



**Central Australian
Aboriginal Congress**

ABORIGINAL CORPORATION | ICN 7823

21 April 2023

Committee Secretary

Joint Select Committee on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice
Referendum

PO Box 6201

Canberra ACT 2600

By email: jscvr@aph.gov.au

Submission regarding the Constitution Alteration (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice) 2023

Dear Sir / Madam,

Please accept this as a submission to the Joint Select Committee on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice Referendum's Inquiry regarding the Constitution Alteration (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice) 2023.

Central Australian Aboriginal Congress (Congress) strongly supports the holding of a referendum to establish a national representative Voice for Australia's First Nations, as proposed by the Australian Government.

Congress is a large Aboriginal community controlled health service based in Alice Springs in the Northern Territory. Since its establishment in 1973, Congress has developed a comprehensive model of primary health care delivering quality, evidence-based services on a foundation of cultural appropriateness. Congress is a strong advocate for the rights of Aboriginal people and for approaches to health that take account of the social determinants of health such as poverty, inequality, housing, early childhood development and alcohol and other drugs.

We support the establishment of the Voice as both a recognition of First Nations' rights, and a practical solution to ensure more effective policies, programs and services for our communities.

First, the establishment of a constitutionally enshrined national representative body as proposed in the referendum would give effect to our rights to self-determination as recognised under international agreements to which Australia is a signatory, including the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)*. In particular, we note Article 18 of the UNDRIP which states:

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**Aboriginal health
in Aboriginal hands.**

Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures, as well as to maintain and develop their own indigenous decision-making institutions (emphasis added)*

In addition, as recognised in the *Uluru Statement from the Heart*, substantive structural change is required given the ongoing burden of poverty, discrimination and ill-health that our people continue to bear. The Voice would establish genuine and substantive and continued representation of our First Peoples in the policy-making process, and provide the overarching framework within which the health of our peoples may be addressed.

On behalf of Congress' Board, I would like to wish the committee well in its work and thank them for their consideration of these important issues. I would be very happy to provide further information should you wish. In the meantime, please contact Congress' Public Health Medical Officer, Dr John Boffa on 0418 812 141 or john.boffa@caac.org.au if you would like more detail on the matters raised here.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Busuttil', is written over a light blue rectangular background.

David Busuttil
Aq Chief Executive Officer

* United Nations. *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. 2007; Available from: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html>