

IAHA position in support of the Uluru Statement from the Heart and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination

Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA), a national, community controlled and member-based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation reaffirm our support in full for the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

In 2017, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people attended the National First Nations Constitutional Convention at Uluru to ratify the decision making of the Regional Dialogues process. From these dialogues came a gift to all Australian people, the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart, replicated in full following this IAHA statement, seeks *“constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a rightful place in our own country. When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country”*.

This is consistent with IAHA’s vision for a future in which all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and future generations are thriving in connection to self, spirit, and place.

The Statement identifies three areas for urgent action: voice, treaty, and truth. It recognises these as essential steps on our collective journey.

This offer was reaffirmed by Aboriginal people in April 2022 in Yarrabah and through the Masig Statement - Malungu Yangu Wakay (Voice from the Deep) in August of the same year when Torres Strait Islander people voiced and avowed self-determination and regional autonomy.

In 2023, the Australian public will have the opportunity to participate in a referendum to enshrine a Voice to Parliament within The Australian Constitution.

These events represent key milestones in the ongoing advocacy and resistance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people since colonisation and an offer to the Australian people for a collective way forward.

IAHA support the Statement from the Heart in the firm understanding of the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, culture, and self-determination in improving education, training, employment, health, and wellbeing outcomes.

This is supported through emerging empirical evidence on Indigenous Nation Building and the Political Determinants of Health and Wellbeing¹, as well as 65,000+ years of evidence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples thriving in Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing.

In the words of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at Uluru, *with substantive constitutional change and structural reform, we believe this ancient sovereignty can shine through as a fuller expression of Australia’s nationhood.*

¹ Rigney, D, Bignall, S. Vivian, A., and Hemming, S. (2022) Indigenous Nation Building and the Political Determinants of Health and Wellbeing. The Lowitja Institute, Melbourne. Available online at: https://www.lowitja.org.au/content/Document/LI_IndNatBuild_DiscPaper_0822.pdf

The Uluru Statement from the Heart

We, gathered at the 2017 National Constitutional Convention, coming from all points of the southern sky, make this statement from the heart: Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes were the first sovereign Nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands, and possessed it under our own laws and customs.

This our ancestors did, according to the reckoning of our culture, from the Creation, according to the common law from 'time immemorial', and according to science more than 60,000 years ago.

This sovereignty is a spiritual notion: the ancestral tie between the land, or 'mother nature', and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were born therefrom, remain attached thereto, and must one day return thither to be united with our ancestors. This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil, or better, of sovereignty. It has never been ceded or extinguished, and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown.

How could it be otherwise? That peoples possessed a land for sixty millennia and this sacred link disappears from world history in merely the last two hundred years?

With substantive constitutional change and structural reform, we believe this ancient sovereignty can shine through as a fuller expression of Australia's nationhood.

Proportionally, we are the most incarcerated people on the planet. We are not an innately criminal people. Our children are alienated from their families at unprecedented rates. This cannot be because we have no love for them. And our youth languish in detention in obscene numbers. They should be our hope for the future.

These dimensions of our crisis tell plainly the structural nature of our problem. This is the torment of our powerlessness.

We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a rightful place in our own country. When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.

We call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution.

Makarrata is the culmination of our agenda: the coming together after a struggle. It captures our aspirations for a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia and a better future for our children based on justice and self-determination.

We seek a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history.

In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard. We leave base camp and start our trek across this vast country. We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.