

18 May 2021

Attention: Voice Secretariat

By email: [Co-designVoice@niaa.gov.au](mailto:Co-designVoice@niaa.gov.au)

Dear Sir/Madam

### **AUSTRALIAN RED CROSS SUBMISSION**

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Indigenous Voice Co-Design Process.

The Australian Red Cross is one of 192 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies that, together with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), make up the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement - the world's largest and most experienced humanitarian network. In Australia, our 30,000 person-strong workforce includes staff, members, and volunteers nationwide.

Australian Red Cross wholeheartedly supports the voices of First Nation peoples being heard and respected as they determine their future, which are principles foundational to the Uluru Statement from the Heart and the elements as it calls for - a First Nations Voice to Parliament enshrined in the Australian Constitution, a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement making, and a national process of truth telling.

Australian Red Cross aspires to walk alongside First Nations peoples and to stand together with them in their calls for systemic change. We do not purport to speak for First Nations people, but to add our perspective as an Australian humanitarian organisation that exists to address the needs of the most vulnerable. The Uluru Statement guides us, and all Australians, on the path forward as determined by First Nations peoples themselves.

Australian Red Cross supports the redress of systemic discrimination and disadvantage that has affected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for generations.

To achieve this, our 107-year experience tells us that it is critical to put affected communities at the centre of their recoveries. Whether in the delivery of humanitarian aid overseas, responding to crises, emergencies or natural disasters, Australian Red Cross's experience has shown that optimal, sustainable results are achieved when those made vulnerable by

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circumstances are empowered to lead their own recovery. This is why strength-based, localised, place-based approaches are at the heart of our work.

Likewise, we believe that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders must be best placed to shape the solutions that will help their communities to overcome the systemic disparities created by European settlement.

For genuine systemic change to occur, the National Voice must be permanent and irrevocable. And it must be listened to and heard. For this reason, we note the calls for the National Voice to be enshrined in the Constitution as nothing less is adequate to the task of redressing the harms caused by policies and practices of the past. Further, this would guarantee the perpetual continuity of the Voice and protect it from fluctuations in partisan policy while guaranteeing a firm foundation from which First Nations peoples will advise the Commonwealth Parliament and shape decisions that impact them.

Like many other Australian organisations, we are also taking conscious and active steps to change. In this process, we are indebted to Red Cross First Nations' staff, members, volunteers, clients, partners, Board Members, and our National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Team.

We are mindful of the weight of ongoing prejudice and discrimination inherent in many of the power and authority structures and institutions throughout Australian society that persists and diminishes us all. Maintaining the status quo is simply unacceptable. It is time for each and all of us to actively and purposefully change for the better. Failure to do so will be harshly judged by future generations. We have pledged to play our role in dismantling the system. It is long overdue.

Yours sincerely,

**Kym Pfitzner**  
**Chief Executive Officer**  
**AUSTRALIAN RED CROSS**