

# Substantive Equality

One size does not fit all



## What is Substantive Equality?

Everyone has the right to access services that meet their needs. Substantive Equality means that specific needs of certain groups in the community are met by adjusting government policies, procedures and practices.

### Equal rules for unequal groups can have unequal results

Substantive Equality seeks to set right patterns of disadvantage faced by certain communities because of their differing needs. These patterns of disadvantage are also known as “systemic racism”.

## What is systemic racism?

Systemic racism is race discrimination in an organisations’ policy, procedure or practice. It is not the action of an individual and is often unintentional.

When policy, procedure or practice caters to the majority group it can exclude marginalised and minority groups.

Substantive Equality can be achieved when you address systemic racism.

**We are not to blame for what happened in the past, but we are responsible for eliminating systemic racism today**

## Service and Substantive Equality

The WA Public Sector is working to eliminate systemic racism and create a community where equality exists for everyone.

Under the Equal Opportunity Act 1984, it is unlawful to discriminate, either directly or indirectly, when providing goods, services or facilities.

With the Equal Opportunity Commission’s help government departments are rolling out the State Government’s Policy Framework on Substantive Equality.

The first of its kind in Australia, this framework means departments must review their services to meet the diverse needs of the WA community.

This process will see departments and their contractors:

- Review barriers in existing services.
- Review new policies and major initiatives before they are rolled out.
- Research existing policies, practices and clientele to plan services accordingly.
- Consult with Aboriginal and minority groups about their service issues.

## Substantive Equality in Action

### Disability

The Disability Services Commission has a partnership with the Ethnic Disability Advocacy Centre which ensures Disability Service Standards reflect the needs of Aboriginal and Ethnic minority groups.

### Health

A review of a health promotion program has shown early involvement with Aboriginal groups makes the program relevant and clear.

BreastScreen WA's mobile cancer screening visits more than 100 remote and regional towns of WA every two years. As a result participation rates have increased.

### Housing

Reforms are taking place across the departments including suitable correspondence for people whose first language is not English.

### Licensing

Assessment of WA driver licence requirements identified a number of barriers preventing certain groups from obtaining a licence. Fair and practical alternatives are being considered.

### Police

Ethnic descriptors which encourage racial stereotypes for people of interest are being minimised in media reporting.

Think beyond the actions of individuals and see how institutional structures, routine practices and work place cultures all combine to produce inequality

## What does the Substantive Equality Unit do?

The SEU was established within the Equal Opportunity Commission in 2006. The Unit focuses on preventing systemic race discrimination by assisting major public sector organisations to assess their services so fair outcomes can be achieved.

## How does substantive equality affect me as a public servant?

Everyone who works in the WA public sector has a role to play. The aim of Substantive Equality is to make racial equality a central part of the way we provide public services. For example:

- **If your job involves drawing up policies or delivering services**, one of the first questions you should ask is how these policies and services could affect people from different Aboriginal and ethnic minority groups.
- **If you work at reception, or as an administrative officer**, you should try to make sure that everyone, whatever their ethnic background, receives information about the services your office provides. You should advise your manager if a caller has specific language or service needs.
- **If you are a manager**, you will also be responsible for making sure your staff, individually and as members of teams, know what they have to do to act on Substantive Equality.
- **If you are a senior officer or a member of corporate executive**, you have additional responsibilities – to make sure your department meets its legal obligation to tackle unlawful racial discrimination, and to promote equal opportunities and good race relations. You will also have to make sure that your department's commitment to Substantive Equality is put into practice.
- **If your job involves communications**, you need to ensure any published information is in language and formats accessible to Aboriginal and ethnic minority groups.

## How to contact the SEU

### By telephone

Contact the SEU: 9216 3900  
Training Course: 9216 3927  
Facsimile: 9216 3690  
County Callers: 1800 198 149  
TTY: 9216 3936

### By email

[seu@eoc.wa.gov.au](mailto:seu@eoc.wa.gov.au)

### By visiting our website

[www.eoc.wa.gov.au](http://www.eoc.wa.gov.au)

### By visiting our office

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141 St Georges Terrace  
Perth WA 6000



Interpreter can be arranged on request.