



Statement on ‘A Voice to Parliament’ and the Uluru Statement from the Heart

September 2023.

Catholic Social Services NSW/ACT (CSS NSW/ACT) is an organisation that advocates on behalf of the network of Catholic Social Services in NSW and ACT. Our vision for society is grounded in our understanding of the fundamental dignity, sanctity and worth of every human life. As people are fundamentally social beings, we work for the common good for the community, how we organise socially, politically, and economically has implications for our capacity to thrive in community. We stand in solidarity with the community. Our participation in community brings with it both a range of rights and protections and a range of duties and obligations.

According to these values, CSS NSW/ACT as a network, strongly supports constitutional recognition of First Nations Peoples through a Voice To Parliament as articulated by the [‘Uluru Statement from the Heart’](#)ⁱ.

The invitation of this Statement, and the upcoming constitutional referendum, is to embrace the calls of our First Nations Peoples for a just future, a means of recognition and a way forward for healing and learning together.

The fact First Nations Peoples have lived in Australia for many thousands of years, but their custodianship of the land isn’t mentioned in the Constitution is “an omission which needs to be rectified”ⁱⁱ.

CSS NSW/ACT also recognises a Voice to Parliament as a step – with truth telling and treaty also being vitally important in the broader work of reconciliation.

As a vote on an Indigenous Voice to Parliament nears, we encourage the community to read and discuss the Uluru Statement from the Heart – the document from which the Voice proposal emerged. We encourage the community to ‘be informed’ and educate themselves as well as possible concerning the proposal to establish the Voice and engage in the debate productively and respectfully.

“This could be a significant step towards a more just and equitable Australia and to bring social justice and healing to First Nations Peoples”.

Additional Resources

Australian Catholic Bishops Conference Social Justice Statement 2023-2024

“Listen, Learn, Love – A New Engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples”

“In 2023, we will be given a chance to vote in another referendum to constitutionally recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples through a Voice to Parliament.

Australia’s Bishops see it as an opportunity for all Australians to renew our engagement with the First Peoples of Australia. They have come to this view through much listening to the First Peoples and they encourage us all to listen to them in a spirit of love and humility.”

<https://socialjustice.catholic.org.au/2023/08/22/social-justice-statement-2023-24/>

A brief overview of Catholic Social Services NSW/ACT and our member agencies.

Catholic Social Service agencies have had a long history as service providers in NSW and the ACT, serving individuals and communities for decades, since the first agencies were established in the late 1950's.

Operating for decades as a NSW branch of the national peak body Catholic Social Services Australia, in 2018 a decision was made by the NSW members to formally establish a NSW Association, Catholic Social Services NSW/ACT, as a network organisation that could advocate behalf of the Catholic Social Service membership and for the vulnerable communities, families, and children we serve.

Our members are embedded in communities across NSW. We are a collaborative network of catholic social service organisations operating as independent local service providers, either linked to a local catholic diocese, a larger Catholic entity or as a local initiative. Our Association facilitates collaboration across our membership and provides a single unified voice to government on key policy matters and issues of concern for the people we serve across NSW.

This strong link to local communities in metro, regional and remote NSW, and our strong historical reputation as service providers, combined with a capacity for collective activity and 'voice', is a defining characteristic of the network.

The network has also established an independent company which may, as opportunities arise, bid for State-Wide tenders, or establish pilot projects and develop new models of service provision.

Members of the network include all the CatholicCare and Centacare agencies; large agencies such as Marist 180, MacKillop Family Services, Mercy Services, St Vincent de Paul (NSW) and smaller agencies such as Dunlea and Sisters of Charity.

In addition to our advocacy role as the collective voice, CSS NSW/ACT is committed to ongoing quality and service improvement and to this has established several 'Communities of Practice' across the network.

The purpose of Catholic Social Services NSW/ACT as a network is to build capacity, share, support and promote best practice, to encourage partnerships between Catholic social services within New South Wales and the ACT. As a state-wide advocate, Catholic Social Services NSW/ACT also works with its members to produce evidence and research which informs public opinion and assists government and the community to develop just and compassionate social and economic policies that will improve the lives of the vulnerable and disadvantaged people in New South Wales and ACT.

We also work in the spirit of collaboration with relevant NGO peak organisations, such as the national peak body, Catholic Social Services Australia, Australian Catholic University, NCOSS, ACWA, FRSA and Government agencies.

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ⁱ Access the Uluru Statement at: <https://ulurustatement.org/the-statement/view-the-statement/>

ⁱⁱ ACBC statement on Indigenous Voice to Parliament

Read the full statement at: <https://bit.ly/BishopsVoice>