



Central Australian
Aboriginal Congress
ABORIGINAL CORPORATION | ICN 7823

Position Paper: Australia Day Change of Date

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Congress supports the current call to change the date of Australia Day from 26 January to an appropriate and inclusive date, so that Aboriginal people are fairly and properly represented in national celebrations.

Congress recognises that commemorating an Australian national day of celebration on 26 January – the anniversary of the commencement of British colonisation – is to many Aboriginal people inappropriate and insensitive as it is a day of mourning, pain and sadness.

Congress believes that the date of Australia Day should be changed from 26 January as the legacy of colonisation is intergenerational trauma which continues to impact on poor physical, social and emotional outcomes for Aboriginal people which is well recognised in Congress' social and emotional wellbeing services. The date is connected to the invasion, conflict, genocide and destruction of Aboriginal people including their loss of culture and kinship by removal from their traditional lands. For those that survived, colonisation is ongoing and has led to disadvantage, health issues, substance abuse and incarceration of many Aboriginal people.

The decision to establish 26 January as Australia Day was made at a time when Aboriginal people were not recognised as Australian citizens and were therefore not included in most aspects of national life. This exclusion was entirely based on race and is a very obvious symbol of the level of racism which still exists within Australia. Racism is well recognised as a significant barrier to Aboriginal health improvement and one of the key focus areas in the current National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Strategy. Part of addressing racism requires Australia to confront its history and move on to a new inclusive era that allows Aboriginal people to be equally valued citizens.

Racism is overwhelmingly common for Aboriginal people and is a recognised determinant of poor health and wellbeing. Racism affects the physical, social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal people. It not only manifests as the direct experience of racially-motivated violence against Aboriginal people, but also more covertly through, for example, exclusion. Racism exacerbates health risk behaviours that take place within Aboriginal communities such as smoking, and alcohol and substance abuse, and is also a significant determinant of mental health issues. Congress believes that any celebration which is race based or is founded on racism should be changed.

Support for the change of date for Australia Day, whilst symbolic, should be the catalyst for opening and continuing conversations about racism and the need to better understand the nation's history. It is also a small step forward in empowering Aboriginal people and communities – one that should lead to real action and solutions for Aboriginal people in the future to improve their health and wellbeing.
