

Press Release

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Pandemic brings us together but two groups are left out

Social inclusion in Australia has proven remarkably resilient during the pandemic, according to *The Inclusive Australia Social Inclusion Index 2020/2021* released today.

Australians were surveyed after the height of the pandemic in December 2020, confirming that disasters do bring people closer together. However, the results also highlighted two spikes in discrimination against young people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

While previous reports have exposed the extent of prejudice and discrimination in our society and who was bearing the brunt, this report reveals our strengths and weaknesses in times of hardship.

KEY FINDINGS

- Australia's overall Social Inclusion score is 61 out of 100, dropping two points due to a lack of contact, advocacy and volunteering in 2020.
- Belonging and wellbeing are at an all-time high, partly due to the positive impacts of working from home and access to the internet.

Our research shows that **young people** (aged 18-24) are one of the most discriminated groups in the country and felt the worst exclusion during the pandemic. Young people were hit particularly hard due to higher youth unemployment rates and high representation in the hardest hit industries. Doubts also loom over their future security when it comes to climate change, job prospects and home ownership.

- There was a significant jump in major discrimination¹ against young people in 2020 (from 44.5% to 56.8%), worse than any other group in Australia.
- Young people consistently experience some of the highest levels of everyday discrimination² in Australia.
- One in six people are highly prejudiced against young people.
- Young people were the only ones to experience a dip in personal wellbeing in 2020.

Additionally, half of all **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people** reported major or everyday discrimination in 2020 after instances soared in the last two years.

- Major discrimination remained high for a second year in a row (49.7%) following a 23 percentage point jump in 2019 (to 52.1%).

¹ Major discrimination is serious unfair treatment such as being unfairly denied a promotion or job, or discouraged from continuing education.

² Everyday discrimination is more chronic, routine and relatively minor experiences of unfair treatment such as being treated with less respect and courtesy, receiving poorer service than others at restaurants or stores, or being called names.

- Everyday discrimination is more common for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people than any other group (51%), the third year of elevated numbers.

While the cause of this trend is unknown, it is believed increased publicity around Indigenous issues could have encouraged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to be more forthcoming with their stories of discrimination as well as provoked some backlash from certain members of the community. There is also evidence to suggest the pandemic caused increased tensions between landlords and tenants, which may have resulted in more instances of people being prevented from renting or buying property.

“In some ways, the pandemic and the restrictions on our movement reminded us of the importance of family, community and looking after our most vulnerable people. This sense of belonging to something bigger and the way it makes us feel comes out in the Index,” Inclusive Australia CEO Andrea Pearman said.

“It is also a reminder of how a lack of physical contact with each other can blind us to the problem and close us off from others, which can have a lasting negative impact on inclusion.

“What’s incredibly confronting is the stark gap in compassion and inclusion that has been shown towards young people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people compared to others during the pandemic and beforehand. It is a problem that we must seek to better understand and start to turnaround.”

Liam Smith, Director of MSDI’s BehaviourWorks Australia, said people tend to come together during times of crisis but that the overall positive perception of the COVID-19 restrictions was somewhat surprising.

“We measure social inclusion by looking at prejudice and discrimination, sense of belonging and wellbeing, contact between groups and willingness to advocate and volunteer for inclusion. Contact and volunteering were out of our control in the last year, but for us to see slight improvements in the first two areas is a great outcome for us as a country,” he said.

“The elevated levels of major discrimination against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have appeared over two years now, so it’s an area we will need to continue to monitor.”

The release of *The Inclusive Australia Social Inclusion Index* marks the fifth time Inclusive Australia and Monash Sustainable Development Institute (MSDI) have measured the country’s social inclusion performance.

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