

Media Release

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Landmark RISE project shares insights on tackling gendered racism in leadership progression

A new report is calling on Australian organisations to move beyond one-size-fits-all gender equity efforts and confront the systemic barriers holding culturally and racially marginalised (CARM) women back from leadership positions.

The report captures early findings from [the RISE Project \(Realise. Inspire. Support. Energise.\)](#), a four-year initiative working with 25 organisations across Australia to break down systemic barriers and expand leadership pathways for CARM women. The project was led by Diversity Council Australia (DCA), Settlement Services International (SSI) and Chief Executive Women (CEW), with funding from the Australian government Office for Women.

The RISE Project: an Insights Report draws on organisational diagnostics, lived experience insights and emerging evidence from participating organisations to explore what drives sustainable and inclusive change.

Early findings from the report highlight that organisations made the strongest progress when they focused on building racial literacy, centring CARM women's voices in organisational decision-making, improving access to sponsorship and influential networks, and strengthening the data and metrics needed to track equity outcomes.

Key highlights from the report:

- 360 CARM women took part in the RISE Project across 25 participating organisations
- 623 mentoring or coaching sessions were delivered with 157 participants
- 269 participants took at least one step towards their career goals
- 63 women participating in the project secured a new role.

The report provides an initial set of descriptive learnings from the project. While further analyses are still underway, the Insights Report focuses on how organisations engage with the process of eliminating gendered racism in practice, providing insights into the steps organisations can take to move from intent to implementation.

“In 2023, DCA’s landmark CARM Women in Leadership report identified the entrenched systemic barriers CARM women face in Australian workplaces. That same year, we launched RISE alongside our consortium partners SSI and CEW to address those barriers and help create more equitable pathways to leadership,” said Dr Virginia Mapedzahama, DCA’s Racial Equity and Intersectionality Director and Project Lead, RISE.

“As this project comes to an end, our hope is that these findings will inform and strengthen ongoing efforts to drive systemic change so that more CARM women can access the leadership opportunities they deserve.

“If organisations want different leadership outcomes, they need to ask different questions, listen more carefully to the women most affected, and be willing to change the systems that hold inequity in place.”

"In many organisations, the higher you move up the leadership pipeline, the less diverse it becomes. That pattern reflects the structural and attitudinal barriers that CARM women continue to face in Australian workplaces — barriers that cannot be addressed through one-size-fits-all approaches," said SSI CEO Violet Roumeliotis.

"This report is essential reading for any organisation seeking to dismantle those barriers and build more fair and inclusive workplaces. The findings show the profound impact when employers take the time to listen and create environments where CARM women can thrive. When we invest in and support CARM women to succeed on their own terms, we create stronger, more inclusive organisations that are better equipped for the future."

"Efforts to advance women that treat all women as one group will always overlook those who face the greatest obstacles. CARM women are capable, ambitious and ready to lead; what holds them back is a system built around a narrow idea of who a leader is, not any lack of talent," said Lisa Annese, CEO of Chief Executive Women.

"This report gives organisations a practical place to begin, and Chief Executive Women urges them to take it. Real progress means redesigning the pathways into leadership, not asking women to fit a mould that was never made for them."

Access *the RISE Project: an Insights Report* via [DCA's website](#).

Ends

List of RISE participating organisations

Accenture Australia Pty Ltd	Jesuit Social Services
ACON Health Limited	Navitas Pty Ltd
Anglicare Victoria	Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG)
ANU College of Systems and Society	Russell Kennedy
Arup	Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre
Aurecon	Telstra
Australian Financial Complaints Authority (AFCA)	The Star Entertainment Group
BHP	Uniting NSW.ACT
Crown Resorts	University of Sydney
Deloitte	University of Technology Sydney
EnergyAustralia	Westpac Group
Gilbert + Tobin	Woolworths Group
HCF – Hospital Contributions Fund of Australia	

About DCA

Diversity Council Australia is the leading peak body for diversity and inclusion. As an independent not-for-profit and charitable organisation, we provide expert guidance to workplaces, policymakers and the broader community through research, tools, events, advocacy and education. Together, with our network of over 1,200 member organisations, we shape more equitable workplaces for a stronger economy and fairer society.

About Chief Executive Women

Chief Executive Women (CEW) is the pre-eminent organisation representing Australia's most senior women leaders from the corporate, public service, academic and not-for-profit sectors. Founded in 1985, Chief Executive Women represents more than 1,000 of Australia's most senior and distinguished women leaders, whose shared vision is Women Leaders Enabling Women Leaders. CEW plays an important role in advocacy and direct engagement with government and business leaders, contributing to policy formulation and partnering with employers to attract, promote and retain talented women leaders. CEW's programs are informed by research, led by CEW members, and generously supported by its partners. Find out more at www.cew.org.au.

About Settlement Services International

Settlement Services International (SSI) delivers a range of human services that connect individuals, families, and children from diverse backgrounds with opportunities – including settlement support, disability programs, community engagement initiatives and training and employment pathways. At the heart of everything we do is a drive for equality, empathy, and celebration of every individual.

Media contacts

Diversity Council Australia

Ali Coulton

M: +61 (0) 430 242 682

media@dca.org.au

Chief Executive Women

Mayank Gurnani

M: +61 (0) 414 463 827

Settlement Services International

Hannah Gartrell

M: +61 (0) 423 965 956

press@ssi.org.au