

Submission by the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation

# ANMF Submission to the Joint Select Committee on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice Referendum

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Australian  
Nursing &  
Midwifery  
Federation



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## Introduction

1. The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) is Australia's largest national union and professional nursing and midwifery organisation. In collaboration with the ANMF's eight state and territory branches, we represent the professional, industrial and political interests of more than 320,000 nurses, midwives and care-workers across the country. Our membership includes over 2,265 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses, midwives and care-workers.
2. Our members work in the public and private health, aged care and disability sectors across a wide variety of urban, rural and remote locations. We work with them to improve their ability to deliver safe and best practice care in each and every one of these settings, fulfil their professional goals and achieve a healthy work/life balance.
3. Our strong and growing membership and integrated role as both a trade union and professional organisation provides us with a complete understanding of all aspects of the nursing and midwifery professions and see us uniquely placed to defend and advance our professions.
4. Through our work with members, we aim to strengthen the contribution of nursing and midwifery to improving Australia's health and aged care systems, and the health of our national and global communities.
5. The ANMF thanks the Joint Select Committee for the opportunity to provide feedback on the *Constitution Alteration (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice) 2023 Bill*.



## Overview

6. The ANMF is a proud supporter of the Uluru Statement from the Heart. We very much support constitutional recognition and the establishment of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament, and are communicating that support to our members and the broader community.
7. The ANMF understands this Bill paves the way for a welcome new chapter to the Australian Constitution which recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the First Peoples of this nation, and provides for a forum, in the form of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice, for them to make representations to the Parliament and Executive government on issues which affect them and their communities.
8. The ANMF appreciates the proposed amendment to the Constitution is the culmination of many years of collaborative work and advocacy by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and groups and legal experts. Their proposal is relatively modest – simply to be recognised in the Australian Constitution, and to be heard. We have no suggestions about the wording of the provisions.
9. The ANMF recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have long been excluded from formal consultative and decision-making bodies, and that they have long sought self-determination and an appropriate forum to advocate for themselves and their communities. A recent IPSOS poll suggests that 80% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people support the Voice as that forum<sup>1</sup>.
10. The ANMF has advocated on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues for many years in our national journal, the ANMJ, publishing on health and nursing and midwifery. Through this we have learned that when Aboriginal people are the drivers of the outcomes they wish to see in their communities, they can meet with the success they desire.
11. We believe that the Voice will help provide for a more self-determined approach and pave the way for healthy, robust and cohesive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.



The Voice should also help to facilitate a strengths-based, partnership approach between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous communities in improving health and life outcomes for Aboriginal people, rather than the prevailing paternalistic, deficit-based approach.

12. The ANMF considers that for too long, health care, aged care and maternal and child care services, structures and systems have failed to deliver Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with appropriate, safe and quality care. Constitutional recognition and the Voice will provide a vitally important means of ensuring health, aged, maternal and child care services are designed, implemented and run to achieve results that reverse existing deficits and see real improvement in health and care outcomes.

## Conclusion

13. Constitutional recognition is an essential step for Australia to take in its reconciliation journey with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is entirely right and appropriate that the Australian Constitution provides an honest and holistic reflection of our shared history, and is inclusive of those who were here for many thousands of years before European arrival. Together, constitutional recognition and the Voice communicate a strong and positive message about building a shared future and providing the way for our cultures to walk together. Australian society will be richer for its honesty and inclusiveness, and the time is right to do it now.

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<sup>1</sup> Attanasio, J. 9News, 27 January 2023. *Majority support for Indigenous Voice to Parliament, poll claims, as PM pushes referendum after protests*. Available at <https://www.9news.com.au/national/overwhelming-majority-of-first-nations-and-torres-strait-islander-people-support-inducting-indigenous-voice-to-parliament-study-suggests/c93bcf64-db71-4185-b716-725c53886a11>