



# **The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament**

Wayahead has a 90-year history of advocacy, particularly in relation to improving mental health outcomes for all communities in New South Wales. This year, Australians will be asked to vote in a referendum to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of Australia through the establishment of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice enshrined in our Constitution.

Wayahead acknowledges the diversity of opinion about the Voice, the Voice referendum, and the Uluru Statement from the Heart amongst Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Wayahead recognises and respects the diversity of opinion within our membership and the broader community across Australia. Wayahead also recognises the potential harm caused if debate and difference of opinions are not respectful.

This is a very important opportunity for all Australians to come together and there has been many years of hard work to define what a Voice could look like.

Wayahead supports the Voice, particularly given the mental health inequities and poorer outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Wayahead considers the Voice provides the opportunity to improve the mental health and wellbeing of our First Nations people, which aligns with our vision for communities to thrive with good mental health. The Voice is a step towards creating a better sense of self and wellbeing through the recognition of First Nations people. Self-determination can have a positive effect on mental health. Having a Voice and being heard is empowering and cannot be underestimated.

Our organisation acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the traditional custodians of the land and waters throughout Australia and as a State based non-profit organisation, we provide services to many different Aboriginal lands, and we pay our respects to the Elders and Traditional Owners. Our office stands on the land of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation.

Wayahead is committed to working with the First Nations communities on mental health issues including delivery of our services, actively seeking out and working with likeminded Aboriginal controlled health focused organisations and supporting the Uluru Statement from

the Heart and the First Nations Voice to Parliament.

This referendum is important for all Australians, and we have provided some information to assist in discussions you may have in your community or workplace to understand what you will be asked to vote on.

At Wayahead we encourage you to:

- Read through this statement to make sure you understand the Voice to Parliament.
- Set up a conversation (or a few) with staff or community members to discuss the Voice, or include it as a topic at your next team meeting.
- Talk through the Voice, what it is aiming to do and why it is so important for First Nations communities.

### **But why is this important? And why now?**

As a mental health organisation with 90 years of serving the community, we play a key role in fostering a culture of reconciliation and mutual respect among our staff and communities.

As a leader in mental health, we recognise the potential for the Voice to Parliament to make a transformative impact on healthcare and work with First Nations communities to deliver greater health outcomes.

### **What is the referendum about?**

On 19 June 2023, Parliament passed the Constitution Alteration Bill. On referendum day, voters will be asked to vote 'yes' or 'no' on a single question. The question on the ballot paper will be:

**"A Proposed Law: to alter the Constitution to recognise the First Peoples of Australia by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice.**

**Do you approve this proposed alteration?"**

### **What is the Voice? What will it do?**

The Voice will give independent advice to the Parliament and Government.

The Voice would make representations to the Parliament and the Executive Government on matters relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

- The Voice would be able to make representations proactively.
- The Voice would be able to respond to requests for representations from the Parliament and the Executive Government.
- The Voice would have its own resources to allow it to research, develop and make representations.
- The Parliament and Executive Government should seek representations in writing from the Voice early in the development of proposed laws and policies.

## Who will sit on the Voice?

Members of the Voice would be selected by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, not appointed by the Executive Government.

Members would serve on the Voice for a fixed period of time, to ensure regular accountability to their communities.

## What is the Voice's function?

The Voice will be advisory in nature only and will enable First Nations people to work in partnership with governments to close the gap.

The referendum is not about the details of the Voice. What the Voice will look like, how the Voice will operate, and how representatives will be chosen – will be set out in legislation by the Parliament after the referendum.

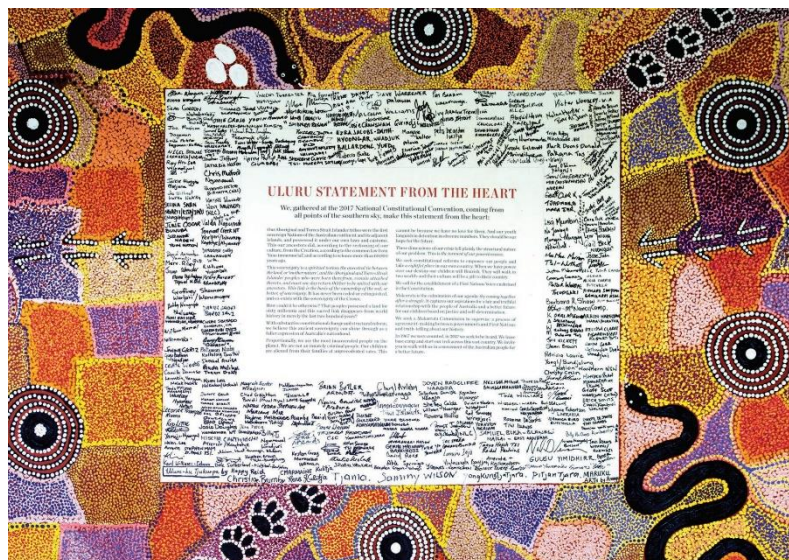
## What is the Uluru Statement?

The Uluru Statement from the Heart is the culmination of 13 Regional Dialogues with First Nations people which arrived at a consensus about what constitutional recognition should look like.

The Statement is an invitation from First Nations peoples to all Australians.

One of its key features is to ask Australians to support meaningful constitutional recognition through providing a First Nations Voice.

It also calls for a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations (Treaty) and truth-telling about our history (Truth).



Source: <https://ulurustatement.org>

## Why is the Voice important for First Nations health?

Improving health and wellbeing outcomes in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

communities is linked to the right to self-determination, to being treated with respect, and to being protected from discrimination. The Commonwealth government, under the Closing the Gap National Strategy, has a commitment to ending the inequality between indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians including around mental health, wellbeing and suicide.

The Voice is designed to give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples a direct say in how decisions about their healthcare are made on a local level and will see greater inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community- controlled organisations. (Closing the Gap Implementation Plan 2023).

### **Where can I find more information on the voice?**

At Wayahead we encourage you to learn more about the referendum, all households will receive the statements for and against the vote for the Voice to parliament. In addition, some sites that could assist in making an informed decision include:

<https://theconversation.com/your-questions-answered-on-the-voice-to-parliament-200818>

#### **Your questions answered on the Voice to Parliament**

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-03-22/federal-parliament-voice-referendum-explainer/102129556>

Parliament has decided on how the Voice referendum will work. Here's what to expect.

<https://voice.gov.au/resources/indigenous-voice-co-design-process-final-report>

Indigenous Voice Co-design Process Final Report

<https://www.safework.nsw.gov.au/safety-starts-here/our-aboriginal-program/culturally-safe-workplaces> Culturally safe workplaces

<https://empoweredcommunities.org.au/the-voice/> A Voice for the Future

<https://www.reconciliation.org.au/support-a-voice-to-parliament/>

<https://psychology.org.au/about-us/news-and-media/media-releases/2023/peak-psychology-body-supports-voice-to-parliament>

<https://wayahead.org.au/diversity-and-inclusion-strategy/>

<https://www.aec.gov.au/referendums/files/pamphlet/your-official-yes-no-referendum-pamphlet.pdf?v=1.0>

<https://mhaustralia.org/fact-sheets/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-voice-parliament>

<https://australianstogether.org.au/other-resources/voice-to-parliament/>

<https://www.niaa.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/closing-the-gap-implementation-plan-2023.pdf>