



Phone: (03) 9380 3900
Email: reception@vmiac.org.au
Mail: PO Box 59, Somerton VIC 3062
Office: Level 3, 211 Chapel Street, Prahran VIC 3181
www.vmiac.org.au

VMIAC's Statement on Referendum and First Nations Justice

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First Nations communities remain incredibly strong in the face of ongoing colonisation. They fight tirelessly for sovereignty, to create Aboriginal Controlled Organisations (including the new [Balit Durn Durn Center](#)), to raise the age of criminal responsibility and to protect Country. The Voice to Parliament is an important step towards ensuring First Nations peoples' voices and leadership are recognised by Federal Governments now and into the future. Recognizing their expertise and allowing it to shape Government policy takes us a step closer to addressing deep, historic systemic racism and redressing the historically disempowering ways successive Governments have treated First Nations communities.

At VMIAC, our mission is for a world where all mental health consumers stand proud, live a life with choices honoured and rights upheld, and where these principles are embedded in all aspects of society. Now, as ever, VMIAC needs to stand in solidarity with First Nations peoples. Debate on the proposed Voice to Parliament (that will soon be put to a referendum) has raised a lot of discussion about First Nations peoples and Australia's colonial history. For this reason, we are speaking publicly about our support of the Yes campaign.

As the Victorian peak for mental health consumers, we know both individual and systemic racism and discrimination continues to harm the social and emotional wellbeing of First Nations peoples. The public discourse is increasing levels of racist vilification and dog whistle politics. We call on political leaders and the media to lead respectful and non-divisive discussion at this important time in our national history.

We are in favour of the Voice to Parliament as we believe it's a critical step in addressing health inequalities, including the disproportionate use of isolation and restraint in Victoria's mental health system ([see here](#)), criminalisation, and deaths in custody.

We know that First Nations peoples hold the expertise to develop policies for their communities. This is what the Voice to Parliament will provide. VMIAC has a 43-year history of fighting for the recognition of people's lived experience as legitimate and essential for developing community and policy solutions that work. VMIAC supports the Voice because we see it as necessary step to maintain and build national momentum for Treaty and Truth Telling, as outlined in the Uluru Statement from the Heart. These are fundamental components of redressing historical wrongs and creating real and meaningful change for the social and emotional wellbeing of First Nations people. Here in Victoria, the [Yoorrook \(Truth Telling\) Commission](#) is having a key role in the [First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria's](#) efforts for a Treaty here in Victoria.

We acknowledge that there are diverse views among First Nations communities on the Voice, including those calling for a Treaty first. We respect the different views within this community. Therefore, it's important for VMIAC to explain why we support the Voice.

VMIAC has been a long-term supporter of the Uluru Statement from the Heart. We support each of the three asks - Voice, Treaty, and Truth Telling. We believe the Voice will take Australia closer to realising a Treaty and Makarrata (truth-telling) Commission, steps which were endorsed by delegates from over 250 First Nations groups. As part of our commitment to these vital steps, VMIAC has joined the [Allies for Uluru Coalition](#).

Across the country people are mobilising for a Yes voice. You can join in by volunteering, sharing a Community Tool kit or attending a session on why the Yes vote is important [by clicking here](#).