



# TALKING POINT

**30 April 2020**

## **Coronavirus: The Silent Discriminator**

The coronavirus harms lives, it is a cause of death and despair. Regrettably discrimination also wreaks silent havoc.

In a few short months this virus has turned the lives of millions of people upside down and many will never be quite the same.

The power that the coronavirus has wielded has been extraordinary. It has been the silent influencer as to who loses their job, who receives social welfare assistance, who is placed into mandatory lockdown, who can travel, what activities we can pursue and who we can visit. It has influenced who is provided with dental, medical and other allied health services and who is not. It has been the cause of people dying alone and being buried without ceremony and honour from family and friends.

Around the world violence against women is reported to have significantly increased. This is a truly dangerous side of gender-based discrimination.

In Tasmania, as we weather the coronavirus storm, discrimination and the erosion of human rights on the basis of race, age, gender and disability is extending further into daily life.

We are witness to a quiet surge of direct and indirect discrimination in the areas of employment, provision of services, education and accommodation.

Loneliness and isolation has crept into people lives, some more than others, insidiously corroding the physical and emotional wellbeing of even the most resilient.

The gap between the haves and the have-nots in our community is increasingly evident. The greater the level of under-privilege the greater the risk of discrimination.

The pandemic and the state of crisis will pass.

When we do emerge from a life of lockdowns, restrictions and economic hibernation, the fall-out will potentially give rise to another kind of misery - unbridled discrimination.

The elderly and those with disabilities are likely to experience the brunt of conscious and unconscious bias.

Gains, painstakingly made in gender equality may slip into reverse.

If the current trend is an indication of the *new normal* those who are Asian in appearance are likely to experience increased racism and incitement to hatred.

If we allow this pandemic to silently spread discrimination without fierce protest and action, we risk a wave of discrimination becoming the *new normal*. Marginalised and vulnerable members of our community risk becoming even more marginalised and vulnerable.

Now, more than ever we need to collectively decide what sort of community we want to be on the other side of the pandemic.

To ensure we can be the best that we can be, we need to practice kindness, respect and compassion towards each other. We need to do it now.

Over recent weeks we have seen wonderful glimpses of kindness, compassion and gratitude. Such glimpses show the better sides of human nature, they must be the ordinary not the extraordinary practices of who we are.

The brightest minds and millions of dollars have been spent combating the spread and effects of coronavirus.

If a fraction of that commitment went toward combating discrimination not only would the economic benefits be on the right side of the ledger, Tasmania would also have a community envied by others.

*I strongly urge anybody who believes that they or someone they know is, or may be, being discriminated against to lodge a complaint or make a report. Reports can be made anonymously using our 'Report It!' form. For further information or to make a complaint or report visit [www.equalopportunity.tas.gov.au](http://www.equalopportunity.tas.gov.au).*

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