

Australasian College for Emergency Medicine

Position Statement

ACEM Supports the Voice to Parliament

This document sets out the position of the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine (ACEM) in support of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to the Australian Parliament.

ACEM is proud to support a Voice to Parliament and Declaration of Recognition in the Australian Constitution to help drive urgent changes and provide a clear and practical way forward for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recognition and self-determination.

This is an essential step in the nation's reconciliation journey and would be a step forward for the College's vision for emergency departments and the broader

health system to be free from racism, discrimination, and inequity, where all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples can access culturally safe health services that meet their needs.

ACEM embraces the concept of a shared national identity that values the rich diversity of our origins and the contribution that cultural identity makes to health and wellbeing.

May 2023

acem.org.au

1. The Uluru Statement from the Heart and the Voice to Parliament

The Uluru Statement from the Heart is an invitation to all Australians to walk alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples on the road to reconciliation. Developed with representatives from diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the Uluru Statement from the Heart calls for a constitutionally enshrined Voice to Parliament (the Voice), to promote self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

2. ACEM's Position

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are the First Peoples of Australia and must be recognised in the Australian Constitution. ACEM's vision is for emergency departments and the broader health system to be free from racism, discrimination, and inequity, where all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples can access culturally safe health services that meet their needs.

ACEM believes that when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are listened to and given agency on all issues, laws and policies that impact their communities there are profound benefits to their health and wellbeing. ACEM is working towards a future where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients, carers and staff experience culturally safe emergency care. A Voice to Parliament provides a robust mechanism for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to have a say in their future and matters that affect them. A Voice will improve health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

ACEM supports a Voice to Parliament and Declaration of Recognition in the Australian Constitution to help drive these urgent changes and provide a clear and practical way forward for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recognition and self-determination, as an essential step in the nation's reconciliation journey.

2.1 Our Commitment to Reconciliation and Health Equity

- 2.1.1** In 2020, the [ACEM Constitution](#) was amended to include a health equity clause to strive for excellence and equity in emergency care for Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, and Māori communities, passing with 93.73% of the vote.
- 2.1.2** ACEM is currently implementing its third [Reconciliation Action Plan](#), which recognises that to create good health is to create structures that ensure representation, agency, dignity, and respect for all Peoples.
- 2.1.3** One of the key priority areas in [ACEM's Strategic Plan 2022-2024](#) is 'Equity through Advocacy', committing to influence key decision-makers to achieve equitable access to high-quality, patient-centred outcomes for people who seek emergency care; including advocacy for evidence-based improvements to equity of access and health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- 2.1.4** Traumatology Talks - [Black Wounds, White Stitches](#) is a report examining cultural safety in Australian Emergency Departments (EDs) from the perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people attending EDs. ACEM is engaging with the report recommendations and actions to improve care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

3. Why ACEM Supports the Voice

3.1 Emergency Medicine is at the Frontline of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health – and We Need to Do Better

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples seek care at EDs at a greater rate compared to other Australians. We see both the health disparities, and the incredible resilience and strength of these communities, but we don't always meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who seek our care. As a medical speciality, and as part of our broader healthcare system, we want to do better, and we are confident that the Voice will invite systemic change.

3.2 Improved Health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

We know that being engaged, respected and supported in health care decisions leads to better health outcomes. Self-determination enables and enhances good health.

Historically, and currently, decisions are being made about the health care of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through systems and processes that were not Indigenous-led, often piecemeal, and did not reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, values or communities. Not surprisingly, health inequities remain and ineffectual solutions persist.

3.3 Eliminating Racism Improves Health

Racism causes life-long harm and damages health. ACEM's support for the Voice is a commitment to unravelling the systems that contribute to and engrain racist beliefs and practices. We know that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples will not seek out health services unless they feel culturally safe. Racism damages health, causes life-long harm and contributes to inter-generational trauma that perpetuates ongoing poor physical, mental and emotional health.

Collectively, we need to adapt healthcare delivery to include the aspirations and solutions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. When healthcare achieves this, racism and bias can reduce, and health outcomes will improve. Until the emergence of the proposed Uluru Statement from the Heart and Voice to Parliament, there has not been a mandated vehicle to enact self-determined changes to how our system currently provides for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

The Voice is recognition and action so Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples will lead initiatives to progress meaningful change in all areas of life, that address the persistent shortcomings of existing governing bodies.

3.4 Improved Health Systems and Structures

ACEM recognises the central role of cultural identity in health and wellbeing for both patients and staff. ACEM understands the diverse experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and seeks to centre Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing in our work. Seeking innovation and solutions from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clinicians and communities will help us build a stronger, more caring health system.

Document review

Timeframe for review: Every three years, or earlier if required.

Document authorisation: Council for Advocacy, Practice and Partnership

Document implementation: Department of Policy, Research and Partnerships

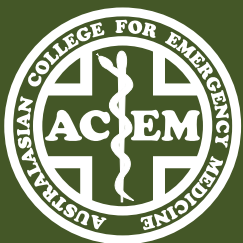
Document maintenance: Department of Policy, Research and Partnerships

Revision history

Version	Date	Revisions
v1	May-23	Original version

Copyright

2023. Australasian College for Emergency Medicine. All rights reserved.



Australasian College for Emergency Medicine
34 Jeffcott St
West Melbourne VIC 3003
Australia
+61 3 9320 0444
admin@acem.org.au

acem.org.au