



Position Statement and Working Definitions for Racism and Anti-racism in the Aotearoa New Zealand Health System



The right to live free from racism

In Aotearoa New Zealand (Aotearoa), we all have a ‘right’ to be treated fairly and with respect and to live our lives free from racism. We also have a ‘duty’ of citizenship to our communities to contribute to and ensure freedom from racial discrimination. These ‘rights’ and ‘duties’ are protected, supported and reinforced under various constitutional, legislative and international instruments, including:

- › Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the Treaty of Waitangi (Te Tiriti)
- › Human Rights Act 1993
- › New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990
- › United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)
- › United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD).

Our commitment and a call to action



As a department of the public service, the Ministry of Health (the Ministry) has a responsibility to support the way the health system (the system) understands, reacts, responds to and addresses racism in all its forms. Eliminating all forms of racism is critical to achieving health equity and the vision of pae ora – healthy futures for all New Zealanders and congruent with upholding our obligations to Māori under Te Tiriti.

This position statement signals the Ministry's expectations for the system to act against racism. It reinforces the commitments outlined in *Whakamaua: Māori Health Action Plan*¹, *'Ola Manuia: Pacific Health and Wellbeing Action Plan*², *New Zealand Cancer Action Plan*³ and *Kia Manawanui Aotearoa*⁴ and is a cornerstone for the Ministry's anti-racism work programme *Ao Mai te Rā: the Anti-Racism Kaupapa*⁵.

Racism is pervasive and is deeply embedded in our systems and structures.^{6 7} Evidence indicates that, even when controlling for other socioeconomic variables, experiences of racism are linked to a range of negative health outcomes and risk factors.^{8 9 10} The cumulative impacts of racism in Aotearoa across multiple levels means Māori and Pacific peoples are more likely to experience disproportionate rates of health risk,^{11 12} higher rates of morbidity and mortality,^{13 14} and shorter life expectancy compared with the general population.¹⁵

All forms of racism are harmful and produce outcomes that chronically favour, privilege and benefit some groups over others.^{16 17} The relationship between the presence of racism, the unequal distribution of the social determinants and the impacts of racism on health outcomes is well evidenced¹⁸ and has been described in recent publications, including the Waitangi Tribunal *Hauora Report: Wai 2575 Health Services and Outcomes Kaupapa Inquiry*¹⁹ and the *Health and Disability Review – Final Report*²⁰.

Together, we can create an anti-racist and equitable health system that ensures all people, including Māori, Pacific peoples and communities of colour, can thrive. The ability to name and take action against racism is premised on sharing both an understanding of the consequences of racism in health and a language for what constitutes racism and what effective anti-racism action looks like. This position statement includes evidence-informed working definitions for racism and anti-racism fit for the Aotearoa context. The two working definitions:

- › are evidence-informed and supported by the *Evolution of Racism and Anti-racism Literature Review*
- › are fit for the Aotearoa New Zealand context
- › recognise the status of Māori as tangata whenua and respond to our obligations under Te Tiriti
- › recognise and support the health sector principles set out in the *Pae Ora (Healthy Futures) Act 2022*
- › provide broader context and support for *the Ministry's position statement on Te Tiriti o Waitangi*
- › provide a broader context and support for *the Ministry's definition of equity*.

Our working definition for racism



Racism comprises racial prejudice and societal power and manifests in different ways. It results in the unequal distribution of power, privilege, resources and opportunity to produce outcomes that chronically favour, privilege and benefit one group over another. All forms of racism are harmful, and its effects are distinct and not felt equally.

This definition of racism is underpinned by the following characteristics and features.

- › **Race and racialisation are social and political constructs** designed to categorise physical differences between people (that is, skin colour, hair texture, geographical origins, etc) and assign value and meaning to a hierarchically arranged racial grouping. These constructs originated from Europe and influenced the structure of society, racial superiority and hierarchy.^{21 22}
- › **Race has been used as a tool of oppression to dehumanise people into sub-human or non-human categories** providing the historical justification for colonisation and slavery.^{23 24} The practice of colonisation and assimilation in Aotearoa is founded on an ideology of racial superiority and hierarchy, disproportionately impacting Māori, Pacific peoples and communities of colour.^{25 26}
- › **Racial superiority and hierarchy have provided the basis for racial prejudice** (a set of assumptions about racial difference) **and the distribution of societal power** (granted by socio-political and economic structures).^{27 28}
- › **Racism is also a social and political construct comprised of racial prejudice and societal power.** It is a system that assigns value and structures opportunity (through legislation, policy, practices, norms) based on race.^{29 30}
- › **Racism is pervasive and deeply embedded in society.**³¹ **Racism manifests in different ways.**^{32 33}
 - › **Internalised racism**^{*}: The acceptance and internalisation of oppressive or dominant values, beliefs, attitudes and stereotypes about one's own race.^{34 35 36 37} It occurs within an individual.

* For historically marginalised groups, internalised racism includes embracing 'whiteness', disempowerment, self-devaluation and a self-image of inferiority. It can manifest in a form of horizontal or lateral violence that reinforces oppression. For historically dominant groups, it is expressed as unearned privileges, access to institutional power, invisible advantages and inflated self-image of superiority (Pheterson G. 1986. Alliances between women: overcoming internalized oppression and internalized domination. *Signs Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol 12(1): 146–60; Jones CP. 2000. Levels of racism: A theoretic framework and a gardener's tale. *American Journal of Public Health*, 90(8), 1,212–15; Watts-Jones D. 2002. Healing internalized racism: The role of a within-group sanctuary among people of African descent. *Family Process*, 41(4), 591–601.



- › **Interpersonal racism:** When individuals interact with others and their personal racial prejudice affects how they act and behave (overtly, covertly, conscious, unconscious, implicit, explicit) towards racialised 'others'. It occurs between individuals.³⁸
- › **Institutional racism:** Policies, practices and laws that, intentionally or not, exclude and foster the unequal distribution of power and privilege. It determines differential access to goods, services and the opportunities of society based on race. It occurs within an institution or system.³⁹
- › **Structural racism:** The cumulative impact of multiple institutions that fosters racial inequity through mutually reinforcing policies, practices, and laws (that is, housing, employment, education, etc). It occurs among institutions or systems and is a feature of the social, economic and political systems in which we all exist.⁴⁰
- › **Racism results in the unequal distribution of power and privilege,** structuring opportunity in a way that unfairly excludes and disadvantages some individuals and communities while simultaneously advantaging others.^{41 42}
- › **Racism produces outcomes that chronically advantage, favour and benefit some groups over others.** The corollary to racism is white privilege, which recognises the historical and contemporary presence of advantage and the absence of impediment that has been afforded to white communities simply by belonging to the dominant racial group.^{43 44 45}
- › **All forms of racism are harmful, and the effects of racism are distinct and not felt equally.**^{46 47} Racism is further compounded by additional markers of social difference, including indigeneity, disability, gender, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, etc.^{48 49}

Our working definition for anti-racism

Anti-racism actively opposes and addresses racism in all its forms. Anti-racism accepts the need to redistribute power, privilege, resources and opportunity. It requires people and institutions to examine their power and privilege and acknowledge and address power imbalances. It is an essential enabler of wellbeing and equity, particularly for Māori, Pacific peoples and communities of colour.

This definition of anti-racism is underpinned by the following characteristics and features.

- › **Anti-racism is action oriented.** It actively opposes racism and requires a commitment to naming and interrupting racism and strategising for change.^{50 51}
- › **Anti-racism redistributes power, resources and opportunity to achieve health equity.** It recognises that different people with different levels of advantage require different approaches and resources to achieve equitable health outcomes.⁵²
- › **Anti-racism necessitates a spectrum of activity and an ecosystem of change.**⁵³
 - › It leverages cultural safety, requiring critical self-reflection and an examination of one's power, beliefs, attitudes and actions.⁵⁴
 - › It requires structural analysis, making visible and challenging the systems and structures that maintain power and perpetuate racism.^{55 56}
- › **Anti-racism is congruent with Te Tiriti.** It recognises the status of Māori as tangata whenua, reaffirms tino rangatiratanga (Māori sovereignty) and recognises and respects partnerships with equal power relations based around Te Tiriti.^{57 58}
- › **Anti-racism requires individual and collective responsibility and a proactive commitment** to unlearning, learning and relearning at an individual and institutional level.⁵⁹ It removes colonial elements (practices and processes) that maintain and perpetuate racism, while adding and embedding indigenous elements. It shifts beyond tokenistic gestures of recognition and inclusion to meaningfully change practices and process.
- › **Anti-racism is strengths based and rejects deficit explanations of racial health inequities** by examining health inequities within the historical context of colonisation and naming institutional and structural racism.⁶⁰
- › **Anti-racism centres the experiences and perspectives of Māori, Pacific peoples and communities of colour.** It deliberately decentres white privilege and white fragility.^{61 62}





- › **Anti-racism reinforces Māori, Pacific peoples and communities of colour as people in possession of human rights,**⁶³ acknowledging the contribution and value of indigeneity and diversity to society.
- › **Anti-racism requires positive forms of active allyship** that supports the redistribution of power. It is not exploitative and recognises that Māori, Pacific peoples and communities of colour are not obliged to teach even the most well-intentioned people about race, racism and its impacts on health.^{64 65}

This definition rejects notions of:

- › **ahistoricism**, which implies the present is disconnected from the past⁶⁶ (Anti-racism necessitates an understanding of Te Tiriti, Aotearoa colonial history and the subsequent forces of colonisation.^{67 68})
- › **meritocracy**, which ignores the existence of an uneven playing field that structurally disadvantages Māori, Pacific peoples and communities of colour and assumes all people have the same access to the same rights and benefits (Anti-racism recognises the impacts of oppression and privilege on a person's chances for success.^{69 70 71})
- › anti-racism as a **'zero-sum' game**, where creating a fair and just society means some people will win and others will lose (Anti-racism understands the economic benefits of a society that is inclusive of Māori, Pacific peoples and communities of colour.⁷²)
- › **the equality of oppression**, which implies all forms of oppression carry an equal weight. (Anti-racism acknowledges that different social groups experience oppression to varying degrees and in different ways. It incorporates intersectional approaches and is careful not to further oppress or exacerbate inequity within historically marginalised groups.)

Endnotes

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