

What is racial profiling?

Racial profiling occurs when an individual is subjected to differential treatment or greater scrutiny because of negative stereotypes related to their race or other grounds such as religious beliefs, colour, ancestry or place of origin or a combination of these. For example, a Muslim may experience racial profiling on the basis of stereotypes about his or her religion. Racial profiling can also involve other factors such as gender and age. For example, a young black man may experience racial profiling on the basis of stereotypes about his age, colour and gender.

Typically, but not always, the reasons given for racial profiling carried out by people in authority are safety, security and public protection.

Racial profiling can occur in any of the following areas:

- statements, publications, notices, signs, symbols, emblems or other representations that are published, issued or displayed before the public
- goods, services, accommodation or facilities customarily available to the public
- tenancy
- employment practices
- employment applications or advertisements
- membership in trade unions, employers' organizations or occupational associations

Racial profiling and the *Alberta Human Rights Act*

Racial profiling is not specified as a protected ground in the *Alberta Human Rights Act*. However, when racial profiling results in discrimination, affected individuals are protected under the *Act* because discrimination based on race or other protected grounds such as religious beliefs, colour, ancestry and place of origin is prohibited under the *Act*. Discrimination based on gender and age is also prohibited under the *Act*.

Examples of racial profiling that can result in discrimination

Examples include:

- A law enforcement officer stops and searches vehicles driven by young black males more frequently than vehicles driven by other people because of an assumption that young black males are more likely to be engaged in criminal activity.
- A store owner refuses to sell an Aboriginal patron a paint thinner based on stereotypes about Aboriginal people as solvent abusers.

- A youth of South East Asian heritage is refused entry to a bar because of the belief that youth of South East Asian heritage are associated with gangs.
- An employer wants a stricter security clearance for a Muslim employee after September 11th because of assumptions that Muslims are involved in terrorist activity.

Consequences of racial profiling

Being discriminated against as a result of racial profiling is a degrading and humiliating experience and can take an emotional, financial and social toll on the individual and the community. Racial profiling may:

- result in an individual's loss of dignity and self confidence.
- erode individuals' confidence in businesses, organizations and institutions. Individuals who are discriminated against as a result of racial profiling lose confidence in the ability of the institutions to serve them in a fair manner.
- disempower individuals. Individuals who are discriminated against as a result of racial profiling may feel that they should not aspire to positions of power or authority in society as they may perceive that they are seen as undesirable by others.

What can you do if you are discriminated against as a result of racial profiling?


Customers, clients and guests can look for constructive ways to deal with racial profiling when it has led to unfair treatment. Here are some options:

- Take immediate action by seeking out a manager and explaining your human rights issue.
- If taking immediate action is not appropriate or possible, write a detailed description of the human rights issue and make an appointment to speak or meet with a manager as soon as possible.
- Contact the Alberta Human Rights Commission to get a free confidential consultation regarding your human rights issue.
- Make a human rights complaint to the Alberta Human Rights Commission. If you believe you have experienced discrimination as a result of racial profiling based on your race alone or in combination with other grounds, you can make a complaint to the Commission based on one or more of the grounds of race, religious beliefs, colour, ancestry and place of origin. In addition to making a complaint based on race or related grounds, you may also report discrimination on other grounds such as age and gender if you believe they are related to your experience of racial profiling. For more information about the protected grounds, see the Commission information sheet *Protected areas and grounds under the Alberta Human Rights Act*.

What can organizations do to prevent racial profiling?

Public and private businesses as well as organizations and institutions have a responsibility to ensure that they operate without discrimination and that they deal fairly with human rights concerns raised by employees, customers, clients, guests and members of the public.

For more information

Read the Commission's interpretive bulletin *Human rights in the hospitality industry*. 

Contact us

The Alberta Human Rights Commission is an independent commission of the Government of Alberta. Our mandate is to foster equality and reduce discrimination. We provide public information and education programs, and help Albertans resolve human rights complaints.

For our **business office and mailing addresses**, please see the **Contact Us** page of our website (www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca), or phone or email us.

Hours of operation are 8:15 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Northern Regional Office (Edmonton)
780-427-7661 Confidential Inquiry Line
780-427-6013 Fax

Southern Regional Office (Calgary)
403-297-6571 Confidential Inquiry Line
403-297-6567 Fax

To call toll-free within Alberta, dial 310-0000 and then enter the area code and phone number.

For province-wide free access from a cellular phone, enter *310 (for Rogers Wireless) or #310 (for Telus and Bell), followed by the area code and phone number. Public and government callers can phone without paying long distance or airtime charges.

TTY service for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing

780-427-1597 Edmonton
403-297-5639 Calgary
1-800-232-7215 Toll-free within Alberta

Email humanrights@gov.ab.ca

Website www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca

Please note: A complaint must be made to the Alberta Human Rights Commission within one year after the alleged incident of discrimination. The one-year period starts the day after the date on which the incident occurred. For help calculating the one-year period, contact the Commission.

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