



ACON's approach
to the referendum on
**AN ABORIGINAL
AND
TORRES STRAIT
ISLANDER
VOICE**



Art by Wiradjuri and Birpai man, Wayde Clarke

WHO WE ARE:

ACON, NSW's leading community health organisation for people of diverse sexualities and genders, is committed to community-led policy reform. Since we were established in 1985, we have always strongly advocated for the voice of communities to be loudest in decisions that affect them.

This approach is informed by consultations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of ACON's Reconciliation Action Plan working group and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ACON staff.

ACON acknowledges, honours and respects the differing views on this issue among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and community members. We are on a process of listening and allyship, and seek to ensure our approach is always constructive and in the best interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

WE BELIEVE:

We have always known that advocacy efforts that are driven by those who are most affected deliver the best outcomes. Nothing about us without us. Listening is the first step in any process that effects change. Listening to the voices, and working with the communities, of those who are most impacted is critical to effective policymaking.

We firmly believe in First Nations' self-determination. We acknowledge and support the generations of work that has gone into fighting for rights, justice and equity, and against racism, for First Nations people. We stand with all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in this pursuit.

We also stand with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in celebrating culture and joy. As the oldest continuous living culture in the world, we celebrate the resilience and strength of First Nations people.

Non-Indigenous Australians have a lot to learn from First Nations communities, about kinship and care, egalitarian and consensus-based governance, and protection of these lands and waters we call home.

**We believe
First Nations
people's voices
and truths
should inform
all Australian
policy that
affects First
Nations
communities,
and such
approaches
need to be
sustained and
supported
by all
Governments,
now and into
the future.**

WE ACKNOWLEDGE:

As an LGBTQ+ community organisation, we know too well the pain, distress and trauma of having our lives voted on. The Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey and the referendum on an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice are very different procedures, however, what is similar is the way in which a vote about legal documents becomes a debate about people's lives.

We know that this Referendum process will dredge up pain, distress and trauma for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is already happening. We condemn the racism that this debate has brought up. We condemn the racism that has occurred in this country since colonisation.

We particularly acknowledge the pain, distress and trauma that First Nations LGBTQ+ mob have and will continue to experience through this process. We are sorry that this is the second time in six years that your life has been subject to a public, national vote.

We call on all Australian governments to acknowledge this and provide support packages that specifically address the experience of those at this intersection.

We call on the electoral commission to support all trans people, including Sistergirls, Brotherboys and trans mob, to vote as themselves.

We know there are several barriers to voting in Australia, including legal barriers to those in long-term incarceration; and the structural and systemic barriers that are especially prominent for people experiencing homelessness, people with a disability, people with a mental illness, and young people. All of these barriers disproportionately affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We acknowledge the difficulties this presents in having a voice on the Voice.

We respect the right of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to hold different views about the Voice to Parliament. We respect the complexity of the situation that the referendum brings. We respect the right for your vote to be private. First Nations people are not homogeneous; autonomy and self-determination should not be compromised by differing community views.

It is through this lens that ACON makes our commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQ+ people, during – and after – the process of this referendum.

DURING THE REFERENDUM PROCESS:

We are acutely aware of the need for support services for First Nations people, for accurate information for all people voting in this referendum, and for community voices to be heard – without expectation or added burden.

In the lead up to the referendum, ACON will increase the capacity of all our staff to better understand the complexities behind the referendum, particularly those in client facing roles, so that we can support First Nations people specifically with regard to the referendum.

We will provide education to ACON staff about the Voice, including sharing informed perspectives from First Nations people on all sides of the vote.

We will advocate to the Australian Electoral Commission for clarity regarding the processes to update enrolment details and share this information with our communities.

REGARDLESS OF THE OUTCOME:

We know that this process does not end the day the results are announced, and our commitments to First Nations communities extend beyond the referendum date. We are acutely aware of the ongoing impacts that this process will have on First Nations people.

Regardless of the outcome, we will continue to support pursuits of rights, justice and equity after the referendum. We will continue to provide our support services for First Nations LGBTQ+ communities after the referendum. We will continue to celebrate First Nations culture, Blak joy, resilience, and strength after the referendum.

During and after the referendum, we will, in line with our Reconciliation Action Plans, increase organisational understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights through cultural learning.

We are committed to a community listening process to better understand what matters to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of diverse genders and sexualities as ACON moves towards truth-telling and accountability as an organisation.

We will continue to work towards Reconciliation, equity, justice, rights, and joy across all that we do.

We are especially grateful to ACON's First Nations staff, members, volunteers, clients, partners, and Board Members, for their expertise, advice, guidance, and generously sharing their cultures and traditions with us.

To support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and our communities during this time, we will look to undertake the following actions:

- In line with our Reconciliation Action Plans, increase organisational understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights through cultural learning.
- Seek adequate resources to commence a community listening process to better understand what matters to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of diverse genders and sexualities as ACON moves towards truth-telling and accountability as an organisation.
- Disseminate community resources in the lead up to the Referendum that provides information on voting procedures, support services, and encourage community to listen to the perspectives of First Nations peoples, traditional owners, community leaders, and organisations to inform their vote.
- Provide cultural competency training to Client Services Teams so that they are better able to provide support to LGBTQ+ First Nations people. This training will include a component on training staff to support First Nations people, specifically with regard to the Referendum.
- Provide resources to First Nations community members regarding available support services during and beyond the Referendum.
- Provide education to ACON staff about the Voice, including sharing informed perspectives from First Nations people on all sides of the vote.
- Run yarning circles for First Nations LGBTQ+ communities during and after the Referendum process.
- Advocate to the Australian Electoral Commission for clarity regarding the processes to update enrolment details including advocating for clear information for trans people on the AEC website and advocating for training for all AEC staff in fielding inquiries from trans people.
- Provide up-to-date information on how to update enrolment details for trans people, especially Sistergirls, Brotherboys and trans mob, on TransHub.
- Provide communications on ACON's channels to all of ACON's communities around deadlines to update electoral details or enrol to vote and engage in specific communication strategies with culturally, ethnically and linguistically diverse groups to provide information about voting.
- In partnership with Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations, advocate for specific mental health support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQ+ people, who experience unique challenges associated with having their lives debated for the second time in six years.