

Voice to Parliament, the empowerment to achieve healthy lives

The National Health Leadership Forum supports the yes vote for the 14 October 2023 Referendum to alter the Constitution to recognise the First Peoples of Australia by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice.

The Chair of the NHLF Karl Briscoe, said the “a successful constitutional change will protect our Voice for future generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, to provide the necessary structural change to have a greater say in the legislation and policy that impact us.”

Having a voice is long overdue. Our Wellbeing should no longer be politicised.

In 2020, all Australian governments, along with the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations, signed the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. This Agreement was a commitment by all parties to marshal resources and the structures around them to achieve the objective of the Agreement, which is to overcome the entrenched inequality faced by too many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people so that their life outcomes are equal to those of all Australians.

However, the Productivity Commission’s Draft Report on Closing the Gap highlights the lack of government and agencies understanding and appreciation of the scale of change required to their systems, operations and ways of working to deliver the change they committed to. The Commission found many examples of government decisions that contradict commitments in the Agreement, that do not reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s priorities and perspectives and that exacerbate, rather than remedy, disadvantage and discrimination.

The NHLF believes that lack of recognition in the Constitution for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the First Peoples of this country, contributes to Australian laws and their application continuing to adversely discriminate based on ‘race’. In practice, the Constitution and Australian laws have not enabled the equal enjoyment and participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in important social, political and economic aspects of life. Despite past efforts of governments over many decades Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s participation in meaningful decision-making processes on policies and legislation that affect their lives has not been adequate to avert the health gaps.

Marilyn Morgan, NHLF Deputy Chair said that ‘change will not work unless the outcomes of our deliberations are seen to be fair, reasonable and accepted by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’.

Having a protected Voice to the parliament, government and their agencies will enable all of us to bring our culture into our work, to support and empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who work across our health system and who strive to improve our health outcomes. Culture is a protective factor – a positive determinant of health – that strengthens our identity, and our connection to community and Country” said Mr Karl Briscoe.

The NHLF refutes the assertions made by Shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Senator Jacinta Nampijinpa Price, that colonisation was beneficial and that there are no ongoing negative impacts of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torr Strait islander peoples.

The Gap in life expectancy and outcomes across all of the social determinants of health, demonstrates her assertion is wrong. Voting ‘Yes’ for The Voice supports the NHLF’s call for a place at the table that decides on the problems and the decisions.

The NHLF supports its member the Healing Foundation and their repudiation of Senator Price’s position: the impacts of intergenerational trauma stemming directly from colonisation are still felt across communities today. Stolen Generations had occurred in living memory and continued to have a profound effect on the health and wellbeing of communities and families. Stolen Generations survivors and their descendants face specific and complex social, wellbeing, and health needs because of complex trauma brought about by the forced removal, institutionalisation, and abuse of children that was inflicted upon multiple generations of First Nations people, says Shannon Dodson, CEO of the Healing Foundation.

The NHLF refutes the claims by Warren Mundine that the Uluru Statement is a ‘symbolic declaration of war’. The Uluru Statement of Heart is act of reconciliation of Australia. The Statement seeks constitutional recognition which is about acknowledging the past and the place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within our foundational document and recognises the fundamental impact of colonisation on first nations peoples and the experience of stolen generations. It is foundational to truth telling of Australia’s history.

The Voice to Parliament is the practical application to constitutional recognition, it is the means to move forward to avoid harm and past mistakes by having Parliament/Government and Bureaucracy to listen and learn from First Nations people and to make policy and decision-making from a co-designed and partnership approach which would demonstrate respect, says Karl Briscoe.

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MEMBERS



Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association

<https://aida.org.au/>



Australian Indigenous Psychologists' Association

<https://indigenoupsychology.com.au/>



Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives

<https://catsinam.org.au/>



Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia

<https://www.gayaadhuwi.org.au/>



The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation

<https://healingfoundation.org.au/>



Indigenous Allied Health Australia

<https://iaha.com.au/>



Indigenous Dentists' Association of Australia



The Lowitja Institute

<https://www.lowitja.org.au/>



National Association Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Practitioners

<https://www.naatsihwp.org.au/>



National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership in Mental Health

<https://natsilmh.org.au/National>



Torres Strait Regional Authority

<https://www.tsra.gov.au/>

Association of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Physiotherapists