



Books about the Holocaust. Education about Jewish history is expected to help Australians understand the severity of anti-Semitism. PHOTO: Rafael Gerster

There must be a greater effort from the community to address the recent increase in cases of anti-Semitism in Australia, according to chairman of the Anti-Defamation Commission Dvir Abramovich.

Abramovich said “there has been a surge in anti-Semitic incidents” over the past five years “on all fronts, whether they have been from neo-Nazis or white supremacists”.

“We’ve heard stories of a rabbi attacked in Caulfield, Nazi graffiti on streets, and an explosion of Holocaust denial and racist stereotypes online,” he said.

Anti-Semitic sentiments became “integrated into the anti-lockdown and anti-vaccine campaign” during the coronavirus pandemic, according to Abramovich.

“When Covid emerged, the anti-Semites said this is a Jewish invention intended to extract money and eliminate the white population,” Abramovich said.

Abramovich said white supremacists and Neo-Nazis “infiltrated groups to say that the reason we have lockdowns is the Jews and that the Jews own the vaccine”.

These cases of anti-Semitism should be considered alarming, according to Abramovich.

“The modern manifestations of Nazism should never find refuge in Australia because it goes against all the strong values that bind us together,” said Abramovich.

So individuals in Australia should “play a part in the war against hatred for Jews”, according to Abramovich.

“Individuals, regardless of who they are and how old they are, have a pivotal role to play in contributing to a civic society,” he said.

Abramovich said education is “paramount” in changing the “minds and hearts” of people complicit in anti-Semitism.

“The bigotry we see against Jews is from a place of fear and ignorance, so education is instrumental in changing peoples’ thinking,” he said.

Education could help young people understand the severity of anti-Semitism, according to Elizabeth Appelboom, member of a reform synagogue called Kedem.

Appelboom said there were efforts to help children “get educated” about anti-Semitism and “change their behavior”.

The Anne Frank exhibition in Victoria “has taught children anti-Semitism and tolerance” and “has used Anne Frank’s story of anti-Semitism as a vehicle to do that”, according to Appelboom.

“The reality is that children may not know what the Nazi symbol means or why it’s so offensive, so I think education can be helpful,” she said.

But education “might not be enough” to address all issues facing Jewish culture, according to Appelboom.

Appelboom said people “have been anxious” about sites such as synagogues and Jewish schools “becoming a visible target”.

“Jewish schools and schuls have got security because there is the fear that they might be a terrorist target,” she said.

The need for security outside Jewish institutions “is an appalling indictment on our society”, according to Appelboom.

Acts of “micro-aggressions” against Jewish people were common in the workplace, according to Susan Banki, member of the Jewish community and human rights lecturer at Sydney University.

Banki said Sydney University recently refused to change the date of a meeting which was scheduled on a “holy day for Jews” called Yom Kippur.

“I wish the university rectified this action because Yom Kippur is a holy day where Jews should have to think about being better people rather than work,” she said.

The university’s refusal to change the date of the meeting reflected its inability to “do well enough by Jewish colleagues”, according to Banki.

But abusive behavior towards other social groups in Australia should be acknowledged, according to Banki.

Jewish people could “become accused of special privilege” if they “act like the only ones” experiencing discrimination, according to Banki

“It’s not right to focus entirely on the Jews because there are other groups in this country who suffer from Islamophobia, homophobia and xenophobia,” she said.

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Jewish House: (02) 9386 0770

Jewish Children’s Support Centre: 0411 759 721

Jewish Community Services Incorporated: 8363 5400

Melbourne Jewish Charity Fund: 03 8587 7244

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