

30 April 2021

Indigenous Voice Co-Design groups  
National Indigenous Australians Agency  
Australian Government

To whom it may concern

Beyond Blue welcomes the opportunity to make this short submission to the consultation on the establishment of an Indigenous Voice.

In 2019 Beyond Blue made a statement expressing that our Board and staff are determined to support an openhearted and respectful response to the Uluru Statement from the Heart, and for genuine action in response to it so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are heard and have a direct say in the public policy, programs and services directly affecting their lives:

- *Beyond Blue supports constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the first sovereign Nations of the Australian continent.*
- *Beyond Blue supports the development of formal structures to give effect to an Indigenous Voice, ensuring all relevant policies are developed in close partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.*
- *We recognise the inherent protective factors of Indigenous cultures and communities – those powerful forces of resilience, humour and connectedness to land, family, community, culture and spirituality – that can and should be utilised as sources of strength and healing to ensure social and emotional wellbeing.*
- *We will work in partnership with Indigenous people and communities to develop solutions to improve outcomes for health and wellbeing.*
- *We intend to be the best ally we can be, lend our voice when required and listen to learn.*

The establishment of an Indigenous Voice presents a significant opportunity to ensure the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is embedded in national policy development, ideally through structures which are protected and with adequate, long-term resourcing.

Social and emotional wellbeing is a holistic concept which underpins both individual and community wellbeing. Action on social and emotional wellbeing is critical in its own right. However, it is also a lynchpin to improving other domains – such as education, workforce participation, and mortality rates. Without good social and emotional wellbeing, it is hard for children to learn, or for adults to get jobs, excel at work and thrive. Recognition of this in policy development is essential to building better health outcomes for all Australians.

The Indigenous Voice Discussion Paper outlines a well-conceived and detailed plan to establish and grow the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's voices in national policy development. Several factors for consideration in implementation are outlined below.

### **The Local and Regional Voices must be adequately and equitably resourced**

The proposal outlines a sound approach that enables community-led Local and Regional Voice governance structures and operating models. This will capitalise on relevant local knowledge, resources and expertise. However, with an emphasis on leveraging existing structures, it will be important for implementation that the Local and Regional Voices are adequately resourced. Many existing community-led operations already operate at capacity, under constrained and often short-term funding cycles. Further, the capacity of different communities to support this process may vary. Reliance on local infrastructure must not be to the detriment of meeting community needs and service continuity. An equitable resource model which supports implementation and operation of the Local and Regional Voices is crucial for success.

### **The relationship with the Australian Government and Parliament must be bi-directional**

The Discussion Paper notes the intention for the relationship between the National Voice and the Australian Government and Parliament to be bi-directional. It is essential that the National Voice be consulted on important policy issues, however the opportunity for the National Voice to escalate important policy issues for consideration is also fundamental. Consideration should be given to both the mechanisms for this bi-directional relationship to succeed, as well as the supports that may also be necessary. Factors for success may include cultural competency, legislation and regulation literacy, and policy skills, among others.

### **Self-determination must underpin relevant policy issues**

The core function and scope of the National Voice states it will advise *"on matters of critical importance to the social, spiritual and economic wellbeing, or which has a significant or particular impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians of national significance."* Arguably, all policy affects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

While acknowledging the limitations and complexities associated with determining which policy priorities are consulted on, it is critically important that the National Voice be enabled to self-determine the policy issues to which it does and does not advise.

The establishment of the Indigenous Voice is a first step towards what we hope will see constitutional change and far-sighted change that can bring a new era of healing and unity, in which the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are recognised in all policy development. Acting on the National Voice's advice presents the Australian Government and Parliament with the opportunity to show the whole Australian community that genuine change and progress can be achieved through respect, bi-partisanship, shared commitment, and collaboration.

Yours sincerely

**Georgie Harman**  
CEO, Beyond Blue