

The Voice to Parliament Referendum (the Referendum) was a significant event in Australia's political history. All students, regardless of age and background, will likely have heard commentary about the Referendum in the media, at home and within their communities, and some may need additional support, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Within last week's newsletter, the [statement from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council \(NATSICC\)](#) reflects the position of the peak advisory body to the Australian Catholic Church on issues relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics, including

*'When we started this journey, we knew it would not be easy. We knew that there were many hurdles to overcome. This has been the case for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for over 200 years. Our strong culture and spirituality have helped us to survive through challenges, and an unsuccessful outcome to the Voice to Parliament referendum is just another challenge that we will face with dignity, respect and without losing hope.'*

*'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.'* (Romans 15:13)

Principals may choose to share this message with your community, reflecting the spirit of hope for an improved future and dialogue with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Principals and school staff are also encouraged to engage with the reflections of [Bishop Charles Gauci](#), chair of the Bishops Commission for Relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.

*'Australians know those poor outcomes are not good enough in the nation of the alleged "Fair go".'*

*Bishop Gauci said while the debate leading up to the referendum was 'intense and, at times, challenging', there was an 'overwhelming consensus ... that more should be done to address the injustice experienced by so many First Nations people'.*

*He said that the Church, while not always living up to its own ideals, has been a driver of positive change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through its parishes, schools, social services, and health and aged care services.*

*'At this moment in our history, it is time for the Church and its ministries to redouble our efforts to close the gap—not as a slogan, but as a commitment,' Bishop Gauci said.*

### **Resources for support and reflection**

Education Officer: Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Education, Jeanette Morris has also put together some resources with the support of other Aboriginal educators. These resources include two articles that are geared more towards adults and might prove helpful to school staff.

- [Reconciliation Australia](#) and [Reconciliation Victoria](#) both offer practical actions in furthering reconciliation in schools and communities. Whilst Reconciliation Australia's resource, [The Referendum and Education](#), was developed prior to the Referendum date, it contains valuable and pertinent information relating to wellbeing.
- [ReachOut](#) is an anonymous and confidential site for young people to connect on their terms. There are a number of general resources that may support all students, with some specific resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students: [Yarn Up](#), [Ways to connect with community if you're a First Nations young person](#) and [How to Stay Strong](#).

- [Australian Indigenous HealthInfonet](#)'s portal [Connection. Strength. Resilience](#) provides "a set of resources aimed at supporting resilience and reducing social and emotional harms to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people following the Voice Referendum".
- The [National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation](#) provides links to various [Voice Resources](#).
- Helena Kadmos' article [How should my class reckon with the referendum](#) looks at teaching and learning alongside university students in the week following the referendum. Her gentle and practical way of supporting students may provide insight into supporting young people and adults.
- June Oscar's article [Now is the time to act. The referendum must not lead to despair, but to a search for new ways to secure justice](#) discusses the importance of maintaining optimism and exploring many pathways to bringing about a unified Australia.

## Student Support

Schools continue to maintain a focus on the care and wellbeing of all students, and in this time following the referendum, it remains important to continue to promote cultural safety due to the potential variety of emotions experienced by different student groups, in accordance with [Child Safe Standard 1](#), which states that schools should establish a culturally safe environment in which the diverse and unique identities and experiences of Aboriginal children and young people are respected and valued.

When continuing to support students following the Voice to Parliament Referendum, schools should consider:

- advising students that they may feel a wide range of emotions, for example, anxiety, anger, sadness or fear. Students should know that mixed emotions are normal and understandable during this time.
- helping students practice self-care by encouraging open dialogue and reaching out for support and staying connected to trusted adults, supportive friends, family and/or the school's counselling or other wellbeing team services where needed
- promoting the concept of healthy boundaries for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to prioritise self-care during this time as needed
- creating safe spaces within the school where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students can express their feelings and concerns without fear or judgment. This can be done through cultural clubs, support groups, or dedicated rooms for cultural activities
- encouraging all students to show respect by being mindful of healthy boundaries and only engaging in supportive and constructive conversations

In supporting your school community, the resources of the DOBCEL team are available as required. Additionally, the following resources may also be helpful.

- [Yarning SafeNStrong \(YSNS\)](#): 1800 959 563
- [13YARN](#): 13 92 76
- [Headspace](#): 1800 650 890
- [Kids Helpline](#): 1800 551 800
- [Beyond Blue](#): 1300 224 636

## Looking forward

A range of Diocesan Schools engaged with the Fire Carrier Program recently. DOBCEL CEB staff are commencing the work of a Reconciliation Action Plan. Our school communities play a critical role in educating the next generation of Australians to the inherent dignity of all.

Education plays a key role in fostering dialogue to enable indigenous-led ideas and initiatives to address inequity and continue to build a spirit of reconciliation for all people in this country.

Our school Reconciliation Action Plans, our responses to [Child Safe Standard 1](#), including for some schools their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plans, and the foundational belief that we are each made in the image and likeness of God because we can love, create, and truly choose good. We are capable of truly and freely choosing to do good and to love, which will enable us together to work towards a richer future Australia.

We acknowledge and thank everyone across our DOBCEL community for your continued commitment and proactive work to foster safe, respectful and inclusive school communities in the pursuit of fullness of life for all.