

Anti-Racism Toolkit

Unconscious Bias

Unconscious (or implicit) bias refers to the attitudes, beliefs, and stereotypes that people hold about individuals or groups without being consciously aware of them. Human psyche is naturally drawn to what is familiar, which can lead to unconscious assumptions about those from different cultures, backgrounds, or ways of life. As a result, everyone carries some form of unconscious bias.

While unconscious bias may be common to all people, negative racial biases are not. In Australia, colonisation and systemic racism have contributed to unequal power relations and negative stereotypes about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. These historical and institutional influences continue to shape unconscious racial biases today.

What is the Impact of Unconscious Bias?

Reconciliation Australia's 2022 Barometer found that 42% of non-Indigenous Australians believe Australia is a racist country, and 89% believe relationships between First Nations peoples and non-Indigenous Australians are important.

Despite this, 75% of non-Indigenous Australians hold negative unconscious biases towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. **This highlights an important distinction: people may consciously reject racism while still holding unconscious biases that influence their attitudes and behaviour.**



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How Does Unconscious Bias Affect People?

Unconscious racial bias can influence decisions, behaviours, and opportunities in everyday life. It can:

- Contribute to microaggressions and subtle forms of discrimination.
- Affect access to employment, education, housing, and other opportunities.
- Reduce life chances, such as being overlooked for a job interview because of a non-Anglo name.
- Influence outcomes within the justice system and impact basic civil liberties.
- Contribute to poorer health outcomes through biased and unequal treatment in healthcare settings.

How Can We Address Unconscious Bias?

Addressing unconscious bias begins with recognising that everyone has biases and committing to challenging them. Some strategies include:

- **Practise empathy:** Seek to understand the experiences and perspectives of others.
- **Increase cultural awareness:** Learn about different cultures, histories, and ways of life to challenge assumptions based on unfamiliarity.
- **Question stereotypes:** Reflect on and challenge negative stereotypes you may have learned.
- **Engage with diverse perspectives:** Read, watch, and listen to me that represents a wide range of cultures and experiences.

By recognising and addressing unconscious bias, we can help create more equitable and inclusive communities.

