with Indigenous staff on how to minimise cultural load while maintaining organisational activity

The Aboriginal person is always overloaded with the work of hold[ing] lovely, feel-good events for non-Aboriginal people to enjoy.

The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-focused activities that an organisation implements has a direct relationship with the level of cultural safety within that workplace. These activities provide opportunities for Indigenous employees to engage with the broader workforce, take time off for cultural events and share Indigenous culture through cultural awareness training.

However, these activities also place additional pressures on Indigenous staff. Respondents identified an inherent need to:

- recognise and reduce the cultural load placed on Indigenous staff members

- recognise and reward the time and effort that Indigenous people invest.

Organisations should also look at opportunities to share the load of activity development with non-Indigenous staff.

WHAT THIS MIGHT LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE

A national organisation has created a network of Reconciliation Action Plan Committees across the country, made up of Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff. These committees have their own budget and identify their own activities, while feeding into a national strategy and approach. Each of these networks engages with a local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff member to ensure local protocols are followed and provide a connection with the local community. This enables the organisation to have a positive relationship with the community and participate in local events, without placing all the burden on Indigenous staff members.

8. Focus on sustainable careers and career development, rather than just short-term appointments

Better career development opportunities for Indigenous people. Don't just hire people and let them fall behind in their careers. Actively support them, otherwise you are just reinforcing socio-economic structures and perceptions in wider society and applying them to your own workforce, i.e. keeping Indigenous people in junior roles without chance of career progression.

Career development is an important aspect of Indigenous workplace satisfaction and wellbeing. We found lack of career progression is a key reason that workplaces lose Indigenous staff – 21% of respondents seeking to leave their employer cited lack of career opportunities or promotion as the main reason for leaving, while 19% cited lack of career development.

Respondents highlighted the need to ensure meaningful career progression for Indigenous people into senior leadership and management within companies. Many highlighted opportunities to provide targeted or identified positions to attract Indigenous staff, particularly in more senior roles.

It is important to acknowledge that different staff will require different things, and that workplaces should acknowledge the diversity of Indigenous staff when building career opportunities and development programs.

Some steps to build sustainable career development for Indigenous staff could include:

- Listen to and develop a real understanding of your Indigenous staff.

- Build an accessible, meaningful Indigenous staff network that provides a culturally safe space to network.

- Enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to advise how organisational policies and practices can be made more culturally safe and inclusive.

- Provide Indigenous mentors to employees entering the workforce for the first time.

WHAT THIS MIGHT LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE

At a hospitality company on the Gold Coast, an older Aboriginal woman who works in the food-and-beverage area mentors younger Aboriginal people who are working for the first time. Hers is an 'Elder in residence' type of role. They can contact her at any time with questions or concerns about their job, policies, procedures and workplace dynamics and she keeps their concerns in confidence. The Elder can liaise with line managers if required and can help with personal or financial issues if they are impacting the person's ability to work. She is provided with time outside the normal course of her job to fulfil this role.

9. Take action to address workplace racism

A manager may listen but doesn't actually understand and thinks that listening is enough. They then move on, leaving the issue still lingering.

As the survey findings show, racism manifests in many ways and can have a dramatic impact on individuals, leading to identity strain, as well as reductions in job satisfaction and wellbeing. Often, respondents noted that their concerns lay with the actions the organisation took following a racist event. To address racism, organisations should:

- Develop, regularly review and promote racism complaint procedures and anti-discrimination compliance training.

- Train managers on how to constructively address and effectively resolve racism and exclusion.

- Train all staff on what constitutes racist behaviour and how to respond appropriately to a person raising a concern about racist behaviour.

WHAT THIS MIGHT LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE

One state government department has developed an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander training package and support network for Indigenous workers who have experienced racism within the workplace. The Indigenous network enables Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people to share their experiences with others who may have experienced these issues themselves, while providing practical tips to navigate the process and procedures. This helps support the staff member through the complaints procedure (where such a complaint procedure exists).

10. Look to high-impact initiatives – those that research shows are linked to better wellbeing and retention for Indigenous staff

It is not uncommon for organisations to focus on implementing initiatives that are popular rather than those that have been demonstrated to be effective.[28]

Gari Yala survey findings shed light on which initiatives are most likely to have a positive impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. Five workplace initiatives were consistently associated with better wellbeing and retention of Indigenous staff, despite these initiatives being some of the least commonly implemented in respondents' organisations. The initiatives are:

1. Formal career development programs for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees.

2. Racism complaint procedures.

3. Indigenous (Leader/Elder) support or sponsorship of new and young staff.

4. Anti-discrimination compliance training that includes reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

5. Celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander days or weeks of significance.

APPENDIX A: RESEARCH METHOD

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Survey development

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND DEVELOPMENT OF QUESTION BANK

An in-depth review of industry and academic research investigating the experiences of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in the workplace was conducted in early 2020. This also included a review of broad research looking at affiliation, exclusion, racism, cultural safety, cultural labour/load, organisational authenticity, workplace support and wellbeing. A bank of over 200 potential survey questions was developed, with questions based on the key themes identified in the literature review.

DEVELOPMENT OF DRAFT SURVEY

Jumbunna and DCA consulted with an Expert Panel of academics and employment practitioners to inform development and distribution of the survey.

The Expert Panel provided feedback on a first draft of the *Gari Yala* survey, which was based on the key themes identified in the literature review. Specifically, the Expert Panel considered:

- critical content areas to include in the survey
- refinement of proposed survey questions
- how to ensure a strengths-based approach
- key diversity-related demographics to include for intersectionality analysis
- appropriate sampling procedure and employment timeframe.

On this basis, a draft survey of over 90 questions was developed, with questions focusing on measuring affiliation, cultural safety, cultural load, identity strain, exclusion and racism, workplace support, organisational authenticity, workplace outcomes and diversity-related demographics. A second workshop was then held in with Expert Panellists in April 2020 to seek their feedback prior to piloting this draft survey.

PILOT OF DRAFT SURVEY

The draft survey was piloted in 3 organisations, through administering the survey to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander network groups within these organisations. In all, 57 respondents completed the survey. Statistical analysis of the pilot sample dataset was conducted to assist with reducing the survey length to 56 questions to minimise respondent fatigue. Specifically, frequency tables, chi-square tests of independence and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) were conducted to determine which items should be retained and which could be dropped.

FINALISATION OF SURVEY

The pilot findings were used to help finalise a 56-question survey. The survey questions were chosen on the basis of their ability to generate findings that were academically rigorous and covered key workplace experience themes for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers.

The final survey covered 10 key areas:

1. Affiliation
2. Strengths and Contributions
3. Cultural Safety
4. Cultural Load
5. Identity Strain
6. Exclusion and Racism
7. Effectiveness of Workplace Support
8. Organisational Authenticity
9. Wellbeing and Retention
10. Demographics (i.e. socio-demographics, job and organisational demographics).

Data collection

SURVEY SAMPLE

Gari Yala surveyed Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Australians who were employed at the time of responding or had been employed in the past 2 years. This 2-year criterion was included on the Expert Panel's advice, in recognition that the survey is intended to be conducted every 2 years.

A combination of 2 sampling methods was used to attain the final sample:

- Jumbunna, DCA and project sponsors Coles and NAB commissioned Polity Research & Consulting to conduct an online survey of 250 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Australians, administered through a research-only survey panel. This approach did not use a probability sample — as with all internet surveying in Australia, the sample was drawn from nonprobability opt-in panels of survey volunteers maintained by the commercial provider.

- The survey was also administered using a non-probability/ snowballing convenience sampling method. The survey was distributed through DCA's member email distribution list, trusted social media groups for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, sponsor employee resource groups and community groups. Using this approach, 783 respondents completed the survey.

Findings are based on the total responses from 1,033 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers based in Australia who completed the survey (see Appendix B for characteristics of the survey sample).

FIELDWORK

The research was conducted online between 16 June and 9 July 2020. Participants who were recruited from a professional market- and social-research panel received a small incentive for their participation.

Survey measures

Cultural safety. Cultural safety means being able to practise your culture free of ridicule or condemnation.[29] It occurs when a workplace acknowledges, respects and accommodates difference. Unsafe cultural practice is any action which diminishes, demeans or disempowers the cultural identity and wellbeing of an individual.[30]

Culturally safe, somewhat culturally safe and culturally unsafe workplaces. Respondents completed 6 items relating to cultural safety, expressing cultural beliefs, being valued as an Indigenous employee, Indigenous-focused roles and cultural leave. Each respondent's responses were used to create a composite score out of 5 (where 5 = culturally safe all the time and 1 = never culturally safe). Respondents in culturally safe workplaces scored their workplace on average 4 or more out of 5 on survey questions asking how often their workplace was culturally safe. Respondents in somewhat culturally safe workplaces scored their workplace on average between 3 and 4 out of 5, while respondents in culturally unsafe workplaces scored their workplace on average 3 or less out of 5.

Cultural load. Cultural load is the (often invisible) load borne by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the workplace, where they are either the only Indigenous person or are one of a small number of Indigenous people.[31] This creates an additional workload associated with, for instance, being consistently expected to respond to all things relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the workplace and speak on behalf of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.[32]

High, moderate and low cultural load. Respondents completed 4 items relating to the extent to which they experience having extra work demands and educational expectations placed on them because of their Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity. Each respondent's responses were used to create a composite score out of 5 (where 5 = never experienced cultural load and 1 = always experienced cultural load). Respondents with low cultural load scored on average 4 or more out of 5 on survey questions asking how often they experienced cultural load. Respondents with moderate cultural load scored on average between 3 and 4 out of 5, while respondents with high cultural load scored on average 3 or less out of 5.

Discrimination, racism and exclusion. Discrimination was defined as being treated unfairly at work because of a person's Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity. Being 'treated unfairly' referred to a respondent being treated as if they were inferior, being treated rudely or with disrespect, being ignored, insulted, harassed, stereotyped, discriminated against or having unfair assumptions made about them. We have used the broad term 'racism' in our study because we are reporting on race-based discrimination, race-based harassment and race-based exclusion in the workplace, using questions adapted from the Measure of Indigenous Racism Experiences,[33] the Everyday Discrimination Scale[34] and the Chronic Work Discrimination and Harassment Scale.[35]

Organisational authenticity. Organisational authenticity stems from a genuine support within the workplace to be inclusive and provide equitable treatment to Indigenous people and employees. This may be shown through leadership commitments, organisational policies or a focus on sustainable careers and career development, rather than just short-term appointments.

High, moderate and low organisational authenticity. Respondents completed 5 items relating to the extent to which they believed their organisation was genuine, committed, had fair policies and focused on quality careers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees. These items were adapted and expanded on from Button's LGBTI-inclusion climate measure.[36] Each respondent's responses were used to create a composite score out of 5 (where 5 = high authenticity and 1 = low authenticity). Respondents in highly authentic organisations scored their organisation 4 or more out of 5, while respondents in moderately authentic organisations scored their workplace between 3 and 4 out of 5. Respondents in organisations low in authenticity scored their workplace, on average, 3 or less out of 5. Respondents who had a composite score of exactly 3 (at the midpoint of the scale) were removed from further analysis, as they were considered not to have a leaning in either direction.

High, moderate and low organisational activity. Respondents were given a list of 16 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-focused initiatives and asked which ones their organisation had in place. Respondents in high-activity organisations indicated their organisation had implemented 9 or more of these initiatives. Moderate-activity organisations had between 4 and 8 of the possible initiatives, while low-activity organisations had implemented 3 or fewer of the possible initiatives.

Identity strain. We have used the term 'identity strain' to refer to the strain employees feel when they themselves, or others, view their identity as not meeting the norms or expectations of the dominant culture in the workplace. The concept of identity strain draws on literature investigating the efforts and energies members of minority groups expend negotiating and managing their identity in the workplace to avoid the negative consequences of discrimination, harassment, bias and marginalisation.[37] It also draws on other identity literature that demonstrates employees can feel pressure to change how they present themselves at work if they feel their identity and values do not conform with those of the organisation.[38] The survey questions for cultural load and identity strain were originally grouped under the one construct of cultural load. However, exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses indicated these survey questions should be split across 2 factors: one covering additional burden placed on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people (cultural load) and one covering pressure for identity conformity (identity strain).

High, moderate and low identity strain. Respondents completed 4 items relating to the extent to which they felt they had to compromise cultural integrity, are told to 'tone it down', work harder and avoid certain people and social situations[39] because of their Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity. Each respondent's responses were used to create a composite score out of 5 (where 5 = never experienced identity strain and 1 = always experienced identity strain). Respondents with low identity strain scored on average 4 or more out of 5 on survey questions asking how often they experienced identity strain. Respondents with moderate identity strain scored on average between 3 and 4 out of 5, while respondents with high identity strain scored on average 3 or less out of 5.

Location. *Gari Yala* collected respondents' postcodes to understand any differences between Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workplace experiences based on rural, regional or urban location. However, the Expert Panel noted that current postcode classification approaches (for example, those of the ABS and the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment) have limited ability to provide insight into these potential differences, as many geographical areas are in a state of change. To address this, the next iteration of *Gari Yala* will seek to ask respondents more meaningful questions to determine location differences, for example regarding access to services and jobs.

Data analysis

TESTING VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

To ensure that Cultural Safety, Identity Strain, Cultural Load and Organisational Authenticity scales met academic and industry standards of rigor, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted on the sample data.

- **Cultural Safety:** TLI (0.99), CFI (0.99), RMSEA (0.046) and SRMR (0.018) scores within the threshold for good fit.[40]

- **Identity Strain:** TLI (0.934), CFI (0.987), RMSEA (0.130) and SRMR (0.025) scores within the threshold for acceptable fit.

- **Cultural Load:** TLI (0.993), CFI (0.998), RMSEA (0.051) and SRMR (0.008) scores within the threshold for good fit.

- **Organisational Authenticity:** TLI (0.994), CFI (0.997), RMSEA (0.036) and SRMR (0.015) scores within the threshold for good fit.

Cronbach's alpha was used to measure the internal reliability for each of the above constructs, with results indicating good reliability – Cultural Safety had an alpha score of 0.85, Identity Strain 0.83, Cultural Load 0.90 and Organisational Authenticity 0.82.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS FOR COMPARISON

SPSS Statistics 27 software was used to conduct the statistical analysis. For each contingency table, a chi-squared statistic was calculated to determine whether there was an association between the 2 variables. The association between the 2 variables in a given contingency table was considered significant if the p-value for the chi-squared statistic was less than .05 (i.e. the α criterion). Except where qualified in the text, all reported findings were significantly different at the 95% confidence level. For contingency tables considered statistically significant, adjusted standardised residuals greater (in absolute size) than +/-1.96 were examined to determine what was driving the association (for example, whether one group responded with more agreement to a given question than another group).

Limitations

Previous studies have shown that online research produces results that are at least as accurate as (and sometimes more accurate than) telephone research. However, a benefit of this approach is the removal of any interviewer bias that may come into play when discussing sensitive issues. Online surveys also have the advantage of allowing people to respond at their own pace, giving them enough time to properly consider important and complex issues. However, it is possible that this method over-samples the computer-literate population which, on average, may be more educated than the general population of workers.

APPENDIX B:
CHARACTER-ISTICS OF SURVEY SAMPLE

Demographic	N=	%
ABORIGINAL AND/OR TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER IDENTITY		
Aboriginal	**885**	85.7%
Torres Strait Islander	**56**	5.4%
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	**92**	8.9%
AGE		
18-24 years	167	12.7%
25-34 years	276	27.0%
35-44 years	259	25.0%
45-54 years	195	18.9%
55-64 years	120	11.3%
65+ years	16	1.6%
GENDER		
Men	383	37.7%
Women	623	61.3%
Other gender/non-binary/gender fluid	10	1.0%
DEGREE QUALIFIED		
Postgraduate	160	15.5%
Graduate diploma/graduate certificate	119	11.5%
Bachelor degree	226	21.9%
Advanced diploma or diploma	157	15.2%
Cert I, II, III or IV	248	24.0%
Secondary education	107	10.4%
Primary education	8	0.8%
Other education	8	0.8%

Demographic	N=	%
STATE		
ACT	52	5.0%
NSW	408	39.5%
NT	23	2.2%
QLD	183	17.7%
SA	50	4.8%
TAS	18	1.7%
VIC	165	16.0%
WA	134	13%
WORK HISTORY		
Currently in paid employment	988	95.6%
Not currently employed, but have been in paid employment in last 2 years	45	4.4%
EMPLOYMENT TYPE		
Working full-time permanent	726	70.3%
Working part-time permanent	179	17.2%
Working contract based	124	12.0%
Working casual — fixed and temporary	58	6.5%
Self employed	28	2.7%
ROLE TYPE		
Senior executive (e.g. C-level, board-level, VP, GM, area/divisional manager, MD, ADF star rank officer)	44	4.3%
Managerial (e.g. line manager, department manager, director, ADF LTCOL(E) or COL(E))	142	13.7%
Deputy managerial (e.g. assistant/trainee manager, team leader, ADF SGT(E) to MAJ(E))	156	15.1%
Employee (e.g. non-managerial, ADF PTE(E) to CPL(E))	600	58.1%
Entry-level (e.g. apprenticeship, graduate-in-take, internship,	91	8.8%
ORG TYPE		
An identified role	347	33.6%
A CDP job/organisation	36	3.5%
An Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisation or Indigenous-run business	81	7.8%
A team/unit/organisation where a large proportion of workers are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	99	9.6%
An Indigenous unit/team in a mainstream organisation	130	12.6%
A large mainstream organisation with more than 1000 employees	464	44.9%
A large mainstream organisation with more than 200 but less than 1000 employees	171	16.6%
A medium-sized mainstream organisation with more than 20 but less than 200 employees	89	8.6%
A small mainstream organisation with less than 20 employees	53	5.1%

Demographic	N=	%
INDUSTRY		
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	24	2.3%
Mining	40	3.9%
Manufacturing	23	2.2%
Electricity, gas, water and waste services	59	5.7%
Construction	36	3.5%
Wholesale trade	10	1.0%
Retail trade	36	3.5%
Accommodation and food services	19	1.8%
Transport, postal and warehousing	15	1.5%
Information media and telecommunications	18	1.7%
Financial and insurance services	44	4.3%
Rental, hiring and real estate services	8	0.8%
Professional, scientific and technical services	67	6.5%
Administrative and support services	90	8.7%
Public administration and safety	141	13.6%
Education and training	112	10.8%
Healthcare and social assistance	237	22.9%
Arts and recreation services	17	1.6%
Other (please specify), inadequately described and not stated	37	3.6%
INTERNATIONAL/LOCAL		
Multi-regional/MNC	314	30.4%
CARE		
Did not provide care	505	48.9%
Cared for child/children only	47	4.5%
Cared for adult/adults only	113	10.9%
Cared for both child/children AND adult/adults	368	35.6%
DISABILITY		
With disability	225	21.8%
SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY		
LGBTIQ+	186	18.0%

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