

Submission on the Indigenous Co-Design Process Interim Report

28 April 2021

The Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) is a national voice in support of people affected by poverty, disadvantage and inequality and the peak body for the community services and civil society sector.

ACOSS consists of a network of approximately 4000 organisations and individuals across Australia in metro, regional and remote areas.

Our vision is an end to poverty in all its forms; economies that are fair, sustainable and resilient; and communities that are just, peaceful and inclusive.

ACOSS seeks to support and work alongside First Nations peak and representative bodies, to support the inclusion of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and First Nations peoples' voices in decisions that affect their lives.

ACOSS reiterates our strong support of the [Uluru Statement from the Heart's](#) call for 'constitutional reforms to empower [First Nations] people and take a rightful place in our own country'. It calls for a constitutionally guaranteed First Nations Voice to provide advice to Parliament. The proposed body has no voting rights and will not alter the make-up of the Australian Parliament, but it will, for the first time, give First Nations peoples a Voice to Parliament.

We have seen the devastatingly negative effects of successive federal, state and territory policies imposed on First Nations peoples; peoples who consistently remind us they are the best able to address the current situation affecting them, their families and communities. First Nations peoples are best placed to explain the historic and ongoing intergenerational traumas of European colonisation - the marginalisation, the hurts and all their consequences. They have the solutions.

We urge governments to support institutional reform to hear the multiplicity of First Nations voices and allow them to bring a rich and varied range of proposals for constructive change to the table.

We do not want Australia to continue on a path of policies and associated expenditure on interventions and activities that are proving ineffective in many situations.

Giving First Nations peoples a say in the decisions that affect their lives will provide an opportunity for doing things differently and more productively, by simply listening to the advice of people who are affected, and by allowing First Nations peoples to claim their rightful place in the nation.

ACOSS calls on the Australian Government to support First Nations peoples' Uluru Statement from the Heart and as a national priority act to:

Recommendation 1

Honour the Australian Government's 2019 election commitment to a referendum once a model for the Voice has been settled.

Recommendation 2

Pass enabling legislation for the Voice after a referendum has been held in the next term of Parliament.

Recommendation 3

Ensure that the membership model for the National Voice gives previously unheard First Nations people the same chance of being selected as established leadership figures.

Acknowledgements

ACOSS was able to prepare this submission thanks to the tireless efforts of countless First Nations peoples in shaping a pathway for structural empowerment, particularly Professor Megan Davis of the [Uluru Statement Dialogues](#) and Dean Parkin of the [From the Heart campaign](#).

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