

# An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament

Position statement – June 2023

## 1. Position

The RACGP has long supported the campaign for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recognition in the Australian Constitution.<sup>i</sup> This position statement reaffirms our support and by extension, the establishment of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament that is enshrined in the Australian constitution.

Whilst the RACGP acknowledges and respects the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and our members, and understands there will be a wide range of opinions on the matter, the RACGP's decision to support a constitutionally enshrined Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament is in line with our Reconciliation Action Plan's vision and goals, for a culturally safe health care system, free from racism, promoting the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and using our voice and actions to advocate for the self-determination and genuine partnerships.<sup>ii</sup>

This support is consistent with the RACGP's commitment to close the gap in health inequality, our membership of the Close the Gap Steering Committee, and reflects our ongoing support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership.

## 2. Discussion

In 2018, the RACGP endorsed its support for the recommendations of the [Uluru Statement from the Heart](#) (the Uluru Statement).<sup>iii</sup> As such, the RACGP supported appropriate and meaningful constitutional and legislative change to implement the Uluru Statement's recommendations.

RACGP holds the view that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people health equity cannot be addressed without drawing upon the strength and resilience present in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Consistent with the principals of Reconciliation and Self-Determination the RACGP recognises the important role the Voice to Parliament will have in honouring and facilitating the implementation of these principals.

Solutions and strategies need to be developed in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities with genuine commitment of governments, non-government organisations and the wider Australian community.

General Practitioners (GPs) are well positioned to understand the health needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients. Additionally, they are well positioned to positively influence local environments through the use of their advocacy and leadership skills, whether that be in the practice, community, health service, outreach clinic, hospital or political setting.

### **Constitutional recognition leading to improved health and wellbeing.**

A significant body of research<sup>iv</sup> has established links between constitutional recognition and improved health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Constitutional recognition can also bring about opportunities to improve governance and leadership in the health sector. Evidence<sup>v</sup> from overseas indicates that the presence of constitutional recognition makes recognition in health legislation easier.

Adopting such an approach would also bring Australia into line with some of our overseas counterparts, such as New Zealand, Canada, the United States and Norway, who have established models for constitutional and treaty recognition.

## **3. Conclusion**

### **Support for the Voice to Parliament**

Consistent with the RACGP's ongoing commitment to close the gap in health inequities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and the acknowledgment for the need for meaningful representation in the solution and decision-making process by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the RACGP supports the need for a constitutionally enshrined Voice to Parliament.

## **4. About the RACGP**

The RACGP is Australia's largest professional general practice organisation, representing more than 40,000 members working in or towards a career in general practice in urban, rural and remotes areas.

The RACGP is responsible for:

- defining the nature and scope of the discipline
- setting the standards, curriculum and training
- maintaining the standards for high quality clinical practice
- supporting general practitioners (GPs) in their pursuit of excellence in patient care and community services.

## **5. About RACGP Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health**

Improving the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is one of Australia's highest health priorities. The RACGP is committed to raising awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health needs and as a result, RACGP Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health ('the Faculty') was formed to help 'close the gap'.

The Faculty has over 12,000 members either working in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healthcare sector or who have a passion and interest in this area. The Faculty undertakes a range of activities to help improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health outcomes. These include:

developing guidelines and resources for GPs and health professionals

delivering education and training

advocating on issues relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health

celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and achievements by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander GPs, registrars and medical students.

## 6. References

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.racgp.org.au/advocacy/reports-and-submissions/view-all-reports-and-submissions/2021-reports-and-submissions/voice-to-parliament-consultation>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.racgp.org.au/rap/our-vision>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.racgp.org.au/the-racgp/faculties/atsi/policy-and-advocacy/campaigns/uluru>

<sup>iv</sup> See for example: R. Mokak. 2015. The link between health and wellbeing and constitutional recognition. *Med J Aust*; 203 (1): 1; C. Lawrence. 2013. Aboriginal health and the Australian Constitution: how do we fix them both? *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*. doi: 10.1111/1753-6405.12026

<sup>v</sup> See for example: Howse, G. 2011, *Legally Invisible—How Australian Laws Impede Stewardship and Governance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health*, The Lowitja Institute, Melbourne.