

Warriorship in the face of Racism: a new toolkit for Mob



Tegan Scheffe

Racism towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has been persistent throughout Australia's colonial history. While the discriminatory laws and policies this nation was built upon have mostly been amended, deeply embedded systemic and interpersonal racism remains. Denying the truth of racism in Australia today prevents us from addressing it in any meaningful way.

When Professor Pat Dudgeon attended the Boatshed Declaration in 2009 (a meeting between academics at the University of Western Australia (UWA) discussing research into racism towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples), she was met with confusion from many of the attendees about why racism was being discussed. They argued it was an outdated topic of discussion, Australia being 'no longer a racist country'. This is far from the truth; racism was alive and well in 2009 and continues to be widespread and prevalent today.

This has been very visibly demonstrated in the aftermath of the 2023 'Voice to Parliament' referendum, with many of our Mob reporting they have experienced a dramatic increase in direct racism since the referendum, both online, and in-person. We have seen the modern Welcome to Country ceremony discarded by some vocal members of the public with booing at major events. Social media has become littered with uninformed keyboard warriors



Professor Pat Dudgeon (second from left), Tegan Scheffe, Abby-Rose Cox (right) and Res McCalman (left) delivered a workshop on Demonstrating Warriorship in the Face of Racism at the Lowitja Institute Conference 2025. Picture: supplied.

questioning why Indigenous peoples 'receive their own funding', the same old comments about where that funding will be spent, and tirades on how 'white Australia said no'.

In the face of such racism, we can make sure we are equipped with the appropriate tools and strategies to deal with bigotry on a day-to-day basis, thereby helping us thrive and live prosperous lives, despite any racism we may encounter. This is the key idea behind the new Warriorship in the

face of Racism project, undertaken by the ARC Centre of Excellence Indigenous Futures Centre (IFC), University of Queensland and the Boorn Centre at UWA. Professor Pat Dudgeon, Yvette Bedford, Abby-Rose Cox, Yvette Roe, Res McCallum, Michael Lavery, Angus Loudon and I will work to develop a toolkit for people to deal with racism.

Racism was defined as being a mix of prejudice, power, ideology, stereotypes, disparities and/or unequal treatment by chair in race

relations at Deakin University, Yin Paradies. However, it is a broad and complex term - so one of the goals of the Project is to create resources to help people navigate and understand racist experience in real life. We aim to work with and empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to act as 'warriors' against racism. The term 'warriorship' is not used in the Western sense of hostility or aggression but rather in the way Native-American culture views warriorship - acting honourably and with strength in the face of adversity and protecting and caring for others.

The Warriorship in the face of Racism project will employ an Aboriginal Participatory Action Research (APAR) methodology, meaning there is Indigenous consultation and leadership throughout all stages of the research and development process. We will build off the perspectives and voices of First Nations peoples to create resources which clearly communicate actions to take in everyday racist experiences.

APAR is a transformative and strengths-based research method grounded in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems, cultural practices, and worldviews.

The project is one of many undertaken by the IFC and the Boorn Centre and is expected to be completed in the second half of 2026. The findings and outputs of this project will be shared as a tool to empower First Nations peoples in contemporary society. We are bringing a strengths-based approach to this anti-racism project as we believe the strength and resilience of our people is greater than the injustice and racism we face. We hope our toolkits will help empower others to realise this potential and live a flourishing life in spite of these challenges.

Tegan Scheffe is a proud Bidjara and Kamilaroi woman with a strong background in primary health care and suicide prevention. Tegan is committed to community-driven, co-designed solutions that enhance the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Tegan currently works at the Australian Research Council, Centre of Excellence for Indigenous Futures as an administrator and has close connections with the Centre of Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention, University of Western Australia.

