

MEDIA RELEASE – 21 February 2023

Enshrining a Voice to Parliament: towards improving health and wellbeing outcomes for our peoples

Lowitja Institute welcomes the significant progress and momentum now building towards a referendum to be held later this year on a constitutionally enshrined Voice to Parliament.

Lowitja Institute CEO Adjunct Professor Janine Mohamed said the establishment of a Voice to Parliament would provide a strong foundation for the urgent work to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

“We welcome the Statement of Intent, recently signed by the Prime Minister and state and territory leaders, that formally recognises the importance of constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and for a Voice to Parliament enshrined in the Constitution,” Adjunct Professor Mohamed said.

Lowitja Institute, Australia’s national community-controlled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research institute, has long urged full implementation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart’s calls for Voice, Treaty and Truth.

“As the Australian Parliament considers the question that will be put to the Australian people in a referendum, we look forward to supporting the process towards recognition for our peoples,” she said.

“An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament is the first reform called for in the Uluru Statement. The Statement is the outcome of five years of active consultations, dialogues and deliberations by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with our own communities for Voice, Treaty and Truth,” Adjunct Professor Mohamed said.

“This is a constitutionally enshrined body of Australia’s First Nations with a direct line to federal parliament. It can influence laws and policies that affect us and our communities.”

Adjunct Professor Mohamed said constitutional recognition has been such a long time coming in Australia but it can look to other democracies, including Canada, Aotearoa/New Zealand, and the nations that are home to the Sámi peoples, which include Indigenous people in the decision-making that affects them.

“Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continue to die far earlier and experience a higher burden of disease and disability than other Australians. This is a result of long-term economic disadvantage and social exclusion, among other factors.”

Lowitja Institute is a member of the Referendum Engagement Group that brings together more than 60 First Nations leaders and representatives of key organisations from across Australia in support of the referendum.

As we work towards a referendum later in the year, Lowitja Institute is seeking to build understanding, awareness and support in our communities for the referendum and the opportunity the Voice presents to impact positively on the health and wellbeing of our mob.

Many events are taking place over the coming weeks as Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous communities spread the word across Australia about the importance of constitutional recognition.

“The Voice will have a practical impact on the lives of First Nations Australians, because we will make better policies when our people are heard,” said Lowitja Institute Chair, Selwyn Button.

“It would enable even our most vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members – who have long been absent from federal government decisions – to have a seat at the table when decisions that directly affect them are being made,” he said.

“The Voice will help fix a glaring omission of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Australian Constitution – our country’s birth certificate. That can only be unifying moment for the nation and a long-awaited one for our peoples.”

“Let’s remember that the 1967 referendum achieved 90% majority of Australians voting ‘yes’. As Archie Roach once said: ‘It’s time to write a new story for our country.’”

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For more information or to arrange an interview with the Lowitja Institute’s Chair and Referendum Engagement Group representative Selwyn Button, please contact Jo Cackett on 0474 727506 or email communications@lowitja.org.au

To speak to any of the Referendum Engagement Group members, reach out to communications@lowitja.org.au

About Lowitja Institute

Lowitja Institute is Australia's only national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled health research institute named in honour of its patron, Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue AC CBE DSG. It is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisation working for the health and wellbeing of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through high-impact quality research, knowledge exchange, and by supporting a new generation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health researchers.

About Referendum Engagement Group

The Referendum Engagement Group includes the Referendum Working Group members as well as additional people from across the country including representatives from land councils, local governments and community-controlled organisations. This group will provide advice about building community understanding, awareness and support for the referendum.

The historic gathering of the Referendum Engagement Group brings together more than 60 First Nations leaders and representatives of key organisations from across Australia. An important part of the Referendum Engagement Group's role will be to engage with communities to build understanding, awareness and support for a successful referendum.

Members are unified in working together and with government towards a successful referendum. They recognised that this is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Australian Constitution in a meaningful way.

For more information, visit voice.niaa.gov.au

Additional resources

You can find additional information about the referendum on a constitutionally enshrined Voice to Parliament, including events and resources, here:

- [Uluru Statement from the Heart](#)
- [From the Heart](#) and [Together Yes](#)
- [Uphold & Recognise](#)