



First Nations Policy

In Australia, it is mutually recognised there is richness and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and peoples. Equally, acknowledgment of Australia's First Peoples as the original custodians has led to a celebration and honour worthy of respect. The diversity of First Australians with distinct culture, customs, language and laws requires non-Indigenous groups to listen carefully in order to help foster connection and collaboration. Furthermore, in amplifying First Nations voices, systemic injustice and trauma can be shared openly in the desire for forgiveness and reconciliation, ensconced in the freedom of believing Jesus' words that "The truth will set you free" (John 8:32). We believe that this posture will further the cause of deep and long-lasting reconciliation. True reconciliation is enacted frequently in the Gospels. Legislation developed alongside our First Peoples in their specific cultural context must be guided by robust research showing positive participation and outcomes for First Peoples.

AIMS:

Australian Christians are committed to introducing legislation in the following areas that include key stakeholders and extensive consultation with First People's elders and leaders.

We stand as a party giving a voice to the voiceless and underpin our policies with the recognition of the ever-present need for reconciliation, unity and healing with our First Peoples.

SPECIFIC POLICY OUTLINES:

1. EDUCATION

- a) There should be a recognition of the cultural capital that First People's children bring to their schooling process — acknowledging and including this, ensuring it remains intact throughout their schooling.¹ Practically this will include all Australians having learning experiences of teaching with First Nations People, not just about First Nations People.² Dr Noel Pearson terms this as a bi-cultural future.³
- b) On-going research and review of Aboriginal education measuring progress in achieving improved outcomes for First Nations students.⁴
- c) Ensuring that Aboriginal Studies is taught in all schools to expand and enrich Australian history for all Australians.
- d) Implementing early literacy programs in all government schools in WA, such as MultiLit, which have helped to improve reading ability.⁵
- e) Replicating in all government schools school-specific, culture-focused, locally-led and gender-specific programs such as demonstrated in the Wesley College "The Moorditj Mob"⁶ program" and by the Smith Family⁷ "Girls at the Centre program", both of which are reducing school achievement inequalities.

2. HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Australia is the only country in the western world that has failed to eliminate trachoma (preventable blindness). Devastatingly, our First People's youth suicide rate remains four times that of other Australian youth.⁸ These examples of health inequalities highlight the fact the environment and conditions impact ongoing health needs and access to high-quality health services.⁹

To enable health professionals to understand and create positive health support and outcomes, it has been recognised that engagement and partnership by developing relationships with Elders, families and leaders of the community over time is the most conducive and meaningful.¹⁰

Any policy formulations will prioritise broadening an understanding of Aboriginal Health with the following processes:

- a) Clinical and cultural skills combined with a whole community approach to First People's suicide prevention.¹¹ Particularly a full state-wide rollout of the *Westerman Aboriginal Symptom Checklist — Youth and Adults*,¹² ensuring it reaches remote communities.
- b) Utilising the strengths of the social world that First Peoples occupy and acknowledging the deep knowledge they have of their needs — resulting in reconfiguring the relationships of power between First Peoples and other Australians in the area of health delivery.¹²

3. LAW AND SOCIETY

When we consider those who breach criminal laws, it is important that we approach it from an understanding that all people, irrespective of race or ethnicity, are capable of acts that break God's and human laws. A posture of grace and forgiveness while encouraging individual responsibility should be sought. Jesus calls us to love our neighbour as we love ourselves, as demonstrated in Luke 10:37 — our least likely neighbour — and the Old Testament principles found in Micah 6:8 of acting justly, loving mercy and walking humbly. In the process, always deeply acknowledging the pain and trauma of the victim. Our growing understanding of how childhood trauma contributes to a higher likelihood of some being involved in criminal acts¹³ that lead to imprisonment is widely acknowledged in many disciplines of social science¹⁴ and psychology.¹⁵ When developing appropriate responses to reduce recidivism with a view of rehabilitation and wholeness, childhood trauma is an underlying factor.

We will continue to support policies and funding areas that promote principles of justice reinvestment and long-term First Peoples' led solutions such as:

- a) Recruiting or partnering with representatives and community members in local areas who can inform culturally-appropriate methods to engage and divert young people. This is exemplified in the very successful Olabud Doogethu Project.¹⁶
- b) We support the *Raise the Age* campaign recognising that children between the ages of 10 and 14 should not be treated as criminals but instead treated as children who need support and trauma-informed care.
- c) Individualised Sentencing: recognising that when some young people commit offences, factors such as childhood trauma or institutionalised by a non-recognition of culturally sensitive and kin care can contribute to the likelihood of criminal involvement. These occurrences should be taken into account when sentencing to allow for healing and the opportunity for alternatives, as well as enabling age-appropriate and culturally sensitive

responsibility for one's behaviour. For instance, such a process is currently being undertaken in Scotland.¹⁷

- d) Relevant cultural procedures in our courts' system,¹⁸ such as the "Koori Court Model" found in Victoria.¹⁹

4. WELFARE AND GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION

This is perhaps the most delicate matter to consider. Given both the history of the Church and State contributing to *The Stolen Generation*, it is key that policies are developed that do not perpetuate a paternalistic approach. Therefore, the following policies are developed with the idea of self-determination or community autonomy — individual decisions are made in the context of community or kin at the core.

- a) Income management of welfare payments. We reject the presumption and prejudice that anyone who receives welfare payments is socially or financially irresponsible. We propose that any future proposal concerning or focused on income management in attempts to reduce alcohol consumption or gambling (such as is currently delivered through the cashless debit card) provide choice and control for all potential kin groups or community groups. There is evidence that any government intervention in the area of income management is more effective when users are consulted. Tailored packages supporting kin groups of communities are also more accepted rather than imposed measures.²⁰

A commitment to self-determination will involve a partnership — with the main purpose being a co-designed process involving First Nations communities, organisations and leaders, and ministerial and parliamentary departments.²¹ This will encourage a dialogue that acknowledges the experiences and capabilities of recipients, learning between policymakers and recipients, with needs identified and a creation of a program that leads to long-term effective solutions to issues around welfare money being used to fund addiction or gambling.

It should be further noted that if the intention of income management is to improve outcomes for a child's well-being, no study has demonstrated that income management has resulted in improvement in this area.²²

- a) Concerningly, there has been an increase of cases increasingly in WA, of First Nations infants being removed from their mothers after birth or within the first 30 days postnatal.²³ To reduce the over-representation of First Nations children in care, we propose the adoption of the practice of Aboriginal Family Led Decision Making (AFLDM). This is a family-led decision-making process supported as best practice in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria.²⁴ This is currently being trialled in WA.²⁵ We acknowledge the importance of wider First Nations family structures in being able to provide appropriate care for children instead of removal to non-kin carers. We also would like to see the Department of Communities develop an understanding in their processes of First Nations attachment theory differences that demonstrate a more specific and obvious culturally sensitive approach of "a whole community raising a child".²⁶

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- ² Craven Rhonda (Editor) *Teaching Aboriginal Studies A Practical Resource for Primary and Secondary Teaching* (Allen and Unwin, 2011 2nd Edition)
- ³ Pearson Noel Radical Hopes 1: Education in *Mission: Essays, Speeches & Ideas* (Black Inc, 2021) 402.
- ⁴ Ibid n 2
- ⁵ <<https://multilit.com/government-literacy-programs/>>
- ⁶ <<https://www.wesley.wa.edu.au/why-wesley/moorditji-mob/>>
- ⁷ < <https://www.thesmithfamily.com.au/programs/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander/girls-at-the-centre>>
- ⁸ Close the Gap Campaign Steering Committee for Indigenous Health Equality 'Leadership and Legacy Through Crises: Keeping Our Mob Safe' 2021 *Close The Gap Campaign Report*.
- ⁹ M Marmot, 'Inclusion health: Addressing the causes of the causes' (2018) *Lancet*, 391.
- ¹⁰ Gee, G. et al.. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social and Emotional Wellbeing. In P. Dudgeon, H. Milroy, & R. Walker (Eds.), *Working Together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health and Wellbeing Principles and Practice* (Commonwealth Government of Australia, 2014 2nd ed), 55-58<<https://www.telethonkids.org.au/globalassets/media/documents/aboriginal-health/working-together-second-edition/wt-part-1-chapt-4-final.pdf>>
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- ¹⁴ Merih Altintas & Mustafa Bilici 'Evaluation of childhood trauma with respect to criminal behaviour, dissociative experiences, adverse family experiences and psychiatric backgrounds among prison inmates.' (2018) 82 *Comprehensive Psychiatry*.
- ¹⁵ D McCallum 'Law, justice, and Indigenous intergenerational trauma—a genealogy' (2021). *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*.
- ¹⁶ Carly B. Dierkhising, et al, 'Trauma histories among justice-involved youth: findings from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network' (2013) 4 *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*.
- ¹⁷ <<https://www.halls creek.wa.gov.au/services/olabud-doogethu>>
- ¹⁸< <https://www.scottishsentencingcouncil.org.uk/sentencing-guidelines/guidelines-in-development/sentencing-young-people-guideline/>>
- ¹⁹ <<https://www.alrc.gov.au/publication/incarceration-rates-of-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples-dp-84/11-access-to-justice-issues/specialist-courts-and-diversion-programs/>>
- ²⁰ <<https://www.mcv.vic.gov.au/about/koori-court>>
- ²¹ Kenia Parsons et al. '*Alternatives to Income Management*' (SPRC Report 08/16). Sydney, Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW Australia and the Parenting Research Centre.
- ²² <<https://ministers.pmc.gov.au/wyatt/2019/national-press-club-address-walking-partnership-effect-change>>
- ²³ Ibid n 22.
- ²⁴ Melissa O'Donnell, et al 'Infant Removals: The Need to Address the Over-Representation of Aboriginal Infants and Community Concerns of Another "Stolen Generations"' (2019) 90 *Child Abuse & Neglect* 88.
- ²⁵ Hannah McGlade 'My Journey into 'Child Protection' and Aboriginal Family Led Decision Making ' (2019) *Australian Feminist Law Journal*, 45:2, 333-349.
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- ²⁷ Statement of Dr Tracy Westerman Royal Commission into Disability, Violence, Abuse in 2021, <<https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/exhibit-8-00401-stat023400010001-witness-statement-dr-tracy-westerman>>