



# ACON'S FIRST NATIONS LISTENING AND TRUTH TELLING PROJECT:

## Our pathway forward following the referendum on an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice



Art by Wiradjuri and Birpai man, Wayde Clarke

As NSW's leading health organisation for people of diverse sexualities and genders, ACON works to create opportunities for people in our communities to live their healthiest lives, and this includes LGBTQ+SB Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. As an organisation founded on the ideals of community-led, consultation-based advocacy, we strive to deliver programs and interventions that are run by and for those they are intended to serve.

As this year's National Reconciliation Week, ACON is taking time to meaningfully consider our role in the process of reconciliation, and the actions we will take to further this objective. Despite the disappointing referendum process and outcome, ACON as an organisation remains strongly committed to the "nothing about us without us" ideals of self-determination for all First Nations people. ACON will continue to stand with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and we remain committed to advocacy efforts that are informed by the people whose lives are most affected by the outcomes of this work.

As an LGBTQ+ community organisation, we know too well the pain, distress, and trauma of having our lives voted on. While the Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey and the Referendum on an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice were very different, they were very similar in the way in which a vote on constitutional change became a public opinion debate on the validity of marginalised people's lives.

Additionally, for LGBTQ+SB Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, this represented the second time in 6 years that their lives became the subject of a public opinion debate that developed an undertone of bigotry and prejudice. This experience is emblematic of the intersectionality of the oppression this group experiences, where they endure multiple dimensions of oppression simultaneously, based on their sexuality and gender, and their race, as well as other compounding factors.

We know that The Voice referendum process was painful, distressing, and traumatic for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and we condemn the racism that this debate incited. Further, ACON condemns the racism that colonisation has produced for First Nations people in Australia, and around the world and we will continue to support the pursuit of rights, justice, and equity for First Nations LGBTQ+SB communities.

ACON seeks to further amplify the voices of LGBTQ+SB Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in our programs and services. To achieve this, the organisation has committed to a Listening and Truth Telling process designed to instil a culture of meaningful listening across our organisation, where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities feel their voices are being genuinely heard, and that their needs are being prioritised.

Wherever possible, ACON's Listening and Truth Telling Project will be informed by LGBTQ+SB Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It will include meetings with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across NSW in which ACON will participate in meaningful acts of listening, and from which further strategic meetings with relevant stakeholders across the health sector will be held, to present the findings of the project. This process will allow us to discuss how to effectively respond to the outcomes of the Listening and Truth Telling process.

The ultimate goal of this process will be to develop meaningful dialogue between LGBTQ+SB Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and ACON staff, including ACON's Senior Leadership and its Board, that will better inform our strategic directions and the future of the way we work with LGBTQ+SB Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Through this process, and by continuing to follow the strategies outlined in our second Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), we will work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to build an open and transparent dialogue between ACON and sexuality and gender diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living with HIV.

We will continue to celebrate First Nations culture, resilience, and joy. In line with our RAP, we will increase organisational understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledges, and rights through cultural learning.

As we move towards truth-telling and accountability as an organisation, we are especially grateful to ACON's First Nations staff, volunteers, clients, partners, and Board Members who are able to provide their expertise, advice and guidance, and for generously sharing their cultures and traditions with us.

ACON is committed to a community listening process to better understand what matters to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of diverse sexualities and genders, and we will continue to work towards reconciliation, equity, and justice across all that we do.