

The Voice Referendum

October 2023

Statement from Family Planning Australia on the Voice Referendum

In the spirit of reconciliation, Family Planning Australia acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their Elders past and present and we extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Our hope and belief is that we can move to a place of equity and justice and work hand-in-hand together.

Refer link: ***Family Planning NSW Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan 2022-2024.***

Family Planning Australia is the leading provider of reproductive and sexual health services in NSW. We are committed to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to improve reproductive and sexual health outcomes. This is a priority area in our Strategic Plan.

Family Planning Australia opened our first outreach clinic in Bourke in the 1970s. Since then we have learnt many important lessons.

The first is the need to listen to First Nations peoples and to invite elders and local community members to design services and community education programs with us so they are relevant, culturally safe and effective. The second is the importance of working in practical partnerships with Aboriginal Medical Services, Land Councils and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations to deliver services and programs that are accessible, are trusted and that work for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their communities.

Family Planning Australia commits to continue to listen and to work in respectful partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations to do our best to achieve practical reconciliation and to close the gaps in health.

Recognition of First Nations Peoples in the Constitution

Like all Australians, we have learned that Australia's First Nations Peoples have been custodians of the lands for 65,000 years, that sovereignty was never ceded and that lack of recognition and the hurts, harms and disconnection that followed European settlement 235 years ago continue to hold Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples back unfairly.

Despite decades of investment by governments in programs to address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage, Australia has not closed the gap and on some key measures we are going backwards. It is time for a new approach if we are to go forward, together as a united nation.

On 14 October 2023, Australians will have the opportunity to vote in a Referendum to amend the Australian Constitution to officially recognise the First Peoples of Australia in the Constitution by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice as an advisory body to the Parliament and Executive government on matters that directly affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We encourage our fellow citizens to seek out factual information about the Constitutional changes and why they have been proposed. The following sources of information may be helpful:

- **The Australian Electoral Commission** has resources to help understand the electoral process of referendums, including information on The Voice referendum.
- The ABC podcast **The Voice Referendum Explained**, with Carly Williams and Fran Kelly, presents balanced, fact-based information on the issues.
- **The Uluru Statement from the Heart** website provides clear information on the Statement, the consultation process undertaken with First Nations people and the long history behind the quest for Recognition.
- The Australian Human Rights Commission Report: **Understanding the Referendum from a Human Rights Perspective** provides examples of First Nations assemblies and voices in other countries and the principles for respectful discussion.
- **Reconciliation Australia** has resources explaining the referendum including common myths and misbeliefs.

