



## NCOSS POSITION ON THE VOICE REFERENDUM

NCOSS supports the Uluru Statement from the Heart as a moderate and generous invitation from First Nations people pointing the way forward for Australia as a united nation. We recommend that non-Indigenous people vote YES in the upcoming referendum for a Voice to Parliament enshrined in the Constitution. As an organisation that is founded on research, knowledge, and advocacy we recognise the power in having a guaranteed voice at the table.

With the NCOSS First Nations Partners and Advisors Group we acknowledge that:

- There are many different views of the Statement from the Heart and the Voice to Parliament. There is no one view amongst First Nations people about these matters. NCOSS is committed to promoting respectful dialogue on these issues that is well-informed, and where all are able to participate safely.
- The Voice to Parliament needs to stand strong and independent, with its shape determined by First Nations communities. It should be connected to, and not replace, existing structures that First Nations people have created, managed, and relied on for decades to give them a voice – Land Councils, tribal organisations, ACCOs, peak bodies, and alliances, as well as new organisations and coalitions established by First Nations communities. It should be answerable to communities, not government or bureaucracy.
- A Voice 'to' parliament, rather than a voice 'in' parliament, will be in a position to speak out strongly about the most pressing issues for First Nations communities today, including:
  - Aboriginal children being taken from their families.
  - High rates of incarceration of Aboriginal children, young people and adults.
  - Overcrowded, unsustainable housing, and homelessness.
  - Poor health and life expectancy outcomes.
  - Holding governments to account for achieving the Closing the Gap targets.These must be first order priorities if the Voice is to make a meaningful and lasting difference.
- For many Aboriginal people the lead up to the referendum will be stressful with stories about them being played out in the non-Indigenous media, and non-Indigenous spokespersons potentially being emboldened to give ignorant, arrogant, and racist analyses of the issues.
- NCOSS encourages non-Indigenous organisations to work together with their First Nations staff, stakeholders and the communities they serve to identify what is needed in the lead up to the Referendum to keep people strong and safe; and to provide a platform for the diverse range of First Nations voices.
- Once the Voice is established it must be empowered to begin the work of advocacy and relationship building. NCOSS further supports treaty and truth-telling as key steps towards healing and improved relationships. Whatever comes next must be decided by a sovereign people in their own land – the First Nations peoples of this country.