

RA Federation position on the Aboriginal Voice to Parliament

Relationships Australia unreservedly supports the vision of the Uluru Statement from the Heart for Voice, Treaty, and Truth.

Justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is long overdue. It is in all our interests that we listen deeply and engage in truth-telling, which will open pathways to stop the ongoing disadvantage and harm being inflicted on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We recognise that processes which strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, decision-making, and healing are the cornerstone of their wellbeing. We also recognise that the rightful restoration of the cultural, spiritual and economic sovereignty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will benefit the whole community.

The Voice referendum to be held this year in Australia is an opportunity to discuss and advance processes that enshrine Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in decision making about the laws that impact their communities, as well as embedding recognition of the First Peoples of Australia in the Constitution. Our ability as a nation to hold such a conversation is an important component of our democracy.

To make most effective use of this public debate we believe there needs to be an urgent commitment by government, parliament, business, the media, and the for-purpose sector to support cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is critical that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities **are not** further harmed, abused and discriminated against during these discussions. Instead, the capacity of our parliament and our institutions to listen deeply and work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples must be enhanced.

After significant consultation with the senior Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff working in the Relationships Australia federation, we wish to acknowledge that there are differing views among our staff and clients as to whether the proposed Voice can and/or will achieve much-needed political transformation. We respect the right of our Member Organisations, their team members, and the communities they serve, to reach their own conclusions about this.

Relationships Australia is committed to expanding community capacity to ensure cultural safety, respectful informed debate, and freedom of expression. We encourage all Australians to seek out the necessary information to build their understanding about the referendum proposal and the Uluru Statement from the Heart. We are also committed as a federation to ensuring our own staff are supported to explore these issues and broaden their understanding.

Relationships Australia thanks the Relationships Australia Indigenous Network for their work and guidance including their generous sharing of cultural protocols and perspectives with us.