

The Hon Ken Wyatt MP  
Minister for Indigenous Australians.

20<sup>th</sup> April 2021

Dear Minister Wyatt,

Re: Co-design process: Submission from the Australian Clinical Psychology Association

The Australian Clinical Psychology Association (ACPA) is the national professional body that represents clinical psychologists who hold the accredited post-graduate qualifications that meet the criteria established by the Psychology Board of Australia for endorsement in clinical psychology.

ACPA strongly supports reform resulting in a First Nations Voice to parliament, thus providing a representative body that will give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders a say in the laws and policies affecting them. The voice should be enshrined in the Constitution, allowing it to become an institution of lasting significance for First Nations and all Australians. We unreservedly endorse three key submission points:

1. The Government must honour its election commitment to a referendum once a model for the Voice has been settled;
2. Enabling legislation for the Voice must be passed after a referendum has been held in the next term of Parliament; and
3. The membership model for the National Voice must ensure previously unheard Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the same chance of being selected as established leadership figures.

Australia's history has encompassed systematic and systemic racially based abuse; massacre and social engineering of its First Nations People; oppressive government policies; an appalling record of Black Deaths in Custody; and a history of "Blackbirding," whereby between 55,000 and 62,500 Pacific Islanders were transported to Australia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to work the cane fields of Queensland and northern New South Wales. The establishment of a Makarrata Commission **would oversee a process of truth-telling about Australia's history and colonisation.**

This history has had a devastating impact that continues to this day, causing ongoing disadvantage and inequality. Our First Nations People continue to be systemically

disadvantaged, and continue to suffer individual, community and systemic racism. This racially-based discrimination and disadvantage results in disproportionate levels of psychological distress, mental illness, social isolation, poverty, unemployment and child mortality, as well as reduced life expectancy and education levels. Indigenous young people are more likely to be incarcerated than finish high school, and those aged 15-24 die by suicide at four times the non-Indigenous frequency. Moreover, this racially based discrimination and disadvantage has resulted in fragmentation of communities and loss of cultural practices and language, and significant trans-generational trauma.

Our profession's code of ethics rests on three core principles: respect, propriety and integrity. We acknowledge that psychology has been part of the discrimination against Indigenous people. In the practice of clinical psychology and in the other aspects of our day-to-day work, we can directly have a positive impact on this issue by educating ourselves about First Nations perspectives on mental health and wellbeing and working towards our own 'decolonised' practice being respectful and sensitive to Indigenous cultures and history. Our support for a First Nations Voice to parliament is consistent with this aim, which also includes cultural humility, respect, sensitivity, informedness and diversity to be central in our work with our clients and colleagues.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Caroline Hunt  
President, ACPA