



# The booing of Adam Goodes calls for meaningful conversation about racism

## VACCHO position statement #IStandWithAdam

31 July 2015

There has been increased discussion regarding the booing of Aboriginal AFL player, Adam Goodes, which highlights the need to address the broader issue of racism. Goodes' zero tolerance stance against racism alongside the pride he has for his heritage strongly promotes Aboriginal culture on and off the football field.

VACCHO recognises and applauds the AFL Captains and their teams who in unison, have supported Goodes and stood up to racism. VACCHO understands and supports Adam's decision to take a break from the game for his own health and wellbeing.

VACCHO is committed to improving the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to a level equitable to that enjoyed by the general Australian population. Racial discrimination has negative impacts on health and wellbeing, making legal protections promoting community safety and tolerance a crucial and critical conversation we must continue to have as a progressive society.

Twenty-two years ago the same conversation was sparked when Nicky Winmar responded to hateful abuse he received from AFL fans by lifting his jersey and pointing to his skin. Community wide debate ensued from this and with assistance of other well-known Aboriginal players past and present, the AFL's racial vilification policy was developed and adopted, making racist abuse banned on and off the field.

While the booing may be for a variety of reasons, VACCHO wants to highlight the impact that racism has on Aboriginal mental health and wellbeing; its negative impacts spreads throughout the communities, contributes to inter-generational trauma and perpetuates cycles of both poor physical and mental health.

**Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation Inc.**

*The peak body for Aboriginal health in Victoria*  
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There is a strong correlation between experiencing racism and a range of mental health conditions, including psychological distress, depression and anxiety<sup>1</sup>.

Many people often assume that racism is overt, intentional, malicious and individual. Not only does this narrow perspective disguise more subtle and pervasive forms of racism, it also makes discussing and confronting racism more difficult<sup>2</sup>. This needs to change.

Racism is widespread and not confined to the sporting arena. The Australian Government report *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework*<sup>3</sup> (2015) quotes Kelaher *et al*<sup>4</sup> '...A study of 755 Aboriginal Victorian adults found one-third (29%) had experienced racism in health settings in the previous 12 months.

Racial discrimination is unlawful under both State and Federal legislation in particular circumstances, therefore, we need to put the responsibility of addressing racism back on the Government's agenda.

Not only is player safety at stake, community safety is too. It is clear from the growing body of evidence on discrimination that interventions targeting organisational and community settings is desperately needed. Whilst VACCHO recognises the AFL's efforts in combating racism we call on all levels of Government to take action against racism to ensure that their commitments to Aboriginal Health Equality are met<sup>5</sup> and our communities are safe from racism.

## For further information please contact:

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VACCHO - 03 9411 9411

## Or to report racism and hate speech you can visit:

*Racism: It stops with me*  
<http://itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au/>

Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights  
Commission  
[www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au/](http://www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au/)

*Reporting Racism: What you say matters*  
[www.antihate.vic.gov.au/](http://www.antihate.vic.gov.au/)

## Footnotes

- 1 Atkinson et al (2010) "Trauma, Transgenerational Transfer and Effects on Community Wellbeing", Chapter 10 in Purdie et al, *Working Together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health and Wellbeing Principles and Practice*, Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, Australian Council for Educational Research, Kulunga Research Network, Telethon Institute for Child Health, Canberra, ACT
- 2 ANTaR (May 2012) *Submission in response to the Anti-Racism Strategy Discussion Paper*
- 3 Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council 2015, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework 2014 Report*, AHMAC, Canberra. Page 142
- 4 Kelaher, M, Ferdinand, A & Paradies, Y 2014 'Experiencing racism in health care: The mental health impacts for Victorian Aboriginal communities', *Medical Journal of Australia*, vol.201, no.1, pp.44-7, in: Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council 2015, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework 2014 Report*, AHMAC, Canberra. Page 142
- 5 Commitments to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Equality include:
  - The COAG commitment to *Closing the Gap* (<http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/closing-the-gap>)
  - *The Statement of Intent* to close the gap in Indigenous health outcomes: (<https://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/close-gap-indigenous-health-equality-summit-statement-intent>)
  - *The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan* (<http://www.health.gov.au/NATSIHP>)
  - The Victorian Aboriginal Health Strategy, *Koolin Balit* (<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/aboriginalhealth/koolinbalit.htm>)