



Senator Nita Green  
Chair, Joint Select Committee on the Aboriginal and  
Torres Strait Islander Voice Referendum  
via: [jscvr@aph.gov.au](mailto:jscvr@aph.gov.au)

21 April 2023

Dear Senator Green,

**Inquiry into the *Constitution Alteration (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice) 2023 Bill***

Mental Health Australia is pleased to make a submission to this inquiry of the Joint Select Committee on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice Referendum.

Mental Health Australia supports the proposed alteration to enshrine an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice in the Australian Constitution.

As the independent peak body for the mental health sector in Australia, Mental Health Australia recognises the fundamental importance of self-determination to First Nations peoples' mental health and social and emotional wellbeing. Self-determination is imperative to address the appalling disparity in mental health and wellbeing outcomes between First Nations and other Australians, again highlighted in Mental Health Australia's 2022 [Report to the Nation](#) research.<sup>1</sup>

Through the First Nations Regional Dialogues and First Nations Constitutional Convention at Uluru, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives prioritised a First Nations Voice as the preferred reform of recognition of First Nations peoples in the Australian Constitution. This First Nations Voice is a unique opportunity for structural reform to empower ongoing self-determination. Mental Health Australia supports full implementation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart – Voice, Treaty and truth telling.

Mental Health Australia recognises the years of conversation and significant consultation that have preceded this proposed legislation, and the advice of both First Nations and non-Indigenous experts on the specific wording for this Constitutional alteration. Uluru Dialogue representatives have expressed support for the proposed wording and belief that it “will deliver what was called for in the Uluru Statement from the Heart”.<sup>2</sup> In recognition of this and as a member of the Allies for Uluru Coalition, Mental Health Australia supports the proposed wording for Constitutional change to deliver a First Nations Voice to Parliament.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [mhaustralia.org/report/2022-report-nation](https://mhaustralia.org/report/2022-report-nation)

<sup>2</sup> [ulurustatement.org/take-action/make-a-submission/](https://ulurustatement.org/take-action/make-a-submission/)

<sup>3</sup> [www.hollows.org/au/latest/allies-for-uluru-coalition-welcome-the-wording-for-constitutional-change](https://www.hollows.org/au/latest/allies-for-uluru-coalition-welcome-the-wording-for-constitutional-change)



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As a peak representative body tasked to provide advice to the Australian Government on systemic mental health reform, Mental Health Australia also understands the importance of the Voice being able to make representations to both the Australian Parliament and the Executive Government.

Mental Health Australia is also deeply concerned about the impacts of the ongoing public debate related to this referendum on the wellbeing of First Nations peoples — with the significant potential for increased racism, discrimination and deficit-based focus which are strongly associated with negative mental health impacts for First Nations peoples.<sup>4</sup> Mental Health Australia implores all political leaders to exhibit and support respectful dialogue which prioritises the wellbeing of First Nations peoples.

Mental Health Australia welcomes this legislation as a step towards structural empowerment of First Nations peoples and as such improving mental health and social and emotional wellbeing.

Yours sincerely,

**Carolyn Nikoloski**

CEO

Mental Health Australia

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<sup>4</sup> Kairuz, C.A., Casanelia, L.M., Bennett-Brook, K. *et al.* Impact of racism and discrimination on physical and mental health among Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander peoples living in Australia: a systematic scoping review. *BMC Public Health* **21**, 1302 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-11363-x>