GARI YALA
SPEAK THE TRUTH

Synopsis report

UTS
Jumbunna
Institute for Indigenous
Education and Research

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

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

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.

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 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

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 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

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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

WHY THIS PROJECT?

WHAT WE DID

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,[1] 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.[2]

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.

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 *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 Islander workers. Their insights and recommendations for organisational action are presented in this report, which details their narratives and experiences.

Throughout this report, we share the views of Indigenous people who responded to the *Gari Yala* survey. This report does not purport to represent the experiences of all Indigenous people, rather, the experiences of those who participated in the survey.

Various sampling methods were used, including accessing Polity Research & Consulting's Indigenous research panel, as well as 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.

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.[3] 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,[4] used Indigenous labour to help build the colonial structures within Australia. Often, this was done with limited acknowledgement and through indentured processes.[5] This background continues to inform relationships and workplace mentality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees. Indigenous people still suffer profound injustices within Australia.[6]

Today, over 65% of Indigenous people in Australia have secured employment,[7] with a growing Indigenous middle class who are 'largely overlooked'.[8] 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.[9] 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."*[10]

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.

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.

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.

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

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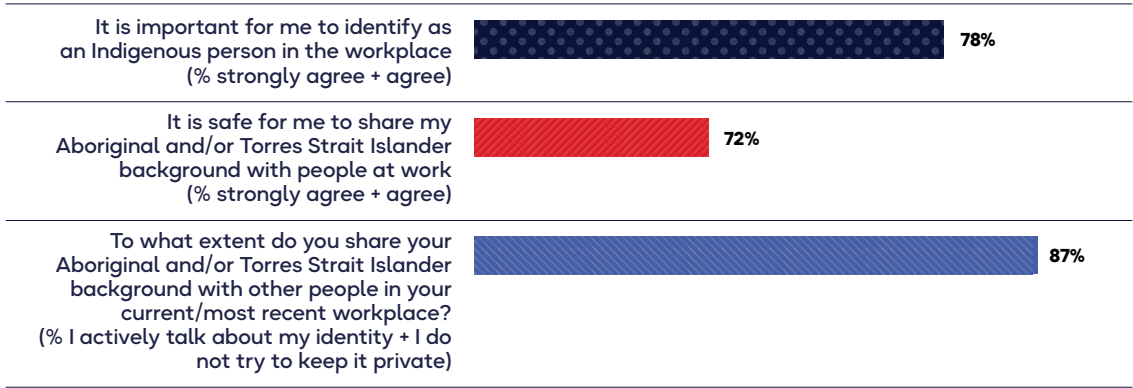
As with all societal discussions and movements, these reach into the workplace and have the ability to inform organisational culture.

ABORIGINAL AND/OR TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER IDENTITY AT WORK

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

We asked 1,033 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% said 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.

It is important for me to identify as an Indigenous person in the workplace (% strongly agree + agree)	78%
It is safe for me to share my Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background with people at work (% strongly agree + agree)	72%
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%

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.

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.

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.

HOW CULTURALLY SAFE ARE AUSTRALIAN WORKPLACES?

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.[11]
It occurs when a workplace acknowledges, respects and accommodates difference.[12]

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.

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

- **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

- **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

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

| 29% | 12% | 4% |

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

| 31% | 13% | 6% |

I am comfortable expressing my cultural and personal beliefs at work

| 26% | 8% | 3% |

■ Sometimes　■ Rarely　■ Never

Racist behaviours, such as unfair treatment and harassment based on race, were strongly linked to culturally unsafe workplaces. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers in culturally unsafe workplaces were:

- 4 times more likely to have heard racial or ethnic slurs or jokes at work (64% in culturally unsafe workplaces compared to 16% in culturally safe workplaces).

- 3 times more likely to have been treated unfairly at work because of their background in the past year compared to those who work in culturally safe workplaces (73% in culturally unsafe workplaces compared to 21% in culturally safe workplaces), and

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)

| 16% |
| 64% |

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

| 21% |
| 73% |

■ Culturally Safe Workplace　■ Culturally unsafe Workplace

THE BURDEN OF IDENTITY STRAIN AND CULTURAL LOAD

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

'Identity strain' (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[13] demonstrating members of minority groups expend effort and energy managing their identity in the workplace to avoid the negative consequences of discrimination, harassment, bias and marginalisation.

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.

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.

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

23%	20%	22%

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

25%	13%	6%

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

17%	10%	6%

■ Sometimes ■ Often ■ All the time

Identity strain has a cost. Indigenous workers with high identity strain were:

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

· 3 times less likely to recommend their workplace to other Indigenous people (15% high identity strain compared to 50% low identity strain), and

· 3 times more likely to intend to leave their employer in the next year (36% high identity strain compared to 11% low identity strain).

I am very satisfied with my job (% always)
- 42%
- 14%

I would recommend my workplace to other Indigenous people (% always)
- 50%
- 15%

I am likely to make a genuine effort to find a new job with another employer within the next year (% very likely)
- 11%
- 36%

■ Low Identity Strain   ▨ High Identity Strain
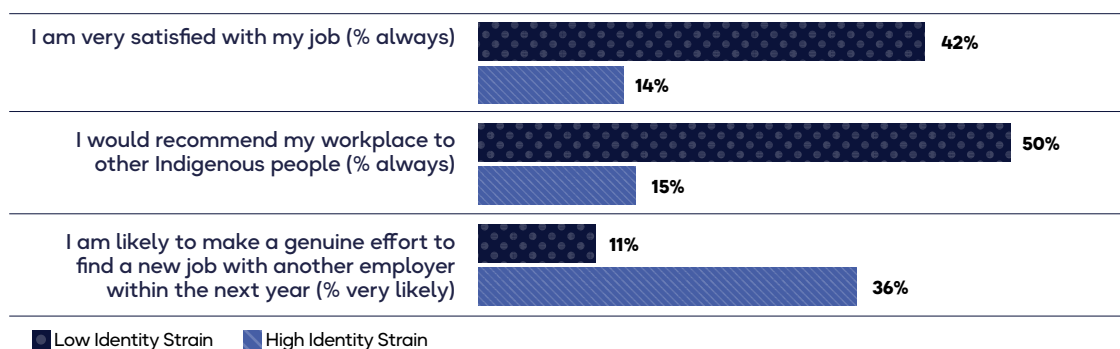
Well over a third of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers carry the burden of high cultural load

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.[14]

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

39% of respondents reported having a high cultural load in their workplace. This came in the form of:

- **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.

I am expected to educate my non-Indigenous colleagues about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and culture
- 26%
- 23%
- 22%

I am expected to talk on behalf of all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples
- 26%
- 24%
- 19%

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)
- 25%
- 19%
- 22%

■ Sometimes   ▨ Often   ▨ All the time

Cultural load is a heavy burden. Indigenous workers with high cultural load were:

- 2 times less likely to always be satisfied with their job compared to those experiencing low cultural load (18% high cultural load compared to 43% low cultural load)

- 2 times less likely to recommend their workplace to other Indigenous people (21% high cultural load compared to 51% low cultural load), and

- 2 times more likely to intend to leave their employer in the next year (27% high cultural load compared to 14% low cultural load).

I am very satisfied with my job (% always)
- 43%
- 18%

I would recommend my workplace to other Indigenous people (% always)
- 51%
- 21%

I am likely to make a genuine effort to find a new job with another employer within the next year (% very likely)
- 14%
- 27%

■ Low Cultural Load   ▨ High Cultural Load
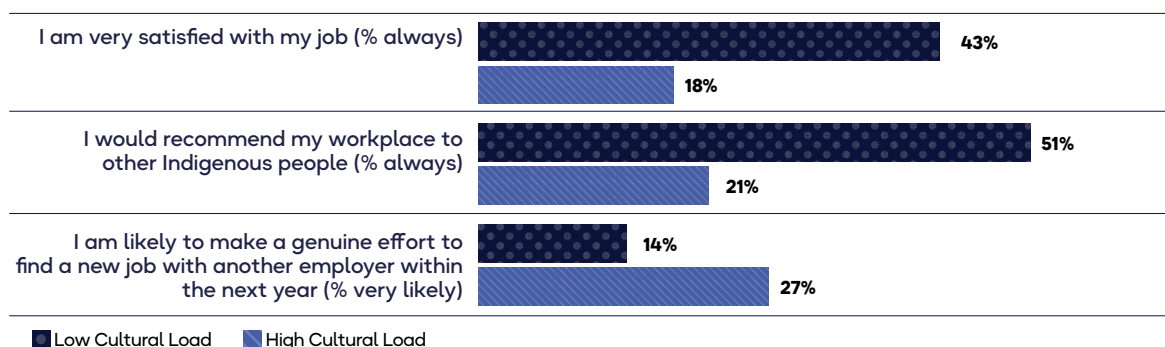
WHAT IS THE STATE OF EXCLUSION FOR ABORIGINAL AND/OR TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER WORKERS?

Indigenous employees face significant workplace racism and exclusion

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 …'

Our survey revealed that racism is having a real and dramatic impact on Indigenous employees.
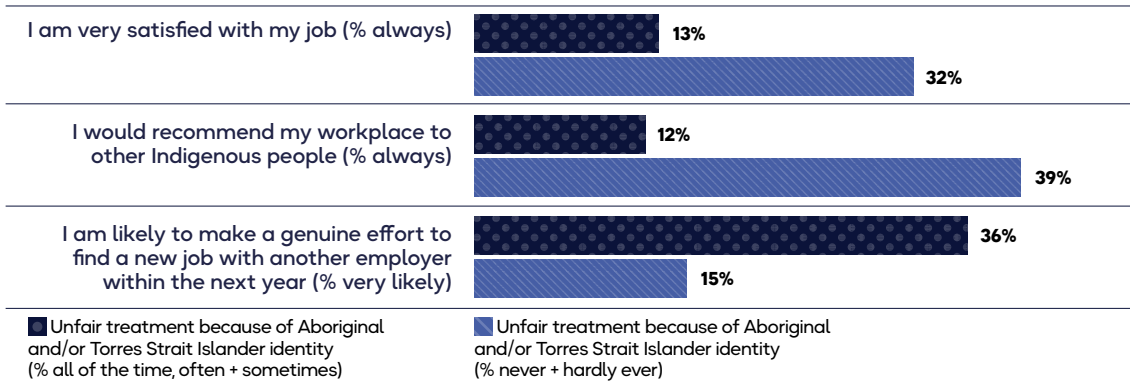
Unfair treatment and racist slurs are all too common – 38% reported being treated unfairly because of their Indigenous background and 44% reported hearing racial slurs sometimes, often or all the time.

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 unfair racist treatment were:

- 2.5 times less likely to always be satisfied with their job, vs those who rarely or never experienced unfair racist treatment (13% experience all of the time/often/always compared to 32% never/hardly ever)

- 3 times less likely to always recommend their workplace to other Indigenous people (12% experience all of the time/often/always compared to 39% never/hardly ever), and

- 2 times more likely to be looking for a new employer in the next year (36% experience all of the time/often/always compared to 15% never/hardly ever).

I am very satisfied with my job (% always)	13% / 32%
I would recommend my workplace to other Indigenous people (% always)	12% / 39%
I am likely to make a genuine effort to find a new job with another employer within the next year (% very likely)	36% / 15%

■ 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)
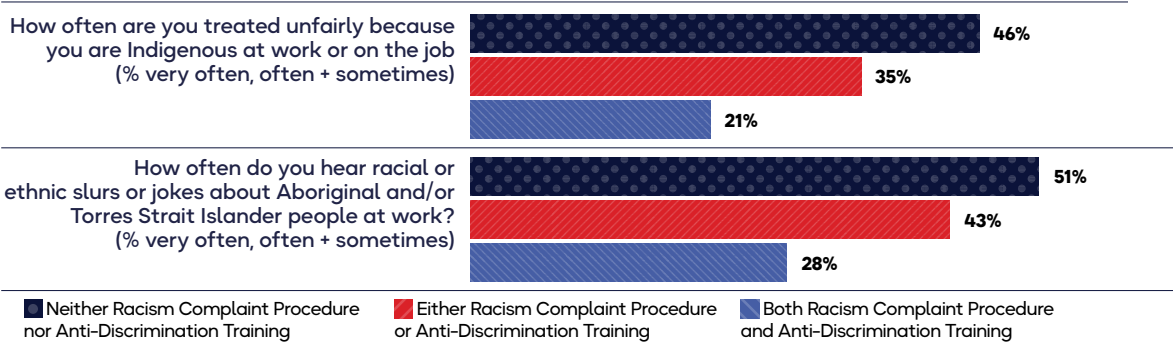
Workplace supports are ineffective – only a third (33%) of respondents who had experienced unfair workplace treatment/racial slurs or jokes agreed or strongly agreed that they had the workplace support required when they experienced racism.

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

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.

Only a fifth of respondents worked in organisations with both a racism complaint procedure and anti-discrimination compliance training that included reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander discrimination and harassment. 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 46% with neither), and

·   **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).

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

- 46%
- 35%
- 21%

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%
- 43%
- 28%

■ Neither Racism Complaint Procedure nor Anti-Discrimination Training   ■ Either Racism Complaint Procedure or Anti-Discrimination Training   ■ Both Racism Complaint Procedure and Anti-Discrimination Training

HOW AUTHENTIC ARE AUSTRALIAN ORGANISATIONS?

Organisational authenticity makes a difference but is not common

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.

Organisational authenticity involves the genuine commitment of an organisation to move from words to action, and visible commitment from leadership to lead by example, when it comes to creating a workplace that is inclusive and treats 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 (48% in highly authentic organisation compared to 9% in organisations with low authenticity)

- 8 times more likely to recommend their workplace to other Indigenous people (61% in highly authentic organisation compared to 7% in organisations with low authenticity), and

- 2.5 times less likely to intend to leave their employer in the next year (14% in highly authentic organisation compared to 41% in organisations with low authenticity).

I am very satisfied with my job (% always)
- 9%
- 48%

I would recommend my workplace to other Indigenous people (% always)
- 7%
- 61%

I am likely to make a genuine effort to find a new job with another employer within the next year (% very likely)
- 41%
- 14%

■ Low Organisational Authenticity   ■ High Organisational Authenticity

Organisations with lower authenticity overpromise and underdeliver. 38% 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.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ORGANISATIONAL INITIATIVES AND ACTIVITY

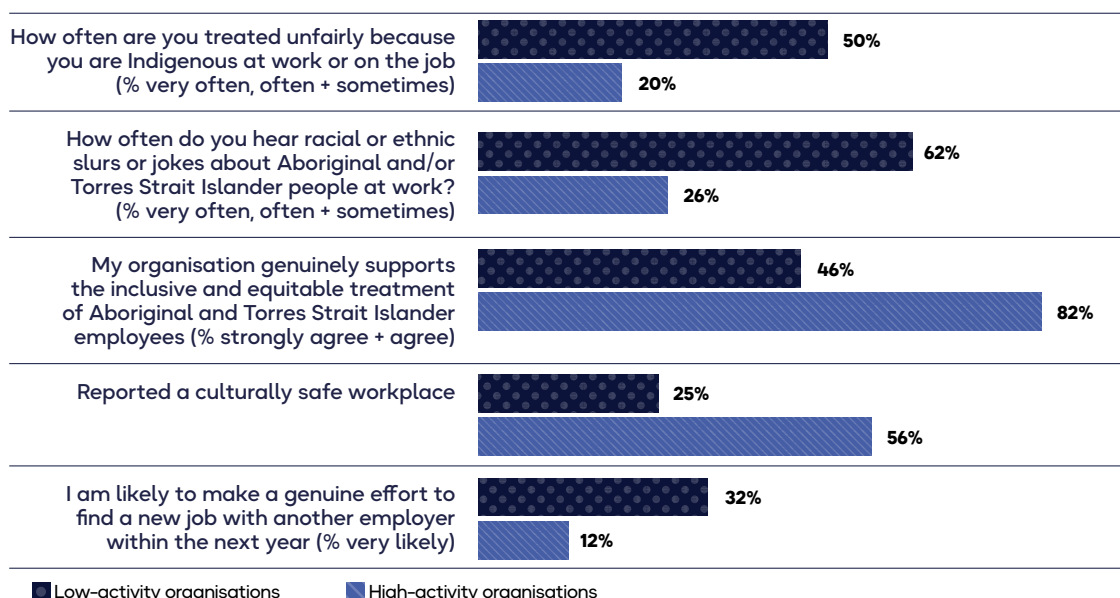## When organisations are active, outcomes improve

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.

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:

- over 2 times less likely to be treated unfairly because they are Indigenous (20% in high-activity versus 50% in low-activity), or to hear racial or ethnic slurs or jokes about Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people at work (26% in high-activity versus 62% in low-activity)

- 2 times more likely to agree that their organisation genuinely supports equitable treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees (82% in high-activity versus 46% in low-activity)

- 2 times more likely to report that their organisation was culturally safe (56% in high-activity compared to 25% in low-activity), and

- almost 3 times less likely to be looking for a new employer in the next year (12% in high-activity compared to 32% in low-activity).

How often are you treated unfairly because you are Indigenous at work or on the job (% very often, often + sometimes)	50% / 20%
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)	62% / 26%
My organisation genuinely supports the inclusive and equitable treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees (% strongly agree + agree)	46% / 82%
Reported a culturally safe workplace	25% / 56%
I am likely to make a genuine effort to find a new job with another employer within the next year (% very likely)	32% / 12%

■ Low-activity organisations   ■ High-activity organisations

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

What organisations can do: 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.

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

Talk to us, engage us 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. 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.

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 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.

Centreing Indigenous voices cannot be done in a tokenistic way. 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).

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.

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.

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.

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.[15] This includes, 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.

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.

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 (usually unrecognised and unremunerated) cultural load pressures on Indigenous staff.

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. 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.

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.

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. 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.

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

Gari Yala survey findings shed light on which initiatives are most likely to have a positive impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. 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.

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.

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