



Australian
Human Rights
Commission

About Us

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS



Who are we?

The Australian Human Rights Commission is the nation's independent human rights body.

We work to find practical and long-term solutions to the human rights issues facing people in Australia, as well as to build greater understanding and respect for human rights in our community.

We were established in 1986 by legislation of the federal Parliament as an independent statutory organisation charged with protecting and promoting the human rights of all people in Australia.

Our vision

Our vision is to work towards an Australian society where human rights are enjoyed by everyone, everywhere, every day.



How we operate

We operate under the *Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986* (Cth) and federal laws that protect people from discrimination:

- *Age Discrimination Act 2004*
- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*
- *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*
- *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*.

We also have specific responsibilities under the *Native Title Act 1993* and the *Fair Work Act 2009*.

The Commission is an 'A status' national human rights institution (NHRI), which means we are internationally recognised as operating in compliance with the UN *Principles Relating to the Status of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights* with the required legitimacy and independence.

Our structure

The Commission is a collegiate body made up of a President and six Commissioners. The seven positions are currently held by six people.

- President and Human Rights Commissioner
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner
- Age Discrimination Commissioner
- Disability Discrimination Commissioner
- Race Discrimination Commissioner
- Sex Discrimination Commissioner.

Our work

As there is no simple way to solve complex human rights issues, the Commission seeks to address these issues using a range of integrated and complementary approaches:

Setting and advancing national agendas

We have a track record of drawing national attention to pressing human rights issues, raising community awareness and encouraging positive action by governments, service providers and others.



Building human rights into Australian laws and practices

We believe that human rights protection needs to be a central part of laws, policies and practices in order to build a fairer and more inclusive Australia. We undertake research, consult, provide advice, review laws and make submissions to parliamentary inquiries.

The partnerships we foster and the constructive approach we take helps us to positively influence laws and practices and drive other practical changes.



Resolving discrimination and human rights complaints

One of our core functions is to help people resolve complaints of discrimination and other breaches of human rights through our complaint handling service. The complaint process not only allows individuals to resolve their disputes quickly and effectively, but can also include actions that address systemic problems.

We use information about trends in complaints to develop targeted education programs and suggest policy reforms to address the underlying factors that lead to discrimination. We also intervene in court cases when it is important to make a human rights argument and appear as *amicus curiae* – or ‘friend of the court’ – to provide specialist advice in discrimination cases.

Monitoring and reporting

Some people in Australia are especially vulnerable to discrimination, exclusion and unfair treatment.

We have a particular responsibility to monitor the situation facing these groups, identify issues of concern and propose solutions that will improve their lives.

Sometimes we do this through holding national inquiries that examine human rights issues in detail.

We also undertake regular monitoring and reporting work, such as the Social Justice Commissioner's annual *Social Justice Report* and *Native Title Report*, on issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Engaging regionally and internationally

We are often invited to share our knowledge and expertise with others in the region, such as through our ongoing technical cooperation programs with China and Vietnam.

As a member of the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions and the Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions, we work in partnership with other national human rights institutions to share 'best practice' approaches and respond to the pressing human rights issues facing Australia and our region.

This engagement helps to build our expertise and makes a positive contribution to how we work domestically.

As a NHRI, we also participate in global exchanges between Commissions through the International Coordinating Committee of National Human Rights Institutions.

We also have an important role to play in the United Nations system. We regularly provide independent reports which describe how Australia is progressing in relation to meeting its human rights obligations.

Monitoring and evaluating our impact

Building awareness, shifting attitudes and influencing laws and policies takes time.

We want to know that our efforts are contributing towards real and lasting change in Australia. That's why we have developed a comprehensive framework to evaluate the impact of our work. This also allows us to draw valuable lessons about what works – and why – that we can apply to future initiatives.



Our priorities

We have identified two over-arching priorities that inform all our work and focus our efforts.

Priority 1: Tackling violence, harassment and bullying

Violence, harassment and bullying profoundly affect the lives of thousands of Australians – at home, work, school, online and on the street. They can shatter people's confidence, limit their opportunities and, in some cases, cause lasting physical and psychological damage.

The Commission understands that discrimination can often be a key factor behind acts of violence, harassment and bullying. We believe that addressing this root cause is a critical element in building a safer and more inclusive Australia.

Priority 2: Building understanding and respect for rights in our community

We all have a responsibility to respect and protect the rights of others.

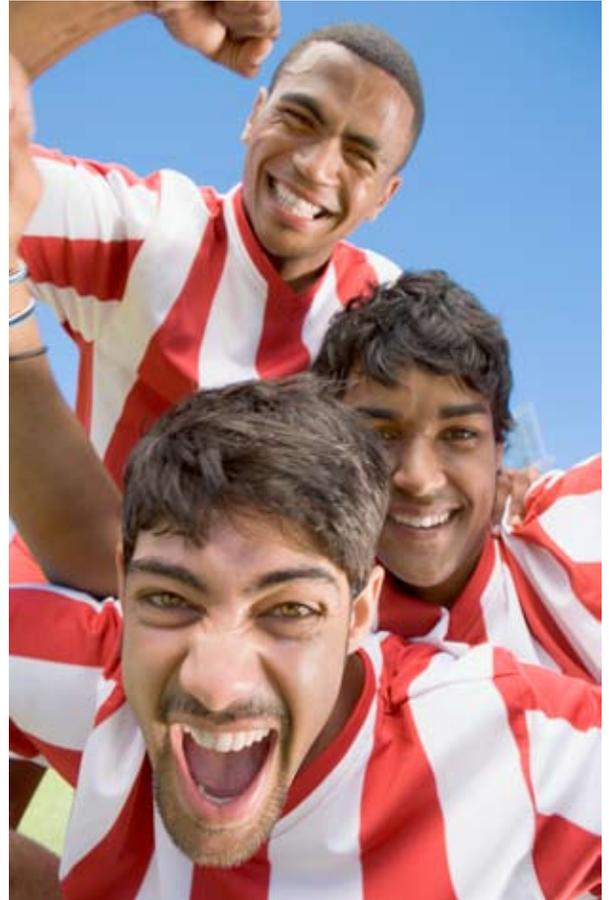
To make this a reality, the Commission works to build greater understanding about what human rights are and how they apply to everyday life in Australia.

We are developing a range of innovative community engagement and human rights education programs, while continuing our long-standing role of providing vulnerable groups with the knowledge and skills to address discrimination and unfair treatment.

We are encouraging and supporting a coordinated and consistent approach to teaching human rights in Australian schools.

We believe that practical discussion of rights and responsibilities in real-life situations helps young people become active and engaged citizens.

We also provide advice and recommendations to the Australian Government to ensure that a human rights perspective is included across a broad range of policy issues, including through implementation of the Australian Human Rights Framework which was released in April 2010.



Get involved

Here are some ways you can get involved and help make our vision a reality.

- Read the Commission's Latest News at: www.humanrights.gov.au
- Keep up-to-date about current human rights issues by joining our electronic mailing lists at: www.humanrights.gov.au/about/mailling_lists/
- Find media releases, opinion pieces, speeches, media kits and extensive research and project information at our online media centre: www.humanrights.gov.au/about/media/ (you can also sign up to receive podcasts and RSS feeds)
- Order our publications, reports, posters, CD Roms and DVDs by calling 1300 369 711 or online at: www.humanrights.gov.au/about/publications/
- Come along to our human rights seminars' – they are open to everyone and cover a range of contemporary human rights issues (check the website or subscribe to our mailing list for upcoming events).
- Make a submission to one of our inquiries or discussion papers, or have your say in one of our online forums
- Teachers can download a wide range of curriculum-linked human rights education at: www.humanrights.gov.au/education/ and students can check out our highly popular resources at: www.humanrights.gov.au/info_for_students/
- Employers can learn how to make their workplace a discrimination-free zone by using our range of useful Good practice, good business resources at: www.humanrights.gov.au/info_for_employers/ and
- Employees can access information on discrimination and their rights at: www.humanrights.gov.au/complaints_information/WOYR.html or by calling 1300 656 419
- Join the human rights conversation at Something in Common: www.somethingincommon.gov.au/

Where can I get more information?

The Australian Human Rights Commission's contact details are:

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Email: communications@humanrights.gov.au

Website: www.humanrights.gov.au

Complaints

Complaint Info line: 1300 656 419 (local call)

Email: complaintsinfo@humanrights.gov.au

Online: You can make a complaint online by going to www.humanrights.gov.au/complaints_information/online_form/index.html.



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