

## **The Australasian Society of Clinical and Experimental Pharmacologists and Toxicologists (ASCEPT) Public Statement Supporting the Indigenous Voice to Parliament**

On 14<sup>th</sup> October 2023, the people of Australia that are eligible to vote have been given the responsibility to answer the following question Yes or No:

"A Proposed Law: to alter the Constitution to recognise the First Peoples of Australia by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice. Do you approve this proposed alteration?"

If a national majority (more than 50%) from all states and territories, as well as a majority (more than 50%) in a majority of states (at least four of the six states) – also known as a double majority – votes yes, the new chapter and section to be added to the constitution are:

### **Chapter IX Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples S 129 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice**

In recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of Australia:

1. There shall be a body, to be called the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice;
2. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice may make representations to the Parliament and the Executive Government of the Commonwealth on matters relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
3. The Parliament shall, subject to this Constitution, have power to make laws with respect to matters relating to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice, including its composition, functions, powers and procedures.

This is the entirety of what Australians are being asked in this referendum and what will happen with respect to the Constitution if the double majority says 'Yes'. No more. No less.

ASCEPT is an institution that advances health, and the prevention and treatment of disease, by promoting and advancing the teaching and research of clinical and experimental pharmacology and toxicology.

The Objects of ASCEPT include: to advocate for and fairly represent the field of clinical and experimental pharmacology and toxicology in public debate for the advancement of health and prevention and treatment of disease; to consider, originate, promote and campaign, so far as relates to the sciences of clinical and experimental pharmacology and toxicology and ancillary sciences, alterations and improvements in the law and oppose or support alterations therein; and anything ancillary to these Objects.

The Society is therefore committed to Closing the Gap, which we are currently not doing as a nation. New data released by the Productivity Commission (Closing the Gap Annual Data Compilation Report July 2023) shows that, overall, just four of the nineteen Closing the Gap targets are "on track", eleven targets are "not on track" (including all of those relating to health), and for four targets, a trend cannot be assessed.

ASCEPT respects and encourages diversity of thought and opinion. The ASCEPT membership was surveyed and asked the question, "As an ASCEPT member, would you be comfortable with ASCEPT making a public statement supporting the Indigenous Voice to Parliament?" 82% of respondents answered 'Yes' and 18% answered 'No'. This statement is therefore reflective of this position, and how individual members of the Society ultimately decide to vote on 14<sup>th</sup> October is entirely a matter for each individual.

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If you are not sure how to vote, ASCEPT encourages you to seek answers to your questions from verified sources in order to make an informed decision. As educators, researchers, and healthcare providers, we know the importance of evidence-based decision making, as well as engagement and meaningful consultation with consumers to improve outcomes.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a life expectancy 8 years shorter than non-Indigenous Australians. Circulatory diseases accounted for the largest gap in mortality rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in 2015–2019 (78 more deaths per 100,000 population for Indigenous than non-Indigenous Australians), followed by cancer and other neoplasms (65 per 100,000), and endocrine, metabolic and nutritional disorders – largely diabetes (63 per 100,000). The underlying causes of these chronic conditions are multifactorial, with prevention and treatment complicated by the particular circumstances of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Pillar 1 of the National Medicines Policy 2022 is “*Equitable, timely, safe and reliable access to medicines and medicines-related services, at a cost that individuals and the community can afford.*” Within Pillar 1, with respect to Equity, the National Medicines Policy includes:

- (1) “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and self-determination is needed in all partnerships to enable shared decision-making in identifying priorities and to drive solutions given the substantial needs and barriers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience”;
- (2) “People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are included in partnerships to co-design solutions to increase access to medicines, culturally appropriate medicines information and medicines-related services”; and
- (3) “People from rural and remote communities face specific and ongoing barriers associated with the cost, supply and distance to access medicines and health services.”

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021-2031, launched in 2021 by then Health Minister Hon Greg Hunt, states, “The Health Plan recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are best placed to determine and deliver the solutions that are best for their communities.”

ASCEPT agrees with this statement and believes a Yes vote on 14<sup>th</sup> October provides the best route forward to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to finally Close the Gap.



Prof Kevin Pflieger  
President  
ASCEPT

*ASCEPT recognises the diversity of its membership and is committed to the values, attitudes and conduct of equity, diversity and inclusion to create a collegial, collaborative and successful professional community.*

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