

AIDA Position on the Voice to Parliament Referendum

The Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association (AIDA) is the peak body representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical students and doctors in Australia. Our purpose is to grow ethical and professional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander doctors who will lead and drive equitable and just outcomes for our people.

Our vision is for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to have self-determination and equitable life outcomes in a culturally safe health system.

Supporting change

AIDA has wholeheartedly supported the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* and the need for constitutional recognition for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples¹. The mechanism to enact the recommendations of the *Uluru Statement* is proposed through a referendum to establish an Indigenous Voice to Parliament. AIDA supports this referendum.

The Voice to Parliament will be a national body made up of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from across Australia. This body would provide advice to the Australian Parliament and Government on relevant laws, policies and programs and proactively engage in the development of such policies and laws.²

Embedding the Indigenous Voice to Parliament would recognise the important place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia's history. It will enshrine a constitutional change for future generations and ensures a successful result remains free from any actions future governments may make to overturn the referendum.³ The wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should no longer be a solely political matter.

The need for change

For over a century – since the Federation of Australia, the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has long been discriminated and politicised. Australia has known of these inequities and the need to address them, ultimately leading to a referendum in 1967⁴. Australians voted 'yes' to change the Constitution to allow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to be recognised as part of the Australian population. Nearly half a century on, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are still fighting against injustices that have persevered to negatively impact the health and wellbeing of our people.

Over these years, government agencies, institutes and organisations have researched, assessed, and reported countless times on the unacceptable health inequities experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people^{5,6,7}. In 2020, all Australian Governments committed to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap⁸, which articulated that genuine partnership and self-determination must be adopted as a standard principle in the development of health policy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Better policy is made when the very people affected by it are involved in its design and implementation. AIDA is a member of the Coalition of Peaks. The Peaks have made clear their

¹ Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association. (2019). [4. Constitutional recognition and self-determination](#).

² National Indigenous Australians Agency. (2021). [Indigenous Voice Co-design Discussion Paper](#). Australian Government.

³ Reconciliation Australia. (2023). [Support a Voice to Parliament](#).

⁴ Australian Broadcasting Corporation (2020). [Right Wrongs](#).

⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019). [Australia's health 2018: in brief](#). Australian Government.

⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019). [National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey](#). Australian Government.

⁷ Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet (2023). [Overview of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health status 2022](#). Edith Cowen University.

⁸ Coalition of Peaks (2020). [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#).

support of a Voice to Parliament and that, alongside the National Agreement, the Voice will help to improve the life outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people⁹.

Despite the overwhelming and continuing acknowledgement of the health inequities experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, an unacceptable health gap persists. No more can these facts just be reportable statistics. Real and significant change is needed to realise improvements to the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We, as a society, have an opportunity to rectify these injustices.

The success of the 1967 referendum changed the constitution – but not attitudes. The 2023 referendum will be an important opportunity for societal change through reflection, self-education and self-determination. We encourage you to actively engage – your vote as an individual can make a difference.

Support through change

The position AIDA holds is based on our vision, the continued health disparity, and the uniqueness of the opportunity before us as a society; the opportunity for constitutional recognition of Indigenous Australians may not present itself again in our lifetimes. As a member-based organisation, AIDA values and respects the diversity of our members and understands there will be differing and passionate opinions on the referendum.

Our vision has long been to support and empower self-determination for improved health outcomes. AIDA will continue to support and advocate for all our members, regardless of opinion, and we will continue to support each individual to exercise their right to self-determination. In no way will we instruct members how to vote in the referendum. AIDA encourages active engagement and self-education around the Voice to Parliament, through reliable and trusted sources of information.

- [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice](#)
- [A Voice to Parliament](#)
- [Indigenous Constitutional Recognition through a Voice](#)
- [Uluru Statement FAQs](#)
- [Final report on the Indigenous Voice Co-design Process](#)

We understand that this is a deeply courageous and personal decision, and that individuals will be impacted by differing circumstances such as family and community dynamics. We recognise that the dialogue surrounding the Voice to Parliament can be overwhelming and triggering for members of our community. If you feel extra support in the lead up to the referendum would help you, we encourage you to utilise the resources listed below.

- 13YARN [Thirteen YARN]: national crisis support line for mob who are feeling overwhelmed or having difficulty coping (13 92 76) <https://www.13yarn.org.au/>
- Gayaadhuwi (Proud Spirit) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership in Social and Emotional wellbeing, Mental Health and Suicide Prevention: <https://www.gayaadhuwi.org.au/if-you-need-help/>
- Doctors Health Advisory Service (DHAS) for doctors and students: <https://www.dhas.org.au/contact/contact-dhas-in-other-states-territories-and-new-zealand.html>
- Find an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation near you: <https://www.naccho.org.au/naccho-members/>
- Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience Centre at Black Dog Institute: <https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/education-services/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-network/>
- Headspace: <https://headspace.org.au/yarn-safe/mental-health-and-wellbeing/>
- Call Lifeline on 13 11 14, or text them online: <https://www.lifeline.org.au/>

⁹ Coalition of Peaks (2023). [A Voice to Parliament](#).