

Inquiry into the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice Referendum

About Mission Australia

Mission Australia is a national, non-denominational Christian charity that has been serving Australia for more than 160 years. Our vision is an Australia where all of us have a safe home and can thrive. In 2021-22, we supported over 147,900 individuals through 465 programs and services across Australia with housing, homelessness, aged care, child, youth and family, mental health and other community services.

Twenty per cent of the people who used Mission Australia services in 2021-22 were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people face challenges due to Australia's history of colonisation and its aftermath, including intergenerational trauma, racism, social exclusion and disconnection from culture and identity. As a consequence, they have on average, worse outcomes than non-Indigenous Australians in a range of life domains including housing, health, and involvement with the child protection and justice systems. This needs to change.

We continue to call for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations to be at the centre of policies that affect them as this results in better outcomes for the people we serve. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations have the solutions to issues affecting their communities.

We have long worked with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as colleagues, providers of support, and as partners in our communities. Mission Australia was among the first not-for-profit organisations in Australia to develop and implement a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). We are a signatory to the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) Principles for a Partnership-centred Approach which guide the way we engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, and how we deliver services and development initiatives in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Mission Australia's vision for Reconciliation is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of this country will be restored to a place of equity, dignity and respect. We have committed to fostering a strengths-based approach to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities to lead the work that affects them. This is reflected in our 20-25 Strategy Operating principle of 'Committing to Reconciliation'. Our Innovate RAP 2022-2023 includes a commitment to Endorse the Uluru Statement from the Heart and we are committed supporters of the Voice to Parliament.

Mission Australia supports a Voice to Parliament

To achieve substantial and sustainable change towards Reconciliation, Mission Australia believes that solutions must be led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and people.

As part of our RAP commitments we are active supporters of the Uluru Statement from the Heart. The Uluru Statement from the Heart represents a historic consensus of Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander leaders. It was written and issued to the Australian people, calling for a First Nations Voice enshrined in the constitution and the establishment of a Makarrata Commission to oversee agreement-making and truth-telling.

Mission Australia believes that a Voice to Parliament enshrined in and protected by the Constitution is a vital first step to ensuring Reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians. We also acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded and that holistic conversations and action around treaty and truth need to complement proposed changes regarding a Voice to Parliament.

The Voice to Parliament will empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have a say on the laws and policies that impact them. It will be a permanent institution that will provide advice to the Parliament and Government on important issues.

The upcoming referendum is a historic opportunity to reimagine our nation. It is our chance to come together to deliver real change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people so they can take their rightful place in our nation.

It is the start of much needed change so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities are able to lead the work that affects them. It is a chance to support the practical changes that we hope to see.

The proposed amendment

We have seen examples of impactful change where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities are empowered to lead the work that affects them and believe enshrining an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice in the constitution will allow for long-lasting structural change at a national level.

We support the proposed amendment to the Constitution which delivers on the mandate of the Uluru Statement from the Heart. We support constitutional recognition through an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice as the self-determined way forward of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people after many years of consultation and work.

The final amendment and referendum question are fit for purpose, are legally sound and should not be changed. The Voice needs to be able to speak to both the executive and parliament. Without being able to do so the Voice will not be able to deliver meaningful change. This is particularly important for providing advice about improving programs and services.