July 2023

IDAA supports a First Nations Voice to Parliament

Official Position statement from the IDAA

CALL TO ACTION FOR PEAK DENTAL BODIES TO SUPPORT A VOICE TO PARLIAMENT

The Indigenous Dental Association Australia (IDAA) is deeply committed to advancing the oral health and well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and working towards improving the Indigenous dental workforce. As advocates for Indigenous rights, self-determination, and equitable representation, the IDAA fervently supports the referendum for an Indigenous Voice to Parliament.

The Voice to Parliament presents a critical opportunity to address the glaring disparities in Indigenous oral health and the representation of Indigenous dental professionals. We know that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continue to experience significant health challenges, often exacerbated by limited access to culturally appropriate health services. The establishment of an Indigenous Voice to Parliament will ensure that these grave issues are given the attention they deserve, leading to improved health outcomes and greater equity in healthcare.

Importantly, the establishment of a Voice to Parliament will play a vital role in improving the university experience of Indigenous students. It is a priority to create a safer and more supportive environment for Indigenous students, as reports of racism and discrimination continue to be a concern. By having an Indigenous Voice to Parliament, we can advocate for policies and initiatives that address these issues and ensure that Indigenous students receive the support and resources they need to succeed in their studies and future careers.

It is crucial that the public is aware of the politicisation surrounding the referendum. The IDAA highlights the importance of considering this factor and recognising that the referendum is a matter beyond politics. It is about acknowledging the rights of Indigenous peoples and ensuring their voices are heard in matters that directly impact their lives.

We also want to emphasise that the Indigenous Voice to Parliament will include Indigenous voices from lutruwita/Tasmania to the Torres Strait. The Voice representatives will be chosen by First Nations people based on the wishes of local communities, ensuring that the representatives accurately reflect the diverse voices and perspectives within the Indigenous population. The IDAA firmly believes that the referendum for an Indigenous Voice to Parliament is a crucial step towards dismantling barriers, achieving true reconciliation, and addressing the systemic issues faced by Indigenous peoples. It provides an avenue for Indigenous voices to shape policies and initiatives, empowering communities and promoting self-determination.

IDAA urge all Australians to wholeheartedly support the referendum for an Indigenous Voice to Parliament. Together, we can foster positive change, address oral health disparities, and create a dental profession that is inclusive, culturally competent, and free from racism and discrimination.

IDAA Directors 2023

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What does it all mean?

A Referendum is important but what am I meant to be voting for?

A short history

The call for a Voice to Parliament, a key objective of the Uluru Statement from the Heart, emerged from the collective efforts of Indigenous delegates at the First Nations' National Constitutional Convention held at Uluru in 2017.

At this historic meeting, around 250 Indigenous delegates representing various First Nations from across the country came together to discuss their aspirations for constitutional reform.

After days of deliberation and dialogue, the delegates reached a consensus on a 440-word statement, now known as the Uluru Statement from the Heart. This statement outlines three key objectives:

1. Voice to Parliament: The Uluru Statement calls for the establishment of a constitutionally enshrined Voice to Parliament, which would give Indigenous peoples a say in the decisions that affect their lives at the national level.
2. Treaty: The statement also advocates for the negotiation of treaties or agreements between Indigenous peoples and the Australian government, recognising and addressing historical injustices and advancing self-determination.
3. Truth-telling: The Uluru Statement emphasises the importance of truth-telling and acknowledging the true history of Australia, including the dispossession and ongoing impact of colonisation on Indigenous peoples.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart has been a significant milestone in the ongoing reconciliation journey in Australia, reflecting the aspirations and voices of Indigenous peoples.

"Voting "yes" will make a big difference in improving the health of Indigenous Australians. It is simply the right thing to do."

What is the "Voice" to Parliament

The Voice to Parliament is a proposal to give permanent representation and recognition to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Constitution. It would create a new body that represents Indigenous people from across Australia and allows them to have a say in decisions, policies, and laws made by the federal government. This would cover important issues related to the social, spiritual, and economic wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The Voice would be an advisory body, offering recommendations and guidance to the Parliament, but it would not have the power to veto or overturn Parliamentary decisions. Its role would be to provide valuable advice and insights to inform the decision-making process regarding items that affect Indigenous people. Currently, there is no such representation in Parliament.

How will it be structured?

The specific structure of the Voice would be determined through legislation following a ***successful*** outcome of a referendum.

The government points to a report by Professors Tom Calma and Marcia Langton when asked about the Voice's details. The report suggests a two-part structure: Local and Regional Voices, along with a National Voice. The structure may evolve in the future.

The National Voice, as per the report, would consist of 24 members. This would include two representatives from each state and territory (totaling 16), five representatives from remote communities, two representatives from the Torres Strait, and one representative for Torres Strait Islanders residing on the mainland. It is important to ensure gender balance among the members. Each member would serve for four years and would be allowed to serve a maximum of two terms. The National Voice would also elect two full-time co-chairs from among its members.

The members of the National Voice will be elected by the Local and Regional Voices.

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Will I be able to view the legislation before the referendum?

No. Legislation for the Voice to Parliament will be developed only if there is a "yes" vote in the referendum. This is consistent with the process for all proposed changes through a referendum in Australia.

Is an Indigenous Voice to Parliament unique to Australia?

No. Countries such as Canada, Aotearoa (NZ), Norway, Bolivia, USA, Sweden, Ecuador and many more have Indigenous representation in decision-making processes in their government structures currently.

What is the purpose of having a Voice?

The purpose of establishing an Indigenous voice is to offer Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals throughout the country the opportunity to actively contribute to government policy decisions that directly impact their communities and themselves.

Here are the design principles of the Voice, as recommended by the referendum working group:

- Provide independent advice to Parliament and government.
- Reflect the wishes of local communities, chosen by First Nations people.
- Be representative of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- It will strive to empower, engage communities, promote inclusivity, be culturally informed, maintain gender balance, and actively involve youth.
- It will operate with accountability and transparency.

IDAA SUPPORTS A "YES" VOTE

- **Inclusion**: Supporting the referendum means giving Indigenous peoples a say in important decisions.
- **Equality:** It shows commitment to fairness
- **Democracy:** It strengthens our democratic values by ensuring all voices are heard.
- **Progress:** It helps improve the lives of Indigenous communities and foster positive change.
- **Opportunity** for a real chance at improving our mobs' oral health and workforce representation through inclusive decision-making and policy changes

Official Government site voice.gov.au

What happens if the referendum is successful?

The Voice will be safeguarded in the Constitution, ensuring that it cannot be overturned by future governments. It will be established as a distinct constitutional body within a new chapter (Chapter 9) at the end of the Constitution.

The inclusion of three sentences recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of Australia will form the foundation of the Voice:

1. There shall be a body, to be called the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice;

2. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice may make representations to the Parliament and the Executive Government of the Commonwealth on matters relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;

3. The Parliament shall, subject to this Constitution, have power to make laws with respect to matters relating to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice, including its composition, functions, powers and procedures.

"A Voice in Parliament makes sense. It may not be perfect but it is a long awaited step in the right direction for us mob."

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