



RECONCILIATION
AUSTRALIA

2021 STATE OF RECONCILIATION IN AUSTRALIA REPORT

MOVING FROM SAFE TO BRAVE



RECONCILIATION
AUSTRALIA

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Reconciliation Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and community.

We pay our respects to the Traditional Owners of Country and their cultures; and to Elders both past and present.

Foreword

Thirteen years ago, we witnessed a pivotal moment in Australian history and a seismic shift towards reconciliation: the Apology. While long overdue, we can credit the timing of the 2008 Apology to an urgent act of bravery—to finally and formally acknowledge the suffering caused by decades of mistreatment of Indigenous Australians.

In preparing this foreword, I could not help but reflect on the day of the Apology. So many Australians had done the hard yards in the lead up to that day by learning about our shared history to better understand why an apology was necessary. Together, we stood in schools, workplaces, public places, lounge rooms and on bridges in solidarity and unity, sharing a moment of deep reflection, sorrow, and pride to be Australian. On that day, I remember saying that we looked in the mirror, and we liked what we saw.

Some of the nation's most important and difficult work is reflected in the work of Reconciliation Australia over the last 20 years. As Reconciliation Australia's inaugural Chairman, I have witnessed the key milestones, challenges and lofty aspirations that have shaped our thinking and hopes for a better tomorrow. The 2021 State of Reconciliation in Australia Report presents that well-worn path and expertly examines the progress we have made, and the way forward.

The five pillars of reconciliation, as set out in detail in the report, give us a strong framework for attention. Action on these pillars can only be realised by being truthful; truthful to ourselves and truth-telling. That truth must begin by owning our personal biases, and confronting our nation's collective racism, both overt and covert.

Bravery in the face of racism will be our change agent. Now is the time to take a deeply personal journey and have the uncomfortable conversations. And we need to extend those conversations to those within our sphere of influence, both professionally and personally. We might feel a degree of safety when discussing our organisation's Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), for instance, but are we prepared to step up our leadership roles, tackle racism head on and drive a reconciled nation at the risk of losing the support of constituents, or shareholders, or colleagues along the way?

Personal conversations are perhaps even harder to begin but are critically important. Are you willing to challenge those you love despite the fear of losing their respect? Are you willing to risk social isolation or your popularity at the next dinner party because you've challenged a racist comment? When we dig deep, we will stand together once more, in the knowledge that we are a mature and courageous nation. And the rewards of our actions will enrich all Australians and our national identity.

Brave is when we listen, challenge, and learn about ourselves and others. Brave is saying that you're ready to delve into the very things that hold you together; your bias, beliefs and values. Brave is when you refuse to accept inertia.

The global health pandemic has brought immeasurable hardship, loss and anxiety to many this year. Yet despite the enormous and ongoing challenges, the pandemic has in some respect provided many Australians with a gift. Through enforced isolation, job loss and instability, many of us have experienced a rare moment of insight into what it's like to experience the powerlessness, lack of financial security and food security, social exclusion and disengagement, and poor mental health that so many of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander brothers and sisters face. We can choose now to harness this empathy and use it as a tool to discredit our personal bias and reject discrimination, with relentless determination.

Many of our young Indigenous people and emerging leaders are already leading this charge. In both mainstream media and social media, we have heard their voices banging on the door of racism, demanding to be heard and dismantling barriers to a truth-telling nation with a palpable sense of urgency. They will be our leaders in decades to come and we, as a reconciliation community, have a duty now to help them reclaim their narrative.

The measure of our success as individuals, will be the extent to which we have empowered ourselves and our sphere of influence—with the knowledge and confidence to face our biases and then, to create change. As a nation, the measure of our success must be the position that Indigenous peoples find themselves in. That is, a safe, equitable, equal and fair environment filled with prospect and hope.

Let's celebrate the progress outlined in the 2021 report and take action on the data and the crucial focus areas it illustrates. Let's take an unapologetic, brave stance on racism to propel us faster towards a reconciled nation. Only then can we once again look in the mirror and rejoice in what we have become.

Shelley Reys AO

Chief Executive Officer, Arrilla Indigenous Consulting

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Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
ARB	Australian Reconciliation Barometer
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
CAR	Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
NSW	New South Wales
RA	Reconciliation Australia
RAP	Reconciliation Action Plan
WA	Western Australia

Preface

In 2016 Reconciliation Australia developed the first State of Reconciliation in Australia Report to mark 25 years of a formal reconciliation process in Australia through both the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation and Reconciliation Australia.

The report identified for the first time the five dimensions of reconciliation that are necessary to achieve reconciliation in this country.

The dimensions—Historical Acceptance, Race Relations, Equality and Equity, Institutional Integrity, and Unity—continue to form the basis upon which we understand the reconciliation effort, track progress and identify areas of greater need. These dimensions are interdependent, meaning sustained progress towards reconciliation can only occur when advancements are made in every dimension.

Four years on, this report reflects on where we have come from, where we are today, where we need to get to, and how we can get there.

It identifies significant areas of progress, including the now almost universal belief that the relationship between First Peoples and other Australians is important. The report uses real examples as shining lights for how we can progress each dimension, and reconciliation overall.

It also identifies the challenges and areas that require greater effort in order to move forward.

In doing so, the report recognises that the reconciliation movement is at a tipping point, where we as a nation need to move from ‘safe’ to ‘brave’ in order to realise the promise of reconciliation.

Having built a substantial network of organisations and individuals who have joined the reconciliation movement through Reconciliation Action Plans (RAP); Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education; National Reconciliation Week activities; Indigenous Governance Awards and Corporate Partnerships; a series of national campaigns; State and Territory Reconciliation Councils; and the many local reconciliation groups and networks, we must now raise the bar of expectation.

Reconciliation cannot just be about raising awareness and knowledge. The skills and knowledge gained should motivate us to ‘braver’ action. For reconciliation to be effective, it must involve truth-telling, and actively address issues of inequality, systemic racism and instances where the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are ignored, denied or reduced. That is, we need to move more of our effort from focussing on the preconditions for reconciliation, to focussing on more substantive change.

In moving towards such change, it is also clear that to continue to build the network of supporters, entry into the reconciliation space must still allow for a safe place to start on the journey—to learn, to grow, to make mistakes and to build skills and capability.

Importantly, we are seeing examples of this substantive work, with a number of RAP Partners coming out in support of the Uluru Statement from the Heart and increasingly speaking up on issues important to First Peoples, or for example, engaging in Indigenous-led initiatives such as justice reinvestment to reduce engagement with the criminal justice system.¹ We are seeing it too in the level of community support for truth-telling as the foundation stone upon which we can build reconciliation, and progress in the education system to teach more on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. We are also seeing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations demonstrating exceptional Indigenous leadership and governance, leading the way on improvements in equality for First Peoples.

It is the examples set by these organisations, schools, communities and individuals articulated in this report that can move us towards a braver reconciliation. One that places truth-telling at the centre of how we move forward, that addresses racism, changes the systems to ensure First Nations voices guide us, and ensures the rights of First Australians are recognised.

Karen Mundine

Chief Executive Officer,
Reconciliation Australia



Introduction

In January 2001 the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR) established Reconciliation Australia (RA), to lead the national journey towards reconciliation. Among the key responsibilities it outlined for the new organisation, few were more important than the task of reporting on Australia's progress towards a reconciled country.

This report follows the 2016 State of Reconciliation in Australia Report to do just that. It maps our progress towards reconciliation using a series of data inputs.

The report draws on the views of key leaders of First Nations organisations and communities, and other key RA stakeholders;² a series of practical examples of reconciliation in action;³ data from the Australian Reconciliation Barometer⁴ and desktop research undertaken by Reconciliation Australia.

It tracks our progress against the five dimensions of reconciliation and lays out some practical actions that need to be taken if we are to continue to progress the reconciliation process.

Section 1 sets out how and why the reconciliation movement came about; articulating and explaining the five dimensions of reconciliation framework.

Section 2 looks at where we are today and what progress we've made towards reconciliation, including since the 2016 State of Reconciliation in Australia Report was published. It uses a series of case-studies to demonstrate in practical ways how progress can be achieved.

Section 3 discusses where we need to get to in the future, and how we can get there. It looks at what we need to start or keep doing to meet our reconciliation goals.

Part 1: The History of Reconciliation

What's in this section?

- Why and how did the reconciliation process come about?
- What has happened since 1788?
- What was the role of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation?
- What are the five dimensions of reconciliation?

Introduction

“The continent was occupied by our people and the footprints of our ancestors traversed the entire landscape. Our songlines covered vast distances, uniting peoples in shared stories and religion. The entire land and seascape is named, and the cultural memory of our old people is written there.

“This rich diversity of our origins was eventually ruptured by colonisation. Violent dispossession and the struggle to survive a relentless inhumanity has marked our common history.”⁵

The demand for reconciliation in Australia is as old as its European colonisation. Since the first Europeans arrived on Australia's shores and commenced an unequal, uneasy, and often violent relationship with the continent's hundreds of distinct Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, our shared history has seen calls for, and denials of, reconciliation and justice.

From the earliest days of the British colonies there were demands from a few lonely coloniser voices to treat Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their cultural protocols with respect. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, despite the dispossession, violence and repressive racist policies they endured, have shown a generosity towards the new arrivals; and since 1788 have repeatedly called for reconciliation and a coming together.

Progress has been slow but in the past few decades Australia has made great advances towards the goal of a reconciled nation.

Progressing concurrently has been the restoration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights won through the vigorous resistance of First Nations peoples and their demands for self-determination, land rights, and recognition as Australia's First Peoples. It has often been this resistance that has fuelled the advances towards reconciliation. From acts of armed resistance in the early days of the colonies, to the formation of First Nations political organisations, the progress of reconciliation and Indigenous rights have been intertwined.

The establishment of the formal reconciliation process was recommended in the final 1991 report of the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody*, which itself arose after many years of strong advocacy and activism by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Six months after the release of the Royal Commission's recommendations, the Australian Parliament unanimously passed the *Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act 1991* (Cth) to establish the formal reconciliation process. Parliament noted that it was "most desirable that there be such a reconciliation" by the year 2001, marking the centenary of Federation.⁶ The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR) was established by Parliament for a 10-year life span.

The CAR's vision statement aimed for "A united Australia which respects this land of ours; values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage; and provides justice and equity for all."⁷

In January 2001 the CAR established a new body, Reconciliation Australia, to "maintain a national leadership focus for reconciliation, report on progress, provide information and raise funds to promote and support reconciliation".⁸

Reconciliation Australia is now the lead body for reconciliation in the nation. It is an independent not-for-profit organisation that promotes and facilitates reconciliation by building relationships, respect and trust between the wider Australian community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The organisation focuses on influencing organisations, people and policies.

Three program areas deliver services, resources and advice to support reconciliation action within Australian businesses, schools, community groups and government organisations—the Reconciliation Action Plan Program, the Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education program, and the Indigenous Governance Program.

Influencing people is conducted through a range of activities, using tools to educate, inform and engage all Australians in reconciliation, with National Reconciliation Week the flagship event.

Influencing policies involves advocacy to advance progress in the five dimensions, producing authoritative research to inform the national conversation, including through the State of Reconciliation in Australia Report, Australian Reconciliation Barometer.

The Final Report of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation

To understand where we are on Australia's journey of reconciliation, it is important to consider the work of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation and its recommendations; in particular, those in its final report.⁹

In its December 2000 letter to the Australian Parliament the CAR lamented that, while "the historic decade of reconciliation" had seen significant achievements, "full reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and the wider Australian community remains to be accomplished".¹⁰

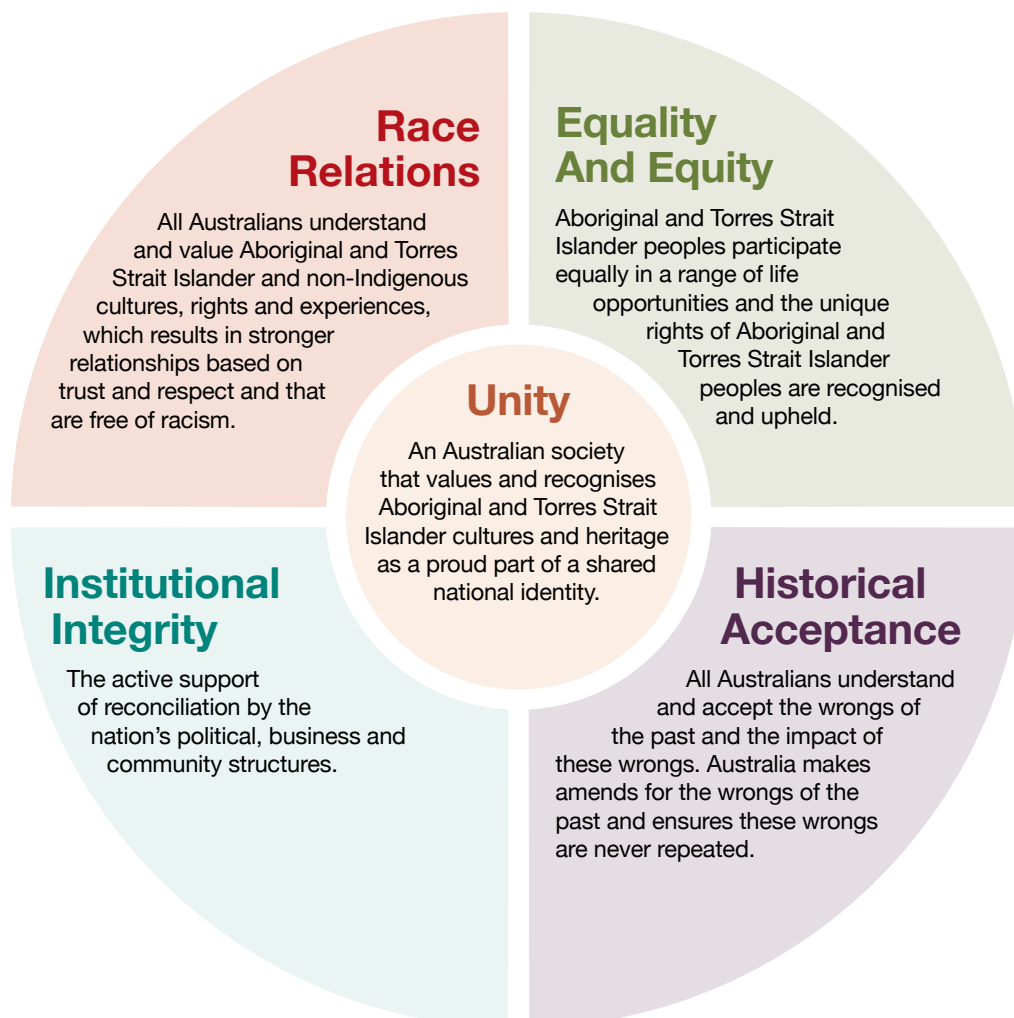
The CAR recommendations informed the development of Reconciliation Australia's vision of reconciliation based and measured on five dimensions: race relations; equality and equity; institutional integrity; unity; and historical acceptance.

The Five Dimensions of Reconciliation

Reconciliation is about strengthening relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous people, for the benefit of all Australians. But how do we define what Australian reconciliation is, and how we will know when it has been achieved? In 2016, a quarter of a century after the formation of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation and the start of the formal reconciliation process, Reconciliation Australia (RA) sought to do this through an extensive consultation with stakeholders in Australia and by investigating similar processes in other countries, such as New Zealand/Aotearoa, Canada and South Africa.

While reconciliation can mean different things to different people, RA has identified five integral and interrelated dimensions to measure reconciliation: race relations; equality and equity; institutional integrity; unity; and historical acceptance. These are the five dimensions of reconciliation.

These five dimensions do not exist in isolation; they are interrelated and Australia can only achieve full reconciliation if we progress in all five.



Race Relations

All Australians understand and value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous cultures, rights and experiences, which results in stronger relationships based on trust and respect and that are free of racism.

Goal: Positive two-way relationships built on trust and respect exist between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians throughout society.

Key Action: Overcome racism.

“The Australian dream is rooted in racism; it is the very foundation of the dream. It is there at the birth of the nation; it is there in terra nullius—an empty land; a land for the taking.”¹¹

“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people need to be connected to the rest of society. Racism cuts that connection. At the same time, racism cuts off all Australians from the unique insights and experiences that we, the nation’s First Peoples, have to offer. Seen this way, recognising and tackling racism is about creating a healthier, happier and better nation in which all can thrive.”¹²

Equality and Equity

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people participate equally in a range of life opportunities and the unique rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are recognised and upheld.

Goal: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians participate equally and equitably in all areas of life—i.e. we have closed the gaps in life outcomes—and the distinctive individual and collective rights and cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are universally recognised and respected. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are self-determining.

Key Action: Strengthen the focus on Closing the Gap; and support processes, programs and approaches that give effect to self-determination, including through a voice to parliament.

“Closing the gap—pretty woeful results, some small wins, but overall, it is a fail. The conclusion you reach is that we know something is wrong with how this strategy is being implemented, but the willingness to truly listen and empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is something that still is below where it should be.”¹³

“Aboriginal people need to have a say in what they do and how they want to be treated. You get the most out of people when they feel safe and in charge of their own future.”¹⁴

Institutional Integrity

The active support of reconciliation by the nation's political, business and community structures.

Goal: Our political, business and community institutions actively support all dimensions of reconciliation.

Key Action: Improve the protection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights in accordance with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

"We have also put a lot of work into acknowledging the contributions of Aboriginal people and creating greater awareness of Aboriginal culture and history."¹⁵

"RAPs have become an important part of institutional integrity; helped change the narrative on accountability and engagement with Aboriginal people, but still yet to truly change the culture and processes in organisations."¹⁶

"It's going to be an ongoing problem as long as we don't deal with the institutional and structural nature of racism. It's embedded in the structures of government, governing and the foundations of society."¹⁷

Unity

An Australian society that values and recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage as a proud part of a shared national identity.

Goal: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and rights are a valued and recognised part of a shared national identity and, as a result, there is national unity.

Key Action: Celebrate, promote and enhance public education about First Peoples' history, culture, and achievements.

"This is another world to the ones most Australians know. It was explained by my father once that it's like a blanket on the ground. We, the uninitiated, only see the blanket. Lift it up and that's what our elders ... see—the real thing—a world most of us will never know or understand. Through their paintings, artists ... offer us a glimpse of the world of dreams where the past, present and the future link."¹⁸

"We must respect each other's right to choose a collective destiny, and the opportunity to develop the legal and political rights for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples so that we may enjoy the right to maintain our culture, our heritage and our land, as a united Australia."¹⁹

"That in spite of everything that's happened to us, our people have offered love. It is our people who have longed for that moment when we can all be free, when we don't have to be framed by race and history, and our people who ask all of you to walk the last part of that journey with us."²⁰

Historical Acceptance

All Australians understand and accept the wrongs of the past that occurred, and their impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Australia makes amends for past policies and practices and ensures these wrongs are never repeated.

Goal: There is widespread acceptance of our nation's history and agreement that the wrongs of the past will never be repeated—there is truth, justice, healing and historical acceptance.

Key Action: Acknowledge our past through truth-telling, education and understanding.

“There comes a time in the history of nations when their peoples must become fully reconciled to their past if they are to go forward with confidence to embrace their future.”²¹

“We can make a good start by bearing witness ... the simple act of listening to someone's story, and a recognition of that story as true can have a profound impact on someone's healing journey. Truth-telling promotes an understanding and acceptance of the ways that past laws, practices and policies deeply affect the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.”²²

Part 2: Where we are today

What's in this section?

- What progress have we made towards reconciliation?
- What are some examples that highlight how things have progressed?
- How have things changed since the last State of Reconciliation in Australia Report in 2016?

Introduction

In 1991, the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR) was established from a key recommendation of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

Just four years earlier, in 1987, the Hawke Government announced the creation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) to embark on a process to reach some sort of “compact, agreement, treaty or Makarrata” between First Nations peoples and other Australians.²³

In 1988 Australia’s divisions and contradictions had been thrown into stark relief by the commemoration of the bicentennial of British colonisation. The image of Australia’s history being about brave pioneers carving out a democratic, egalitarian nation—held by many white Australians—could hardly have been more different from that of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ memories of massacres, land theft, child removal, incarceration, suppression of language and culture, resistance and survival.

That same year, 1988, saw the presentation to Prime Minister Hawke of a bark framed petition which became known as the Barunga Statement. The petition asked the government to recognise a range of rights and for the Australian Parliament to “negotiate with us a Treaty recognising our prior ownership, continued occupation and sovereignty and affirming our human rights and freedom.”²⁴

The Hawke-Keating era was one that suggested that the time for reconciliation was due and the CAR commenced consulting and working to, “*promote a process of reconciliation between Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders and the wider Australian community, based on an appreciation by the Australian community as a whole of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and achievements and of the unique position of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders as the indigenous peoples of Australia, and by means that include the fostering of an ongoing national commitment to cooperate to address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage.*”²⁵

In 2021 Australia is still progressing towards reconciliation.

How is reconciliation tracking?

Support for reconciliation has grown significantly over the past three decades. There is a far greater awareness of the complexity and magnitude of First Nations’ cultures and knowledges; and many more Australians now understand and acknowledge the brutal impact that British colonialism and the modern Australian state have had on First Nations families and communities.

As one respondent to the Reconciliation Australia (RA) stakeholder interviews observed,

“The past 20 years and reconciliation? Growing awareness that we had not seen before. Before this time people were not interested and did not want to know.”

There is a broad consensus among stakeholders that Australia has made progress against the five dimensions. However, there is also a level of frustration at the slowness of progress and a clear view that politicians are lagging behind public opinion and dragging the chain.

“There is a far greater awareness of the complexity and magnitude of First Nations’ cultures and knowledges”

“In a broader sense the issue of reconciliation has been a positive story. In a political sense though we are seeing a bare minimum of support. Just need the politics to catch up.”

“[The government has] been absent in this space for some time ... basically government not doing their part to bridge the divide between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous people. Look no further than the response to the Uluru Statement.”

The anger and exasperation at the Government’s rejection of the Uluru Statement from the Heart was a constant theme in the interview of leaders with one respondent describing the Uluru Statement as “a guiding light”.

Many of the key stakeholders look to the lack of progress in relation to the Uluru Statement as an indicator that Parliament is not keeping up with the broader community in progressing reconciliation. The slowness of progress and the perceived lack of leadership shown by politicians is also a serious source of disappointment.

“There are signs of increasing impatience as to why this is not all fixed. There is a portion of the population who don’t want to think about it, for it all to go away—this is not a growing part of the community, but it is alive and well and is a blockage on constitutional recognition, and a blockage on the politicians doing better.”²⁶

Others, however, argued that reconciliation is a journey, not a destination.

“I have never seen reconciliation as having an end point. What we do when dealing with unfinished business is to try and move it along so others can pick it up and set the rules for reconciliation in the next generation—I see it as a process not an end point.”²⁷

Importantly, there was less frustration with politicians when referring to local government. Local councils were repeatedly singled out as an area of great opportunity if the right engagement program could be delivered.

The Rio Tinto destruction of 46,000-year-old cultural heritage sites of the Puutu Kunti Kurama and Pinikura (PKKP) Peoples, in the Juukan Gorge, Pilbara, was a significant rupture of a relationship between a large corporate organisation and Traditional Owners of the land they mine.

It was met with widespread community shock and outrage; the suspension of the organisation from Reconciliation Australia’s Reconciliation Action Plan program; a Senate Inquiry; shareholder action; and the CEO and two senior executives of Rio resigning. It highlighted the distance still to go in some areas, and the increasing expectation of the Australian community to improve the relationship with First Peoples and take bolder action towards reconciliation.

It also showed that there are now real consequences when expectations are not met and organisations fail to enact their commitments to reconciliation.

RACE RELATIONS

“How does Australia respond to racist people, or people who do racist things? Do we hold them accountable? Do we condemn them, fire them from their jobs, or do we elect them, promote them, or give them their own TV show?”²⁸

Reconciliation is ultimately about repairing the relationship between Australia’s First Nations peoples and other Australians. Building a relationship marred by two centuries of dispossession, marginalisation and an overwhelming denial of the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as the original owners of this continent and its islands, is challenging. But it is a prerequisite for successful reconciliation.

Without a significant proportion of Australians understanding and valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, rights and experiences, trust will not be built and respectful relationships and reconciliation will not be achieved.

The good news is that the 2020 Australian Reconciliation Barometer (ARB) provides evidence of a growing proportion of Australians expressing a clear pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures; in 2020, 64% of Australians in the general community did so (up from 62% in 2018) and 79% agree that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are important to Australia’s national identity.²⁹

“Ninety-four per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and 90% of the general community feel our relationship is important.”³⁰

“Despite these improvements in pride and strength of relationships, 43% of the broader community and 60% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people agree with the view of many of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders interviewed by Reconciliation Australia, who noted that Australia remains a racist country.”³¹

“We are still a racist society. People (are) okay with positive stories but won’t advocate for people when things aren’t great.”

Many of the stakeholders interviewed pointed to specific acts of racism, such as the targeting of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sports stars to illustrate their views,

“Can’t step away from last four years and talk about what happened when Adam Goodes stood up and talked about racism. When people stand up it still causes division in this country, massive divide.”

One of Reconciliation Australia’s case studies suggests that while sport continues to be a space where racism regularly manifests, it also provides a forum where ignorance and racism can be addressed.

When West Coast Eagles star forward, Liam Ryan, was targeted with a barrage of racist slurs on social media, his club promptly released a video strongly condemning the racist social media comments while also aiming to educate and influence change in the community.

On the video, Noongar Elder and club official, Phil Narkle, explains the historic context for such racial abuse to Aboriginal peoples and called on the club’s supporters to tackle racist language head on (See the West Coast Eagles case study in this section).

“A growing proportion of Australians are expressing a clear pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures”

According to the ARB, there is a trust deficit felt by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people surveyed—with only 47% of those respondents thinking Australians in the general community have high trust for them, and only 30% of the general community reporting they trust Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.³²

The stakeholder interviews suggested that the reconciliation process is critical to building the trust and understanding so necessary for improved race relations.

“[Reconciliation] needs to change the hearts and minds of people which can be done through enlightenment of how we got here and the role of colonisation. We will never be reconciled until we acknowledge racism exists and colonisation still exists. The feeling is this is being maintained.”

A key theme emerging from the interviews is the need to address structural or systemic racism and this concern appears to be shared by a significant majority of other Australians.

“It’s going to be an ongoing problem as long as we don’t deal with the institution and structural nature of racism. It’s embedded in the structures of government, governing and the foundations of society.”

The view that governments were not doing enough to combat racism was prevalent among those interviewed.

“Government needs to be bold and call out racism in the Senate and House.” “We need a mature government, but first we need to call out racism.”

This disappointment in government’s role in promoting reconciliation is shared by many surveyed in the ARB research on equality and equity, showing that most Australians believe governments must do more to close the gap in areas of health, justice, employment and education.³³

Case-study:

The West Coast Eagles – Tackling racism and improving race relations

Australian sport has been a place of exceptional triumph for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Torres Strait Islander peoples. However, it has also been a place where Australian racism has often been at its worst. Racist abuse against First Nations players has been an all-too-common experience across nearly all sporting codes but particularly in Australia's most popular football codes. The derogatory treatment meted out to Nicky Winmar, Adam Goodes and other footballers has generated national discussion around race and racism in Australia.

In 2019, the West Coast Eagles star forward, Liam Ryan, was targeted with a barrage of racist slurs on social media. The West Coast Eagles, who currently maintain a RAP responded quickly and in a united manner. The Club promptly released a video strongly condemning the racist social media comments while also aiming to educate and influence change in the community.

West Coast Indigenous liaison officer and Noongar Elder, Phil Narkle, and development coach, Chance Bateman, presented the short video explaining the hurt caused by such racist posts.

"We are united at this football club. We are united at this club and we do not accept or tolerate racism," said Mr Narkle, the first Indigenous liaison officer appointed to any club in the AFL.

He then went on to explain the historical context for such racial abuse of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and called on the Club's supporters to tackle racist language head on.

"It is a throwback to early settlement when this land was settled under terra nullius—or no man's land—the reason for that is because Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were not thought of as human beings. We were thought of as a sub-human species and that decision to settle the land under those terms triggered some of the most horrific degrading and inhumane treatment of some of our men, women, children and babies."

"So what we would like to do is ask your support, so that whenever you hear that these players need to harden up and it's just name calling, we hope you can support them and educate others on why the term is so offensive to our people."

The video prompted support from a number of other AFL clubs, united in their stance against racism.³⁴

EQUALITY AND EQUITY

“For Indigenous peoples to participate in Australian society as equals requires that we be able to live our lives free from assumptions by others about what is best for us. It requires recognition of our values, culture and traditions so that they can co-exist with those of mainstream society. It requires respecting our difference and celebrating it within the diversity of the nation.”³⁵

Reconciliation can only progress when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians participate equally and equitably in all areas of life. To achieve this, Australia must close the gap in life outcomes and end First Nations disadvantage in a myriad of other social indicators. We must also achieve recognition and respect for the distinctive collective rights and cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. An Aboriginal girl born today should be able to live a life that is compatible with her culture and historical traditions while enjoying the same opportunities as any of her compatriots.

While closely related, there is also an important distinction between ‘equality’ and ‘equity’. The 2016 State of Reconciliation in Australia Report, articulated equality as,

“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples being in control of their life choices— enabling them to participate fully in the social, cultural and economic opportunities enjoyed by the wider Australian community.”

It refers to equity as being,

“The unique rights—both collective and individual—that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians hold by virtue of being Indigenous, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples’ ability to freely exercise these rights.”³⁶

Both are necessary for progress in reconciliation to occur. The failure to establish a relationship between government and First Peoples that ensures Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices are at the centre of creating the solutions to issues affecting their lives, has meant that wide and unacceptable gaps continue to exist between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians across all social, health, educational and economic indicators.

It has also meant that the unique rights of First Peoples are unable to be fully realised and enjoyed. Such a failure impacts on both ‘equality’ and ‘equity’ and points to the importance of ensuring that the institutional arrangements allow for both to be progressed.

Jackie Huggins, former Co-Chair of National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples, in delivering the historic 2017 Redfern Statement to the Prime Minister, called on government to address this through,

“A new relationship that respects and harnesses [our] expertise, and recognises our right to be involved in decisions being made about us.”

She appealed to the government to: *“Draw on our collective expertise, our deep understanding of our communities, and lifetimes of experience working with our people.”³⁷*

“Ninety-five per cent of Australians in the general community agree it is important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have a say in matters that affect them”

Pat Turner, CEO National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO), highlighted the historic absence of appropriate structural arrangements with government that support unique rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples,

“Since the early 1970s, every major institution established by government to hear First Nations peoples has been dismantled or hijacked by government. When what we said became inconvenient or uncomfortable to the nation state, our voice was undermined, supplanted, or discredited, before then being abolished. For many years now, the notion of Constitutional recognition of Indigenous Australians has been front and centre in national political debate. Governments have made promises, commissioned reports, initiated multiple inquiries, and still failed to produce an outcome.”³⁸

What is being called for, is to change the approach of government to ensure the structures and systems of government involve First Peoples when decisions are being made about their lives.

This has been a constant call from First Peoples. There has been some progress with the establishment as an act of self-determination, of the Coalition of Peaks, as formal partners with Australian Governments on Closing the Gap.³⁹

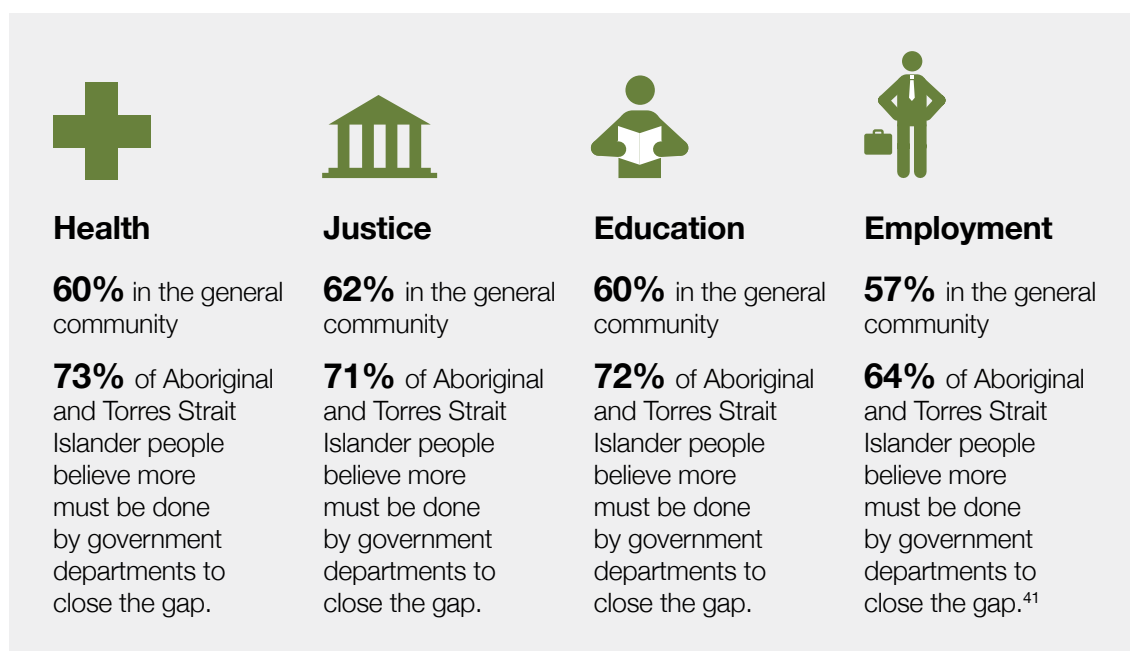
The disappointing results from the 13-year-long Council of Australian Governments’ Closing the Gap strategy are clearly unacceptable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders interviewed by Reconciliation Australia, and they are also seen as an obstacle to reconciliation.

“Closing the Gap—pretty woeful results, some small wins, but overall it is a fail. The conclusion you reach is that we know something is wrong with how this strategy is being implemented, but the willingness to truly listen and empower Aboriginal peoples is something that still is below where it should be.”

The need for governments, and Australian society more generally, to listen to and empower First Nations peoples, is strongly endorsed by the ARB research. Ninety-five per cent of Australians in the general community agree it is important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have a say in matters that affect them, compared with 94% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

Likewise, the ARB research shows that most Australians share the stakeholder interview respondents’ disappointment in the failure of the Closing the Gap strategy to meet most targets.⁴⁰

The ARB reveals that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and Australians in the general community, believe more must be done by government departments to close the gap in health, justice, education, and employment.



The ARB also reveals that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are more likely to experience barriers to accessing cultural and material rights than other Australians and this inequality of opportunity is reflected in the stakeholder interviews.

*"We are not on a level playing field and a government too willing to use its constitutional power to our disadvantage."*⁴²

Some felt that much of the progress in the material equality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people resulted from the efforts of First Nations peoples themselves rather than any initiatives of government or the business sector.

"The greatest change has not come from government or from corporates, but from Aboriginal people getting educated and changing the outcomes for their community."

And many commented on what they saw as a growing role of business in addressing inequality and inequity. The Reconciliation Australia RAP program was mentioned by many respondents as driving this change,

"Corporates have a role in providing jobs. Have really stepped up. Dived into spaces they normally don't."

One argued however that in the case of some RAPs, changes were often due to the efforts of First Nations, rather than non-Indigenous people working in RAP organisations.

"The history of some RAPs has been problematic—I don't flag RAPs in the list of the biggest achievements of RA. Often with RAPs, implementing has fallen on Aboriginal staff to do the heavy lifting. Activities in RAPs also don't confront people on the tough issues."

This point underscores the importance of ensuring appropriate structures and systems of governance are in place for a RAP, as highlighted by Glen Kelly, Co-Chair Reconciliation Australia.

*"Is an organisation's RAP a business document that is embedded in management structures, properly acted upon, bought into by the Board, CEO and senior management? Does it contain action that would be considered substantive as compared to the capacity of the organisation? Does an organisation have an Indigenous workforce and can they keep them? Are the commitments being met?"*⁴³

The idea that the efforts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities have driven much of the progress towards the equality and equity component of the five dimensions is supported by some of the case studies identified by Reconciliation Australia.

The remarkable impact that the community-controlled Institute for Urban Indigenous Health (IUIH) has had on the health of the communities it serves, is a case in point. The IUIH's work in South East Queensland had seen a 340% increase (from 8,000 to 35,000) in the number of Indigenous clients accessing comprehensive and culturally safe care and an extraordinary 4,100% increase in annual health checks (from 500 to 21,000).⁴⁴

Through strong and vibrant community leadership, and strengthened community self-determination, the IUIH has been able to make a significant impact on the health of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

IUIH was recognised in the 2018 Indigenous Governance Awards and argues that much of its success has been the result of its strong emphasis on a cultural component of community-controlled governance.⁴⁵

As leading Aboriginal legal academic, Professor Megan Davis, wrote: *“(the IUIH) have been able to temper Western governance models with an Indigenous cultural framework”*.⁴⁶

Case study:

Equality and Equity: IUIH - Empowering a community towards equality and equity

An initiative of four South East Queensland Indigenous health services, the Institute for Urban Indigenous Health (IUIH) exemplifies how reconciliation involves the equal and equitable participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australian society.

Governed by the local communities it serves, the IUIH philosophy is about empowering these communities with the information and resources to take responsibility for their own health. Through this empowerment the IUIH is not only helping to Close the Gap in life expectancy but is laying the foundations for better education, real jobs in the real economy and safer communities.

South East Queensland is home to 38% of Queensland's and 11% of Australia's Indigenous people. The region has the largest and fastest growing Indigenous population in the nation and the biggest Health Adjusted Life Expectancy (HALE) gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in Queensland.

Through strong and vibrant community leadership, strengthened community self-determination, an entrepreneurial business model, and adopting an innovative regional health “ecosystem”, the IUIH has now been able to make a massive impact on the health of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Through its innovative and highly successful Deadly Choices health promotion program the IUIH has spread its impact into every corner of Indigenous Australia.

In its short life the IUIH has demonstrated its impact on equity and equality in health by a 340% increase (from 8000 to 35,000) in the numbers of Indigenous clients accessing comprehensive and culturally safe care and a remarkable 4100% increase in annual health checks (from 500 to 21,000).

As IUIH CEO, Adrian Carson, explained in his 2018 Indigenous Governance Awards acceptance speech, *“When we talk about “governance”, we can be talking about ticking boxes, or it can often be about compliance, or strategic planning. But for us, that's the Western side of governance. For community-controlled governance, it is about feelings and about how people feel when they walk into a clinic. While you can't measure it, that makes sense to us.”*⁴⁷

As prominent Aboriginal legal academic, Professor Megan Davis recently wrote: *“(the IUIH) have been able to temper Western governance models with an Indigenous cultural framework”*.⁴⁸

INSTITUTIONAL INTEGRITY

“Determination and effort at all levels of government and in all sections of the community will be essential to make reconciliation a reality.”⁴⁹

All of Australia’s political, social, cultural, educational and business institutions have been historically complicit in the denial of rights to First Nations peoples. Our governments, our institutions of learning, our civil organisations and our businesses were either active participants in the subjugation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples or turned a blind eye to it.

Transforming this historic shame to an active support for reconciliation by the nation’s political, business and community structures is a key prerequisite for successful reconciliation.

The effectiveness of First Nations advocacy and activism has seen changes to government policies that indicate a move towards integrity and reconciliation. Concurrent with this has been a growth in broader community support for reconciliation over recent decades.

A major catalyst for this growth in institutional integrity has been the Reconciliation Action Plan program (RAP), which provides a framework for organisations to implement reconciliation actions. The RAP program started out with eight trailblazers in 2006 and today more than 1,100 organisations have developed a RAP. A number of federal, state and local government institutions have actively engaged in the RAP program, and the business sector has been a particularly strong supporter.

The benefits of the RAP program are recognised in many of the stakeholder interviews.

“RAPs have become an important part of institutional integrity. Has helped change the narrative on accountability and engagement with Aboriginal people, but still yet to truly change the culture and processes in organisations.”⁵⁰

“Real engagement of RAP parties in a great range of activities. I keep coming across engagements flowing from RAPs.”

There is little doubt that RAPs have uniquely facilitated the percolation of information and knowledge of First Nations histories and cultures, through workforces, in a way that has led to improvements in the institutional integrity of many Australian organisations. A number of the case studies bear this out.

However, some of the respondents, while recognising the positive engagements arising out of RAPs, suggest that there is an element of box-ticking and a lack of accountability for RAP organisations who do not practice institutional integrity.

“Thinking about RA—Institutional Integrity and connection to RAP program—has been a really positive program. Sometimes can be seen as a box tick, so there is a need to hold organisations involved with RAPs to a higher level of accountability. The RAP program needs to continue to lift.”

“A lot more business and institutions have RAPs, although a lot of RAPS are tick the box. Value is really in the process and not the end result.”⁵¹

“Need for a pathway for organisations and people to grapple with both the ‘performative’ and the ‘substantive’ aspects of RAPs”

“RAPs have become an important part of institutional integrity. Has helped change the narrative on accountability and engagement with Aboriginal people, but still yet to truly change the culture and processes in organisations. What happens when an organisation does not meet its targets? Where is the accountability?”

Others pointed to the power imbalance between the RAP organisations and its First Nations partner(s) and insist that the RAP process must be based on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander needs and aspirations rather than that of the RAP organisation,

“Overall, solutions need to be Indigenous-led, more than a collaboration in name only. We know what we need.”

“Institutions are still trying to save us, even in the present day with the coronavirus. As long as the interaction is based on deficit, it’s going to be difficult to make progress, but not impossible.”

One way that RAP organisations deny First Nations aspirations in their philanthropy is by supporting ‘soft’ issues only and ignoring some of the more difficult issues.

“Corporate giving tend to be on soft issues, completely risk adverse. Not on deaths in custody, child removal and criminal justice for example.”

Glen Kelly, Co-Chair Reconciliation Australia, views this challenge as a “*perceived lack of association between what reconciliation means to Aboriginal people ... and how RAPs can contemplate reconciliation being played out*”.

He sees a need for a pathway for organisations and people to grapple with ‘both the ‘performative’ and the ‘substantive’ aspects of RAPs.⁵²

This pathway, which allows for an entry point for organisations where the initial focus is on the ‘performative’ aspects of reconciliation or what could be called ‘pre-reconciliation’, must also lead organisations to moving beyond this stage to substantive reconciliation that speaks to the aspirations and longstanding calls of First Peoples. The Elevate RAP cohort are positioning in this substantive reconciliation space.

The broader concern about the lack of progress, and a deficit view of First Nations peoples still held by many institutions, is backed up by the ARB. While there has been improvement since 2018, a considerable proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Islander peoples feel they cannot be true to their cultures or personal beliefs in various different settings. According to the 2020 ARB, 12% of Aboriginal and Torres Islander people in government departments feel this way (19% in 2018); 20% in interactions with police and courts (25% in 2018), and 15% feel constrained in their own work places (19% in 2018).⁵³

The media’s institutional integrity was poor, with 50% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people believing the media portrayal of themselves and their communities is usually negative. Forty-two per cent of Australians in the general community agreed with them.⁵⁴

Some positive examples are emerging in other sectors as greater understanding is developed in institutions.

One positive shift has occurred in the university and museum sectors. One example that captures this shift is the Return Reconcile Renew (RRR) partnership.

Until the late 1940s thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander remains were regularly taken from hospitals and burial sites around Australia and sent overseas for scientific or museum purposes—causing significant trauma to family members.

The RRR partnership is between First Nations organisations and communities, and a group of academic and museum institutions—including some who were past collectors and hoarders of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander human remains. Their goal is to repatriate Ancestral remains held by universities and museums (See the RRR case study in this section).

RRR has an international team of experts from First Nations organisations, universities, research institutions, governments and museums, and has assisted in the return of thousands of Ancestral remains. Putting in place the systems and structures that acknowledge where past practices have caused harm to First Peoples, and making changes to the longstanding practices of institutions in those areas, is central to progressing institutional integrity.

While taking such steps may be difficult for some organisations, it is these braver decisions that will help forge progress. It remains concerning that many museums and educational institutions continue to refuse requests to return the remains they have in their collections.

The education sector is also critical in progressing institutional integrity. Reconciliation Australia's Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education program supports schools and early learning services in Australia to foster a higher level of knowledge and pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and contributions. It supports schools and early learning services to develop a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), and teachers and educators can access professional learning and curriculum resources to support the implementation of reconciliation initiatives.

By making a commitment to progress reconciliation, with appropriate structures and processes in place, schools and early learning services are making an important contribution to institutional integrity.

Another case of institutional shifts towards reconciliation is a project to establish the Colebrook Reconciliation Park in the Adelaide suburb of Eden Hills. The park commemorates the survivors of the Colebrook Children's Home where many Aboriginal children were placed after being stolen from their families.

The Mitcham City Council, which helped enforce racist government policies in the past, has demonstrated institutional integrity by acknowledging its past role, apologising to the Colebrook survivors and supporting the creation of the Reconciliation Park.

Other important examples of progress towards institutional integrity have been the corporate support for the Uluru Statement from the Heart, and the Treaty discussions led by Victoria, Queensland and the Northern Territory.

A number of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders interviewed contrasted these initiatives by state and territory governments with what they saw as a lack of action by the Australian Government, expressing disappointment with the lack of progress in this dimension on the national level. The role of the Australian Government in our progress toward reconciliation is considered passive and underwhelming.

"[The government has] been absent in this space for some time ... basically government not doing their part to bridge the divide between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people. Look no further than the response to the Uluru Statement."

Case study:

Institutional Integrity: The City of Stirling

The need to acknowledge Australia's history of colonisation, dispossession and racist policies is integral to a successful process of reconciliation. It can help build stronger relations between First Peoples and the broader community.

A partnership between City of Stirling local government and the Wadjak Northside Community Resource Centre is progressing such an historical acknowledgement in Western Australia, and working to progress the race relations dimension, alongside historical acceptance.

The partnership has seen the creation of Mooro Country Tours to allow local schools, residents and tourists to gain an improved understanding of the city's rich Noongar history.

Established in 2013, the tours give participants a brief opportunity to experience the culture, bush foods, medicines and stories of the Wadjak people, who lived on Country for tens of thousands of years before the City of Stirling.

The tours and the resultant deepening relationship between the City and the Wadjak Northside Community Resource Centre contributed to Stirling winning the WA Premier's "Improving Aboriginal Outcomes" award.

More recently this relationship has been enhanced with the naming of key new developments in Noongar language names. One such new park was named *Bina* meaning "light of the morning."

The City of Stirling Reconciliation Action Plan continues to play a part of the City's improving relationship with local Wadjak people.

The City of Stirling is named after Governor James Stirling, the man behind the notorious 1834 Pinjarra massacre, in which dozens of Noongar civilians were murdered. The City is now considering commencing a conversation about changing its name as part of a new RAP development process.

UNITY

“Here in Australia we’re fortunate enough to have one of the richest and oldest continuing cultures in the world. This is something we should all be proud of and celebrate”⁵⁵

The Unity dimension of reconciliation is defined as Australians valuing and recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage as part of a shared national identity; that Australians recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are the oldest living cultures in the world, having developed over 60,000 years in a complex relationship with the Australian landscape.

In order to achieve reconciliation and a sense of national unity, all Australians should feel pride in the tens of thousands of years of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. Learning about and connecting with that rich and diverse history is key to embracing and celebrating the ancient heritage that underpins our national story.

The ARB provides good evidence that more Australians are recognising the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and the benefits their knowledge can add to protecting Australia’s unique and delicate ecosystems.

The proportion of Australians in the general community who believe in the possibility of national unity remains high at 72%. Similarly, 73% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people support the concept of unity.⁵⁶

The latest ARB also reveals a growing proportion of Australians expressing a clear pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

64% 

In 2020, 64% of Australians in the general community expressed pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and **80% agreed that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are important to Australia’s national identity.**⁵⁷

95% 

Ninety-five per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and **91% of Australians in the general community feel our relationship is important.**

Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders interviewed argued that unity is the inherent action in reconciliation but that there is a lack of public understanding about this dimension.

“Reconciliation is two parties coming together, not just the blackfellas talking about it. It is about the action of reconciliation as opposed to the concept itself.”

“In one sense it is about the conscience of the nation. It’s the place that can bring Australia together.”

Despite this perceived lack of public understanding there is evidence that the unity so necessary for real reconciliation to take place is taking root in Australia.

Growing awareness and recognition of the important skills of land (and sea) management held by First Nations peoples followed the 2019-2020 devastating bush fires across the country. Farmers, graziers, fire fighters and government agencies are speaking to Aboriginal fire managers and proposing an enhanced role for traditional Aboriginal burning techniques for the first time.

An improved understanding of the remarkable history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is challenging racist historical views of First Nations cultures and societies. Recent archaeological dating of Aboriginal grinding stones, used to produce flour from native seeds, suggest that Aboriginal peoples were the world's first bakers. These grinding stones turned seeds to flour 30,000 years ago, predating the previous theory that bread was first baked in the Middle East around 17,000 BCE.

The rise of the Black Lives Matter movement in Australia in 2020 may suggest a growing Australian unity. During 2020, the rallies to protest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander incarceration rates and deaths in custody were characterised by large attendance by white Australians and those of Asian, African and Middle Eastern cultural backgrounds.

Many Australian institutions also publicly supported the sentiments expressed by those marching.

Among these were Basketball Australia and the Australian women's national basketball team, the Opals, who invited the Australian community to "RISE UP" in support of Black Lives Matter. The Opals asked supporters to take positive action to eradicate racism, discrimination, and injustice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and people of colour.⁵⁸

Case study:

Unity: Support for the Uluru Statement from the Heart

The 2017 Uluru Statement from the Heart was described by Reconciliation Australia CEO, Karen Mundine, as a generous invitation from First Peoples to the broader Australian community to support addressing some of the unfinished business of Reconciliation.

The Uluru Statement demands constitutional change to enshrine a voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Parliament; it calls for the establishment of a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making with Australian governments and to oversee a process of truth-telling about Australia's history and colonisation.

Describing their current circumstances as "the torment of our powerlessness", the First Nations drafters of the Uluru Statement devised a simple process for resolving much of Australia's unfinished business between themselves and other Australians.⁵⁹

In 2019, during National Reconciliation Week, 14 of Australia's leading business, educational and sporting organisations came together to publicly support the Uluru Statement from the Heart.⁶⁰

All 14 organisations are key participants in Reconciliation Australia's Reconciliation Action Plan program. The key national organisations publicly threw their considerable weight behind the call for a referendum to enable constitutional reform and encouraged other Australians to join them.

Insurance Australia Group Limited (IAG) Managing Director and CEO Peter Harmer articulated their shared purpose, saying, "We stand behind the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* because we believe it is important that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are given the opportunity to have a voice on decisions that affect their communities."⁶¹

At the same time, a community based movement to garner support and explain the Uluru Statement emerged. The Uluru Statement website (ulurustatement.org) was developed to support public events, provide resources and describe the process to date.

Such community and corporate engagement demonstrated a desire to address the calls in the Uluru Statement and forge a more unified nation.

HISTORICAL ACCEPTANCE

“Something must be done about the denial of the real history of this country. At the same time, we must support each other to accept our own history, the history of pain and distress that so often holds us victim. It is only in accepting it that we can make choices to deal with it and move on from it.”⁶²

Historical Acceptance is about truth-telling to achieve justice and healing. It is about acknowledging that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures have had a continuous connection to the Australian landscape for tens of thousands of years.

It is about accepting that Australia’s history is characterised by land dispossession, intentional marginalisation, violence, and overt and unapologetic racism directed at First Nations peoples. Violent frontier conflicts and massacres, followed by active policies and practices were designed to segregate, assimilate, and ultimately destroy Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ identities and cultures. These policies and practices included forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, the dispossession of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lands, failure to pay Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers’ wages, mass incarceration, and deaths in custody.

Reconciliation is dependent on Australians understanding and accepting the wrongs of the past and their continuing impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and on Australia making amends for past policies and practices, to ensure these wrongs are never repeated.

Truth-telling about our shared history has long been called for by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as a necessary precondition for moving forward together based on a shared understanding of our past.

On 5 August 1995, the then Attorney General requested that the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission inquire into and report on the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families.

For many in the broader community, the resulting report was an awakening about the parts of our history that have caused pain and suffering to, but also been met with great resilience by, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.⁶³

“The truth is that the past is very much with us today, in the continuing devastation of the lives of Indigenous Australians. That devastation cannot be addressed unless the whole community listens with an open heart and mind to the stories of what has happened in the past and, having listened and understood, commits itself to reconciliation.”⁶⁴

Similarly, truth-telling was central to the work of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation throughout the 1990s in its calls for what’s needed for the nation to move forward together,

“Our nation must have the courage to own the truth, to heal the wounds of its past so that we can move on together at peace with ourselves.”⁶⁵

Truth-telling and healing remain critical to the reconciliation process.

“After a shared understanding of our history, Australia looks more harmonious. It looks more cohesive. There is more love between people. There is less hatred and racism. It looks safe for our young people. It looks encouraging for our young people and the future looks bright.”⁶⁶

“Reconciliation is dependent on Australians understanding and accepting the wrongs of the past and their continuing impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples”

In 2017, the release of the Uluru Statement from the Heart also identified truth-telling as one of three key aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, “We seek a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history.”⁶⁷

Three years after the Uluru Statement this need to truthfully tell and accept Australia’s history was overwhelmingly endorsed in the 2020 ARB with 93% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and 89% of Australians in the general community supporting formal truth-telling processes in relation to Australia’s shared history.⁶⁸

Truth-telling is also seen as a key priority for reconciliation by many stakeholders interviewed.

*“We should be focusing on truth-telling and progress on the other dimensions will follow—it’s the most immediate path and highest priority.”*⁶⁹

“Truth-telling has the broadest role to play in reconciliation. Changing place names, retelling the story of an area, talking about massacres—so at the local level it is happening in some places. Cultural wars backlash possible, but it is pretty easy to invest in truth-telling. It can bring a lot of enrichment for non-Indigenous people who then feel they have a grasp of the broader history of their area ... so a good area for reconciliation to be playing in.”

“Need to embark on truth-telling first. For all the things we are trying to get to, truth-telling is essential for reconciliation.”

“Most pressing issue for non-Indigenous Australia is truth-telling. Too many people don’t know what happened and we ought to pursue it. Maybe that is at the heart of reconciliation. Get the truth-telling underway and do it hand in glove with the treaty making process. As a nation a reckoning has to come.”

Significantly, the prioritising of truth-telling as a key way of progressing reconciliation is also backed by the public.



90%

Ninety per cent of Australians in the general community (86% in 2018) **believe it is important to learn about past issues**, compared with 93% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (91% in 2018).⁷⁰

“Truth-telling has the broadest role to play in reconciliation. Changing place names, retelling the story of an area, talking about massacres—so at the local level it is happening in some places”

Even without a formal process of truth-telling, as proposed by the Uluru Statement, the 2020 ARB shows Australians are more aware than ever before of some appalling chapters in Australian history.



A number of respondents in the stakeholder interviews argue that truth-telling will be a liberating experience for non-Indigenous Australians pointing to the experiences of regular commemoration of the Myall Creek (NSW) and Kukenarup (WA) massacres.

“In truth-telling have a look at how both sides, perpetrators and victims, of the Myall Creek massacre have come together to tell the truth of an event which led to the first white people in Australia being executed for the murder of Aboriginal people. Every year there is an event where both these groups come together to acknowledge the truth but then to move on together.”⁷⁴

“None of this is going to be to the detriment to those who have arrived in the past 240 years—society as a whole can be better. Accept the ugly parts (shared history) and the good parts.”

“I think truth-telling is a painful business, but very important and provides wonderful reconciliation opportunities e.g. Lake Tyers, and in WA, Ravensthorpe, where settler families and Aboriginal families share a ceremony around a massacre.”

One stakeholder interviewed also spoke of a more united Port Hedland community after a groundbreaking truth-telling initiative about the forced incarceration of thousands of Aboriginal peoples, believed, often falsely, of having venereal disease, in a series of “lock hospitals” in the region,

“Port Hedland Lock Hospital and islands off the WA coast at Carnarvon, where Aboriginal people suspected of having venereal diseases were sent. The community had local knowledge and was asked what they wanted to do about it which led to a historical truth-telling commitment. Unintended consequence was a united community and community pride with truth-telling at the heart of it. Local councils have an absolute role to play in having our history told.”

Many of the stakeholders interviewed by Reconciliation Australia highlighted the role of local government in truth-telling and historical acceptance and there are numerous case studies of local government initiating name changes and other ways of honouring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories.

Hobart has already adopted a dual name policy for the city and key landmarks around it, including Kunanyi/Mount Wellington. Hobart Mayor, Councillor Anna Reynolds, wants to ensure that Aboriginal history is recognised including renaming Franklin Square Truganini Place. Councillor Reynolds said, “Some of our history has not been as well told as other parts of it, and a lot of stories from the Aboriginal community, a lot of stories about the Black War, just haven’t been explained to the community.”⁷⁵

On the other side of the country in Fremantle, WA, there is a similar project. Mayor Brad Pettitt proposed using the Aboriginal name Walyalup as a dual name if the local Noongar community wanted it. This follows a plan to rename the city’s Kings Square, Midgegooroo, after the father of Noongar warrior Yagan.

It is clear that there is a growing acceptance of both Australia’s brutal colonial history and of the history of racist government policies after the creation of Australia in 1901.

This progress in accepting historical truths is partly due to increasing scholarship in the area. University of Newcastle has been a leader in this scholarship with its map of colonial frontier massacres now identifying more than 400 Aboriginal massacres that occurred during the colonial expansion in Australia.

The online tool developed as part of the project records the massacre site locations, details of the individual massacres and for the first time in the world, the sources corroborating evidence of the massacres.⁷⁶ The project’s reach has been amplified by the University’s partnership with The Guardian Australia and the resulting digital project was awarded the NSW Premier’s History Award.⁷⁷

While research into Australia’s violent colonial past is increasing in our tertiary education institutions, the quality of history taught in primary and secondary education is also changing.

There is recognition that the role of schools is critical and Reconciliation Australia’s Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education program was mentioned by stakeholders interviewed by Reconciliation Australia.

“Education about history. This is the biggest step we could take. Schools are changing—but that would be about it.”⁷⁸

The Narragunnawali program has seen over 6600 schools and early learning services across the nation (this is just under 25% of all schools and early learning services in Australia) registering to develop a RAP to drive positive change in their local educational communities. 1200 of these have a current public RAP.

There was some disappointment in the stakeholder interviews that RAP organisations had not contributed enough to the growing support for truth-telling.

“Overall, they (corporates) should be using resources to support a truth-telling program—either as a broader process or specifically.”

It is here that organisations can challenge themselves to move from tentative performative steps of acknowledging place and Country, to a braver space of truth-telling about some of the difficult aspects of our shared history, or indeed of the history of organisations’ interactions with First Peoples.

Such truth-telling can set the foundation for significant progress in reconciliation. It can form the basis of re-setting the relationship between First Peoples, government, and institutions. Truth-telling is emerging as a critical element in treaty processes in Queensland, Northern Territory, and Victoria.

Stakeholders expressed optimism from recent developments in state and territory governments' moves on treaties.

*"Victoria, the Northern Territory and Queensland are having full on conversations about Treaty. Truth-telling in this is a make or break issue for Treaty discussions. It's a watershed for Treaty discussions."*⁷⁹

Case study:

Historical Acceptance: Myall Creek Massacre Memorial Site

Frontier violence in New South Wales had become so wide spread by the 1830s that the murder of Aboriginal people by British colonial convicts, settlers and stockmen was widely accepted, despite British law stating it was a crime punishable by death.⁸⁰

In 1838, armed stockmen at Myall Creek in Northern NSW massacred 28 Wirrayaraay people of the Gamilaraay Nation. Seven of the 11 men responsible were sentenced in the NSW Supreme Court to public hanging—the first British subjects executed for the crime of massacring Aboriginal people. This is the only known case of a conviction following a massacre of Aboriginal people in Australia.

In 1998, the Uniting Church held a reconciliation conference at Myall Creek which led to the establishment of the Friends of Myall Creek Memorial Committee⁸¹, a group of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, some of whom were descendants of survivors and perpetrators of the massacre, as well as concerned locals and conference participants.⁸²

In 2000, the Committee opened the Myall Creek Memorial, dedicated to commemorating the massacre in an act of reconciliation and acknowledgement of the truth of the area's shared history.

On the June long weekend each year, hundreds of people from around Australia gather at the site to attend the annual memorial service. Descendants of the victims and survivors, as well as descendants of the perpetrators of the massacre, come together to remember and reflect on the atrocities of the past and express shared goals for the future.⁸³

In a 2013 SBS interview, Gamilaraay Elder Aunty Sue Blacklock, a descendant of victims and survivors of the massacre, and founder of the memorial site and annual commemoration said,

*"It has lifted a burden off my heart and off my shoulders to know that we can come together in unity, come together and talk in reconciliation to one another and show that it can work, that we can live together and that we can forgive. And it really just makes me feel light. I have found no more heaviness on my soul."*⁸⁴

The Myall Creek Massacre Memorial and annual memorial service acknowledges a traumatising and difficult shared history within the local community. The site preserves the memory of this particular historical event, but is also representative of many more massacres that took place across Australia—those yet to be memorialised, or yet to be widely known.

Overview of tracking against the previous State of Reconciliation in Australia Report

The first State of Reconciliation in Australia Report was published by Reconciliation Australia in 2016 to mark 25 years of a formal reconciliation process in Australia.

The report used a five-dimensional framework of reconciliation to measure and analyse Australia's progress over the time and set out a roadmap for a reconciled Australia.

This section of the report provides a brief overview of how the nation has progressed against the areas for action outlined in the 2016 Report.

Race Relations

Area for action: Overcoming racism

One in five Australians, compared with one in two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people reported experiences of racial prejudice in the preceding 6 months in 2020.⁸⁵

High levels of racism experienced by First Peoples underscore the importance of maintaining protections against racism. Efforts to weaken the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth) (RDA) in 2017 did not succeed following debate in the Australian Senate. It is critical that legislative protections continue to ensure that all Australians are able to live free from racial discrimination.

The 2018 RAP Impact Measurement Report showed that employees of RAP organisations are more informed of racism, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and history. Employees who've participated in at least one RAP activity with their current organisations are:

- more likely to see the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous colleagues as very good (57%), compared with those who haven't (41%);
- more likely to hold very high trust (33%) for Indigenous colleagues, compared with those who haven't (18%); and
- more likely to feel it's very important to learn more about past injustices for Indigenous people (61%), compared with those who haven't (42%).⁸⁶

"Take Action Against Racism" and "Inclusive Policies" are two of the minimum required Actions within the Narragunnawali Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) framework for schools and early learning services. By the end of September 2020, almost 2700 schools and early learning services had added Take Action Against Racism and more than 2700 had added the Inclusive Policies Action to their RAPs.

Efforts have also occurred in articulating the need to address institutionalised racism in order to close the disadvantage gaps. Links between racism and poor health are well established.⁸⁷ This includes both the detrimental effects of racism at a structural and societal level and the direct impact that experiences of racism have on the physical and mental health of individuals.⁸⁸

The Coalition of Peaks consultations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to develop priority reforms for closing the gap identified addressing institutional racism as a key priority to support change: "*Confronting institutionalised racism in government mainstream institutions and agencies to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can access the services they need in a culturally safe way.*"⁸⁹

The Final Quarter documentary aired on mainstream television networks in July 2019, detailing the repeated racism experienced by former professional AFL player and 2014 Australian of the Year, Adam Goodes. The documentary was accompanied by a suite of educational resources, designed for use in workplaces and by the broader community,⁹⁰ and went on to win a Human Rights Award in late 2019.⁹¹

Australian Black Lives Matter protests featured in mid-2020 protesting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths in custody, over-incarceration, and police interactions with First Peoples. They followed Black Lives Matter protests in the United States following the death of African American man George Floyd in police custody. While First Peoples have been advocating for change in these areas for decades, the protests provided an opportunity to renew the calls for change. The Australian protests attracted tens of thousands of protesters around the country, and raised awareness of justice issues experienced by First Peoples.

The Racism. It Stops With Me campaign was relaunched in this time of renewed focus on racial equality supporting people to learn more about racism, respond effectively when racism occurs, be a good ally, and act for positive change.⁹²

The Change the Record campaign continues to advocate for system-wide changes in the criminal justice system to break the cycle of mass incarceration of First Peoples, and continued deaths in custody.

Equality and Equity

Area for action: Renew focus on closing the gap; recognise and respect the cultures and collective rights of First Peoples

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advocacy for a decisive role in development of Closing the Gap programs and policies was finally realised in 2020 with the signing of a new National Agreement on Closing the Gap between Australian Governments and the Coalition of Peaks.

Only two of seven current Closing the Gap Targets were on track to be met in early 2020, with the Early Education improving from 2016 to being 'on track' in 2020.⁹³

The refusal of the Australian Government to accept the 'Voice to Parliament' provisions of the Uluru Statement was a step back in progress.

For many years, First Peoples have advocated for a say in policies, programs and legislation that impacts their lives. The Voice to Parliament was a landmark proposal to address this structurally and ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice is embedded in the decision making process. First Peoples and many other Australians continued to advocate for government on the importance of a constitutionally enshrined Voice to Parliament.

The growth of Welcomes to, and Acknowledgements of Country, growing public support for a change to Australia's national day and the significant support for 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, point to increasing community awareness and support for First Nations rights.

There has been progress at a State/Territory level, with Victoria, Queensland and Northern Territory committing to treaty making processes, with Victoria also committing to a truth-telling process.

There has also been strong progress in the Indigenous business sector. Laura Berry, CEO of Supply Nation notes,

*"There are more Indigenous-owned businesses than ever in Australia; Supply Nation registered Indigenous businesses collectively earn more than \$1 billion per year with revenues growing at an average annual rate of 12.5%; Indigenous businesses are far more likely to employ other Indigenous people – despite Indigenous people only making up 3% of the population. On Supply Nation's directory, Indigenous Business Direct, Indigenous employment averages 40%."*⁹⁴

Institutional Integrity

Area for action: Capitalise on the RAP program; Improve the governance of government

The Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) program was developed in 2006 to provide a framework for organisations to support the national reconciliation movement. RAPs play an important role in expanding institutional integrity in all sectors of Australian society, and over 1,100 organisations are part of the RAP network, with the potential to directly influence more than 2.3 million people who work or study in an organisation with a RAP.

Each new RAP partner joins a group of diverse organisations, collaborating and learning to maximise impact with the potential to directly influence over 20 per cent of Australia's working age population that work or study in an organisation with a RAP.⁹⁵

RAP organisations celebrated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge, and rights, with more than 6,000 employees participating in cultural immersion initiatives, over 50,000 in face to face cultural learning, and 160,000 in e-learning in 2019.⁹⁶ They also played an important role in improving access to opportunities and creating positive change within the wider community, with more than 40,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people employed, \$32 million provided in pro bono support, and almost \$8.5 billion worth of goods and services procured from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses.⁹⁷

Support for reconciliation continues to rise from Australia's business community and all levels of government, demonstrated through increased engagement in the RAP program.

As at June 2020, there were:

- 86 local governments with an endorsed RAP and actively engaged in the program
- 119 state government bodies with an endorsed RAP and actively engaged in the program
- 83 Australian Government departments with an endorsed RAP and actively engaged in the program
- 409 organisations from the private sector with an endorsed RAP and actively engaged in the program.

There are 44 ASX 200 organisations in the RAP program, including many of Australia's largest private firms and multinational organisations.

The Coalition of Peaks (Coalition) forged a partnership with COAG in March 2019, which enabled the Coalition to lead engagement with First Peoples, and forge a new National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap in July 2020.

Unity

Area for action: Achieve a process of Constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and unite all Australians

Constitutional reform that ensures First Nations peoples are empowered to inform policy and legislation affecting them is a crucial next step in the fulfilment of First Nations' rights.

In 2017 the Referendum Council handed down its final report calling for a referendum to provide for a representative body in the Australian Constitution that gives First Nations Peoples a Voice to the Commonwealth Parliament, and for a Declaration of Recognition to be developed and enacted by all Australian Parliaments.⁹⁸

The Prime Minister rejected the proposal a month later.

The Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition, established in 2017 to consider the recommendations of the Referendum Council, the Uluru Statement from the Heart, the Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition and the Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Indigenous Australians. It laid out a framework to progress towards realising the aspirations of the Referendum Council, including that the Australian Government consider legislative, executive and constitutional options to establish the Voice.

Despite strong public support for the Uluru Statement and the models for reform it proposes there has been no public education campaign funded by the Australian Government, however, a private group, From the Heart, was created to advocate for a constitutionally enshrined First Nations Voice to Parliament. The establishment of this group followed the work of the Uluru Statement group which held events around the country raising awareness and building community understanding and support.

In June 2019, Elevate RAP partners issued a 'Response to the Uluru Statement' supporting a referendum for constitutional reform and the models for change set out in the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

In 2019 the Federal Government announced a co-design process, headed by Professor Tom Calma AO and Professor Dr Marcia Langton to define models for a First Nations voice to government at the local, regional and national levels. In 2020 following advice from the co-chairs, the Minister provided an update on the revised timeframe for the co-design process due to the impacts of COVID 19.

Treaty making in Victoria, Queensland and the Northern Territory represent critical progress towards unity.

Historical acceptance

Area for action: Acknowledge our past through truth, justice and healing

Eighty-nine per cent of the general community, and 93% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people believe that Australia should undertake truth-telling processes, with 91% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and 83% of the general public, agreeing on the importance of First Nations history to be a compulsory part of the school curriculum.⁹⁹

The Uluru Statement from the Heart calls for truth-telling about our history.

In 2018 Reconciliation Australia (RA) and The Healing Foundation hosted a Truth-Telling Symposium—the first of its kind, recognising the growing momentum towards truth-telling at a local, state and national level. RA subsequently held three workshops with local councils in 2019 to explore the role of local government in truth-telling.

There has been an increase in memorials established to commemorate and remember massacres around the country, with the University of Newcastle's online massacre map adding significant scholarship to the debate on Australia's frontier wars.

In July 2020, the Victorian Government announced that it will establish a truth-telling process to formally recognise historic wrongs—and address ongoing injustices—for First Nations peoples.

To date, there has been no commitment from the Federal Government to a truth and justice process for Australia.

There is great potential to strengthen historical truth-telling within school and early learning services and RA's Narragunnawali program is facilitating greater understanding of these histories and cultures in schools and early learning services. As at the end of September 2020, more than 850 of them have added the 'Elders and Traditional Owners Share Histories and Cultures' Action to their RAP. By the end of September 2020 more than 200 schools had formally acknowledged their commitment to the ACARA mandated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories Cross-curriculum Priority for schools, by adding the 'Embed Cross-Curriculum Priority' Action to their RAPs.

Part 3: Where we need to be in the future

What's in this section?

- What do we have to start or keep doing in order to meet our reconciliation goals?
- What does the future look like for reconciliation?
- Will we ever get there?

Introduction

**“When are we gonna get there? / Are we there yet? / Are we there yet?
/ When are we gonna get there? / Are we there yet / Are we there yet
/ They probably don’t wanna know how long / It’s gonna take to bring
them home/ Or close the gap, or react / To the fact that I put this in
a song / Statistics say, that I won’t make / The predicted day of life
expectancy / Compared to the average Aussie that grew up next door
to me / Where do we start at? Where is the heart at?”¹⁰⁰**

There is strong evidence of progress in Australia’s journey towards reconciliation. This is despite some well-founded disappointments—particularly over the response of the Australian Government to the Uluru Statement from the Heart. This progress is borne out of data in the Australian Reconciliation Barometer, the RAP Impact Measurement Report, the many case studies of success and progress, and is the consensus from the stakeholders interviewed by Reconciliation Australia.

We are moving closer to becoming a reconciled nation,

“[There is a] growing awareness that we had not seen before. Before this time people were not interested and did not want to know.”¹⁰¹

There is, however, much more to do. It is possible that as we move closer to achieving some of the key prerequisites, such as truth-telling, negotiations around treaties, and greater control by First Nations peoples over their own affairs, the reconciliation journey will become more difficult.

But it is the more difficult, substantive change that will propel us towards a more reconciled country.

As the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR) concluded in 2000, “Reconciliation is hard work – it’s a long, winding and corrugated road, not a broad, paved highway. Determination and effort at all levels of government and in all sections of the community will be essential to make reconciliation a reality.”¹⁰²

Reconciliation Australia’s vision is of a just and equitable Australia where relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians are free of racism, and built on trust and respect. It is a transformational vision, one that sees Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people participating equally in all areas of Australian life, both now and into the future.

RAPs need to focus more on some of the 'harder issues. But how do we get there? And how do we know when we arrive?

Many of the stakeholders interviewed speak of reconciliation being a journey without a destination. However, they are clear that there are specific tactical steps that can speed our progress.

The results of the 2020 ARB, while reaffirming increased public understanding of First Nations histories and cultures, and increased support for reconciliation and justice, also indicate that more progress is needed before reconciliation is achieved.

Our case studies highlight successful partnerships between our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) organisations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, companies and communities.

Feedback from stakeholders, and findings from Reconciliation Australia's Evaluation of the RAP Program, is that RAPs and the partnerships that arise from them, can be improved by greater accountability of RAP organisations and greater control by First Nations peoples of such partnerships and the sort of projects they engender.

"Overall, solutions need to be Indigenous-led, more than a collaboration in name only. We know what we need."

Some of the stakeholder interviews also argue that RAPs need to focus more on some of the 'harder' issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; like incarceration, child removal, and policing rather than more comfortable issues like cultural festivals and caring for Country.

The importance of expanding the role of education and local governments in reconciliation are two other themes expressed in the stakeholder interviews and the impact of these two areas are illustrated in the case studies included in this report.

Many stakeholders emphasised the effectiveness of local community action for reconciliation, and pointed to RA's engagement with local government as a key way of facilitating and encouraging this.

Community engagement across a breadth of issues could be supported by state/territory reconciliation councils. The current coverage of state/territory reconciliation councils in NSW, Victoria, South Australia, Queensland, Western Australia, Tasmania and the ACT provides opportunities for outreach and reigniting the network of reconciliation groups and supporters around the country. The steps laid out in the Uluru Statement from the Heart were strongly supported by stakeholders interviewed, with one stakeholder describing the Uluru Statement as "a guiding light".

"We have almost a lost opportunity with the work done around Uluru—one of the best platforms to do something differently for some time. The desire to gather around it was quite strong."

Support for the Uluru Statement and the steps it outlines is also strong in the Australian public; with a 2019 Essential Poll finding that 70% of 1,097 respondents support constitutional recognition. The Voice to Parliament, a proposal that originated from the Uluru Statement from the Heart, was supported by 66%.¹⁰³

Sixty-nine per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and 53% of the general community support the idea of a treaty, compared to 64% and 47% respectively in 2018.¹⁰⁴

One stakeholder interviewed argued that, *“to move the country forward we need to focus on constitutional reform, Voice to Parliament and the other areas of the Uluru Statement.”*

Australians, both the general public as indicated by the ARB, and the stakeholders surveyed, agreed that reconciliation is having an impact.

“In one sense it is about the conscience of the nation. It’s the place that can bring Australia together. We do need the foot soldiers on side though. A little company in Brisbane – an engineering company – has painted on its wall ‘Racism it stops with me’ – how good are they?”¹⁰⁵

Another spoke of how these changes had benefitted their own dealing with authorities.

“I have seen some of the benefits, for example with national parks and fisheries. Reconciliation has helped with that.”

As we ponder how to maintain the momentum towards meaningful national reconciliation, one thing is clear from all the evidence informing this report: there is much more to do.

How are we going to get there?

“For it to be more than rhetoric, reconciliation needs to be about valuing our culture, our language and our custodianship. Grassroots issues caused by the disenfranchisement, dispossession and subsequent systemic poverty that affect our people (violence, child sexual abuse, lack of access to services, substance abuse, high youth suicide rates etc.) are issues that need to be addressed as a priority. This needs to be done in conjunction with, and not in the absence of, a broader framework for institutional change.”¹⁰⁶

What next? Much has been achieved since the birth of the formal process of Australian reconciliation in 1991 but we have a long way to go and there are things we must do better to expedite our arrival at a just, equitable and reconciled Australia.

The data provided by the ARB, feedback by the stakeholder interviews, and through the case studies of successful reconciliation initiatives, provides us with some good directions.

It’s not all just black and white

In 2016, nearly half (49%) of all Australians were either born overseas or had at least one parent who was born overseas.¹⁰⁷ There is a strong need to better engage with Australia’s extensive culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. As one respondent pointed out in the stakeholder interviews,

“Messaging and communication with ethnic minority groups has not been widespread [from RA]. There is no ethnic person on the board of RA, say Asian or Muslim background. If we are talking reconciliation it cannot just be black and white. Look at the demographic of our country. Appears to be a challenge at the Board level of RA. We need to have the deep conversations with the full diversity of people in our community.”

Another remarked simply,

“Race relations [is] also a major issue for new migrants.”

This shared experience of Australian racism and a reduced exposure, and commitment to the mythology of Australia's creation, make CALD communities natural allies in the movement for reconciliation. As Reconciliation Australia IT Officer and first generation Sri Lankan migrant, Suminda Gunaratne, wrote in Reconciliation News,

*"Within Australia's migrant communities there is an overwhelming desire for greater knowledge about Australia's history and friendships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We need to engage better with these communities and tap into their goodwill."*¹⁰⁸

This desire is being acted on within Australia's CALD communities as they increasingly engage with First Nations peoples with the peak national CALD communities body, FECCA (Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia), recently launching its "Encouraging Engagement" guide during National Reconciliation Week 2020.¹⁰⁹

Strength in the local street

Local communities are where reconciliation is lived and felt and effort is required to energise and engage at a local level.

"It was an enormous grassroots movement in the early days and with the local reconciliation action groups. Mums and dads of Australia came together to learn and to start to build relationships with Aboriginal people in their area. The local movement is however not as strong as it was."

Many respondents pointed to the effectiveness of reconciliation in local communities and stressed the important role of local government in such a process. In addition, case studies provide countless examples of local governments initiating local change across the five dimensions.

It is also at this local level where the stakeholder interviews highlighted the critical importance of truth-telling and the opportunities this presents local communities to progress reconciliation based on historical acceptance.

'Braver' RAPs

While there was strong recognition of the positive role played by the RAP program, respondents questioned some components of the program.

One view was that RAPs are sometimes a box-ticking exercise, and that the partnerships with First Nations peoples were often unequal. Respondents called for more First Nations control of agenda, and greater emphasis on supporting First Nations self-determination.

Respondents also argued that RAP organisations should be more prepared to advocate on some of the harder issues confronting First Nations communities; such as child removal, incarceration and over-policing, rather than concentrating on less controversial issues such as culture and caring for Country. So too, should they be prepared to consider their role in these issues, how they can contribute to, or how they might be contributing to, issues that impact First Peoples negatively.

National recognition

The Uluru Statement and a constitutionally enshrined Voice to Parliament remains the strongest proposal to achieve self-determination, with stakeholder interviews, the 2020 ARB, and other recent national polling all expressing strong support for it.

The recommendations of the final report of the CAR as well as the unimplemented recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, and the Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families, remain vital.

Areas for action 2021 onwards

Moving towards a braver reconciliation requires a vision for what a reconciled Australia looks like with clear future directions under the framework of the five dimensions of reconciliation.

RACE RELATIONS

“Of course, racism is killing the Australian dream, it is self-evident that it is killing the Australian Dream, but we are better than that. The people who stood up for Adam Goodes and supported him and said no more, are better than that, the people who marched across the bridge for reconciliation, they are better than that.”¹¹⁰

Actions

- Maintain legal protections against racism
- Support public campaigns against racism
- Support public education on First Nations cultures and histories
- Reform mainstream service delivery, and workplaces, to address systemic racism and promote cultural safety and improve accountability
- Address justice issues that impact the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and institutions including addressing over-incarceration, rates of family violence, and children in out-of-home care.

This evidence demonstrates that addressing Australian racism and building positive race relationships will progress reconciliation across many of the five dimensions including closing the gaps in health and other indicators, which is so necessary for achieving equality and equity.

It is clear that while there have been some improvements in how First Nations peoples perceive the relationship between non-Indigenous Australians and themselves, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experience of racism remains consistently and unacceptably high. There is an increasing proportion of Australians who acknowledge Australian racism and want to do something about it.¹¹¹

Addressing the many justice issues that have been the subject of significant government inquiries, and acting on findings and recommendations, should be a priority in order to improve the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, government and government institutions.¹¹²

More broadly, overcoming racism must be a national priority. There must be a zero-tolerance approach to racism, backed by effective institutional and legislative settings, and supported by public education. Australian institutions must be more active in calling out and condemning all racism both at the individual and systemic levels, including any racism in our parliaments.

Maintaining the current protections against racial discrimination in both state and federal jurisdictions is a critical shield against racism suffered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and many other Australians, particularly people of colour and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Legislative protection against racism must be protected, and attempts to wind back protections under the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth) (RDA) and other protective legislation must be resisted.

But more must be done to free Australia from the distorting and divisive effects of racism.

Racism is a consequence of ignorance; so community education and awareness-raising on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories is essential for reducing and eliminating racism.

Anti-racism campaigns such as the Racism. It Stops with Me campaign should be supported by government so that they can continue their work and outreach. The campaign provides the community with important tools to help make change and learn more about racism, respond effectively when racism occurs, be a good ally, and act for positive change.¹¹³

Strong condemnation of racism such as the “Eagles Condemn Racism” video released by AFL club,¹¹⁴ the West Coast Eagles, and the “RISEUP” campaign launched by Basketball Australia and the Australian women’s national team, the Opals, are guiding lights for other organisations and institutions to look to and emulate in reducing racism.¹¹⁵

Workplaces, schools and individuals should consider how they can support a greater understanding of how unconscious bias can function, and how we can actively intervene, disrupt and challenge racism.

Schools and the early childhood sector are critical to achieving this change as well. Maintaining Reconciliation Australia’s Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education program¹¹⁶ and other initiatives such as The Healing Foundations’ Stolen Generations Resource Kit for Teachers and Students, will remain critical in helping our education sector to increase understanding of our¹¹⁷ history and promote unity. They are also important for revealing and working against unconscious bias and systemic racism within the education system.

EQUALITY AND EQUITY

“The health disadvantage statistics for Aboriginal people speak for themselves. We now know that the social and cultural determinants of health matter and continue to advocate for a fully resourced package from governments to redress these inequalities.”¹¹⁸

Actions

- All future policy development, implementation and monitoring of Indigenous Affairs is done in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their representative bodies
- The calls in the Uluru Statement from the Heart, including for a constitutionally enshrined Voice to Parliament, should be supported by parliaments, corporate and civil society, and the broader community
- Governments must appropriately resource national, regional, local and traditional owner, independent, representative bodies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- Governments, working in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, must address each of the social and economic gaps experienced by First Peoples
- Governments must raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to at least 14 to bring it into line with international human rights standards.

The ongoing failure to close the gap in equality between First Peoples and non-Indigenous people, and ensure the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is realised, respected and enjoyed by First Australians suggest a clear need to lift our national effort on achieving equality and equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Leadership must come from governments working in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives.

There have been some welcome developments. The announcement by Prime Minister Scott Morrison in 2019, of a partnership between the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and the First Nations’ Coalition of Peaks, was a welcome initiative. In the 2016 State of Reconciliation in Australia Report, Reconciliation Australia had joined with many First Nations peak organisations and called for COAG to extend and expand the Closing the Gap targets in a formal partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is positive that this has been acted on.

This partnership means that not only do the deliberations around the Closing the Gap strategy and targets finally have some meaningful First Nations participation, but we have, for the first time, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people sitting at the national table as partners.

This partnership is a good first step towards one of the key pillars of reconciliation—that all future policy development, implementation and monitoring is done in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their representative bodies. It is imperative that Governments engage in the partnership discussions and negotiations in good faith and act on the advice of those who know best how to address the issues that affect them.

However, the principle that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must have a decisive voice in matters that affect them— a cornerstone of the equality and equity dimension of reconciliation— is far from being implemented across the board.

In the eloquent words of the Uluru Statement itself, *“When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.”*¹¹⁹

Reconciliation Australia urges the Australian Government to support the calls in the Uluru Statement, including for a constitutionally enshrined Voice to Parliament, and maintain national, regional, local, and traditional owner, independent, representative bodies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and more broadly, to create respectful partnerships and engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and organisations.

INSTITUTIONAL INTEGRITY

“So many of our losses were and are preventable—that is the failure and pain we carry. Had governments had the grace to genuinely listen to our voices, to the truth, to solutions and calls to action, perhaps this, the 11th Close the Gap Campaign Report, would not be needed.”¹²⁰

Actions

- Governments, corporate organisations, and civil society must recognise the importance of, and honour commitments enshrined in, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and work proactively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to incorporate its aims into domestic policy, legislation, and business practices that impact First Peoples
- RAP organisations should speak up on, and engage with a range of issues, including those that may attract controversy, such as constitutional reform, treaties, truth-telling, over incarceration, children in out-of-home care, justice reinvestment, and closing the disadvantage gaps.

The results from the stakeholder interviews provide recognition that institutional integrity is improving. The RAP program is seen as a major contributing factor to this trend.

The public support for the Uluru Statement from the Heart by some of Australia’s biggest companies is evidence of this, however, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants in our interviews suggest ways to improve the RAP program and the integrity of RAP organisations.

While expanding the RAP program and the influence of reconciliation in Australia’s leading corporate, sporting, cultural and educational organisations is crucial, it is also important to ensure greater accountability and an increased commitment to First Nations leadership in partnerships and their primary role in setting priorities.

RAP partners are facilitating change, increasing employment opportunities for First Nations peoples, educating their own workforces and directly assisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations with funding and/or skills and expertise.

However, there is an opportunity to build on this and move into a braver space.

There is a role for the business sector and more broadly, the RAP community, in supporting the principles established in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The active support of Australia’s largest and wealthiest companies can add significant weight to ensuring that the unique rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are recognised and upheld.

This should involve interrogating their own role in relation to the realisation of First Peoples’ rights, including how they help or hinder the enjoyment of those rights.

Playing such a role should encompass speaking up on a range of issues, including those that may attract controversy—such as deaths in custody, over-policing, over-incarceration, and child removal. Public statements should be matched by actions within the everyday operations of organisation.

Increasing the appetite to critically test their organisations’ practices and approaches on rights-based issues and speaking up for those rights, can help build stronger long-term relationships so important to a braver reconciliation.

UNITY

“We cannot imagine that the descendants of people whose genius and resilience maintained a culture here through 50,000 years or more, through cataclysmic changes to the climate and environment, and who then survived two centuries of dispossession and abuse, will be denied their place in the modern Australian nation. We cannot imagine that. We cannot imagine that we will fail.”¹²¹

Actions

- Governments, corporate, education and media institutions should value First Peoples cultures and ways of doing in governing, the education curriculum, business practices, and media representation
- Governments, corporate, education and media institutions should support initiatives that celebrate, promote and enhance public education about First Peoples’ history, culture, and achievements
- Governments, corporate, education and media institutions should promote discussion about enhancing our national identity by embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and history into our national story.

Most Australians believe that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are important to Australia’s national identity. The latest ARB reveals a growing proportion of Australians expressing a clear pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.¹²² In 2020, 64% of the general community expressed pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, compared with 87% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. 79% of the general community and 85% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people agreed that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are important to Australia’s national identity.

Governments, corporate organisations and education institutions must contribute to, and support unity. Central to this is undertaking and supporting initiatives that celebrate, promote and enhance public education about First Peoples’ history, culture, and achievements. This should become part of everyday business as a way of enhancing our national identity and celebrating the oldest living culture on the planet.

There are many examples of initiatives to draw from. The Mossman State School in Far North Queensland is currently teaching its students the local Aboriginal language, Yalanji, with great success. Fifty years ago, speaking Yalanji in the playground of this same school was a punishable misdemeanour, but today the Elders who experienced this repression of their mother tongue are working with teachers and education officials to bring their language to the broader community.

In the small historic town of Braidwood in NSW, local non-Indigenous residents advocated for, funded and erected a large tribute to the local Dhurga Yuin, acknowledging their ancient connection to local Country. Local Catholic school, St Bedes, is also running irregular language classes in the local Dhurga language.

These are good examples of how communities, and their local schools, are developing educational programs that other schools can draw on. Supporting similar projects on a national scale, and ensuring our institutions are progressing the broader community's understanding and pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, achievements and ways of doing is important to progressing unity. It is also an opportunity for the whole nation to forge a national identity that is uniquely Australian, of this continent, and inclusive.

Valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage forms one of the critical building blocks of forging a more unified nation. Emerging from the work of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation in the 1990s, the Australian Declaration Towards Reconciliation stated that, *"Our hope is for a united Australia that respects this land of ours; values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage; and provides justice and equity for all."*¹²³

“All Australians need to understand a fuller account of our shared history”

HISTORICAL ACCEPTANCE

“Truth-telling has the broadest role to play in reconciliation. Changing place names, retelling the story of an area, talking about massacres - so at the local level it is happening in some places. Cultural wars backlash possible, but it is pretty easy to invest in truth-telling. It can bring a lot of enrichment for non-Indigenous people who then feel they have a grasp of the broader history of their area.”¹²⁴

Actions

- Governments at a federal, state and local level, along with educational institutions, should support truth-telling in local communities to build national understanding of our shared past, and build a culture and movement of truth-telling
- Governments and institutions should build greater public recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures in the public domain including through memorialisation, plaques, renaming places, and sharing and re-storying
- Governments and universities should support increased scholarship to investigate Australia's frontier wars and massacres
- Governments, working with our educational institutions, should work with First Peoples to improve the teaching of First Nations history and culture in our schools.

Just as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are missing from the Australian Constitution, so too is much of Australia's telling of its history silent on the occupation of Australia by its First Nations peoples. Too often, our history covers up the brutal nature of colonisation, and leaves out the resilience and contribution by First Peoples.

The effective advocacy by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the three decades of the reconciliation process, have all been part of a relearning of Australian history in which the myth of peaceful settlement by courageous European pioneers is making way for a more truthful representation.

To develop a deeper reconciliation process, Australia must also develop a deeper understanding of the complexity of pre-colonisation Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in order to appreciate what was disrupted or lost.

All Australians need to understand a fuller account of our shared history and its impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander society post-colonisation, as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' contribution to the nation.

This should involve initiatives to build greater public recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures such as memorialisation, plaques, renaming places, and sharing and re-storying—including through the arts, establishment of museums, local community memorials and monuments. A national effort across these areas should involve collaborating to re-story, reconcile and heal, including through local reconciliation committees, advocacy, and partnerships across the Australian community.

“Such community truth-telling can underpin and support a widespread movement of truth-telling and build understanding of our shared history. It can help pave the way to a more formalised truth-telling process”

Such community truth-telling can underpin and support a widespread movement of truth-telling and build understanding of our shared history. It can help pave the way to a more formalised truth-telling process.

Developing greater understanding of the role of truth-telling in reconciliation, through initiatives such as the Truth-Telling Symposium held jointly by Reconciliation Australia and The Healing Foundation are critical to informing the next steps in truth-telling.¹²⁵

An evaluation of the RAP partnership between EY (formerly Ernst & Young) and the Wollotuka Institute at the University of Newcastle showed increasing positive connections among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and their non-Indigenous colleagues within organisations.¹²⁶

Such improvements in relationship increase the awareness of non-Indigenous employees, about history and First Nations cultures, through cultural awareness trainings, online learning and cultural learning programs.

Reconciliation 'Australia's Narragunnawali program and The Healing Foundation's education program are also having an impact.

In the education sector, the 2020 ARB showed that 61% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and 43% of the general public agreed it is very important for Indigenous history to be a compulsory part of the school curriculum.¹²⁷

There is scope to strengthen commitment to historical truth-telling within our education sector. Once again, the Uluru Statement from the Heart invites Australia to join a process of truth-telling and healing:

“Makarrata is the culmination of our agenda: the coming together after a struggle. It captures our aspirations for a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia and a better future for our children based on justice and self-determination.

We seek a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history.”¹²⁸

Summary of actions

Race Relations

Actions

- Maintain legal protections against racism
- Support public campaigns against racism
- Support public education on First Nations cultures and histories
- Reform mainstream service delivery, and workplaces, to address systemic racism and promote cultural safety and improve accountability
- Address justice issues that impact the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and institutions including addressing over-incarceration, rates of family violence, and children in out-of-home care.

Equality and Equity

Actions

- All future policy development, implementation and monitoring of Indigenous Affairs is done in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their representative bodies
- The calls in the Uluru Statement from the Heart, including for a constitutionally enshrined Voice to Parliament, should be supported by parliaments, corporate and civil society, and the broader community
- Governments must appropriately resource national, regional, local and traditional owner, independent, representative bodies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- Governments, working in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, must address each of the social and economic gaps experienced by First Peoples, including critical justice issues in relation to over-incarceration, family violence, and children in out-of-home care
- Governments must raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to at least 14 to bring it into line with international human rights standards.

Institutional Integrity

Actions

- Governments, corporate organisations, and civil society must recognise the importance of, and honour commitments enshrined in, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and work proactively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to incorporate its aims into domestic policy, legislation, and business practices that impact First Peoples
- RAP organisations should speak up on, and engage with a range of issues, including those that may attract controversy, such as constitutional reform, treaties, truth-telling, over incarceration, children in out-of-home care, justice reinvestment, and closing the disadvantage gaps.

Unity

Actions

- Governments, corporate, education and media institutions should value First Peoples cultures and ways of doing in governing, education curricula, business practices, and media representation
- Governments, corporate, education and media institutions should support initiatives that celebrate, promote and enhance public education about First Peoples' history, culture, and achievements
- Governments, corporate, education and media institutions should promote discussion about enhancing our national identity by embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and history into our national story.

Historical Acceptance

Actions

- Governments at a federal, state and local level, along with educational institutions, should support truth-telling in local communities to build national understanding of our shared past, and build a culture and movement of truth-telling
- Governments and institutions should build greater public recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures in the public domain including through memorialisation, plaques, renaming places, and sharing and re-storying
- Governments and universities should support increased scholarship to investigate Australia's frontier wars and massacres
- Governments, working with our educational institutions, should work with First Peoples to improve the teaching of First Nations history and culture in our schools.

Conclusion

“Many Indigenous people ... asked the critical question, ‘But when will things be different?’ Even in the midst of celebrating the joyous days of the 2000 bridge walks I heard that question asked ... ‘How do you go from good words into good actions?’”¹²⁹

The modern Australian nation is less than 120 years old; Europeans arrived permanently on these shores only 112 years before that. Yet these two centuries have wrought enormous destruction and inflicted unimaginable suffering and heartache on those who lived here for more than 60,000 years prior.

The sophistication, skills, culture and economy of the many First Nations peoples of this continent were almost universally denied and disparaged until very recently. In their blindness and arrogance, the colonists characterised Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander peoples as lacking capacity, grace and, for the most part, even humanity.

The first recorded massacre of Aboriginal families occurred only years after the arrival of the First Fleet. The murder of seven Bidjigal people on the banks of Deerubbun or the Hawkesbury River, was a shocking harbinger of the future of race relations in the colonies and indeed the modern nation of Australia.

Periodically there were colonists who objected to the brutality levelled against the First Nations people, but the great consistency in modern Australian history is the determined and unbroken resistance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander peoples. Whenever an opportunity to progress their interests against the onslaught of racism and oppression arose, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples grasped it.

From the armed resistance led by Bidjigal man, Pemulwuy, in the 1780s, to the 1930s National Day of Mourning and today’s young women organisers of Black Lives Matter marches, First Nations peoples have found ways to maintain resistance.

The formal movement for reconciliation is itself born out of this resistance and the refusal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to acquiesce in their oppression.

This report honours the resistance and the growing momentum for change that has been planted in the hearts of significant, and growing, numbers of Australians. While we have some way to travel to reach Reconciliation Australia’s vision for a just, equitable and reconciled Australia, this report highlights the changes that have occurred, the advances that have been made, while detailing where we still need to go and how we might get there.

What is clear in reviewing the past 29 years of reconciliation is that we have come a long way and now enjoy greater support from the Australian people than ever before. But we need to be more determined than ever if we are to achieve the goals of reconciliation as defined by the five dimensions and demonstrated in a just, equitable, reconciled Australia. As history tells us, this will only happen through action. Action from government, businesses, civil society, communities and individuals.

In imagining such a future, this report provides real life examples of reconciliation in action and a series of actions that must be taken to move our reconciliation focus from ‘safe’ to ‘brave’. It presents this shift as the next iteration of reconciliation, a pathway to ensuring that reconciliation is positively felt and identified by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. When it is felt in such a way, the relationship will grow stronger between First Peoples and other Australians, and inspire a sense of national unity on the path towards a more reconciled nation.

Some key milestones in Australian Reconciliation

Approximately 80,000 BCE	First evidence of Aboriginal occupation in Australia.
1788	British establish a colony at Port Jackson Sydney on Gadigal Country.
1797	The settlement of Parramatta is attacked by a large group of Bidjigal warriors led by Pemulwuy.
1834	Western Australian Governor, James Stirling, leads an attack on the Binjareb Noonga in the Pinjarra Massacre leaving an estimated 70 men, women and children dead.
1901	The Commonwealth of Australia is formed without any consultation with Australia's First Nations.
1914 -1918	1,300 Indigenous soldiers, out of an estimated Indigenous population of 80,000, served in the Australian Imperial Force during the First World War. Around 250 to 300 soldiers made the ultimate sacrifice.
1931	Doris Pilkington Garimara and two other girls begin their epic escape back to Jigalong as documented in the book, <i>Rabbit Proof Fence</i> .
1938	Day of Mourning protests by Aboriginal men and women gathered at Australia Hall in Sydney. The participants at the first Day of Mourning came from across Australia to continue a struggle that had begun 150 years previously.
1948	The <i>Commonwealth Nationality and Citizenship Act 1948</i> (Cth) creates "Australian citizenship" for the first time. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are technically included as citizens but are still unable to vote—one of the key privileges of citizenship.
1959	Malera/Bundjalung woman, Margaret Williams-Weir, becomes the first Aboriginal person to graduate from university when she is awarded a Diploma of Physical Education from the University of Melbourne. She went on to complete a PhD at the University of New England.
1962	The <i>Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918</i> is amended to enable all Indigenous Australians to enrol to vote in federal elections, with Queensland becoming the last State to grant Indigenous Queenslanders the right to vote in State elections in 1965.
1966	In the Wave Hill walk-off, two hundred Gurindji stockmen, house servants and their families—employed by Lord Vestey's Pastoral Company at Wave Hill, NT—went on strike to get their tribal lands returned.
1967	More than 90% of Australians vote "Yes" in a referendum to allow the Australian Government to make laws for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
1971	Jagera man, Neville Bonner, becomes the first Aboriginal person to sit in the Australian Parliament as a Queensland Senator for the Liberal Party.
1972	The Aboriginal Embassy is erected in front of Australia's Parliament House in Canberra to demand land and other rights.

1976	Kuku Yalanji woman, Pat O'Shane, becomes Australia's first Aboriginal barrister.
1984	Arrernte and Kalkadoon man, Charles Perkins, appointed head of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs becoming the first Indigenous person to head up an Australian Government department.
1985	Uluru is handed back to its Anangu owners with the Anangu leasing the land back to the Australian Parks and Wildlife Service for 99 years with joint management arrangements.
1988	The <i>Barunga Statement</i> , demanding rights and recognition for Aboriginal peoples, is presented to Prime Minister Bob Hawke and tens of thousands of Australians protest lack of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander rights during Australia's Bicentenary.
1990	The Hawke Government establishes the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission in an attempt to provide greater First Nations control of affairs.
1991	<p>The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody presents its final report and recommendations to the Australian Parliament, including calling for a process of national reconciliation.</p> <p>The Australian Parliament unanimously passes the <i>Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act 1991</i> (Cth), formally launching a process of national reconciliation.</p>
1992	The High Court recognises the Meriam people's ownership of Mer (Murray Island) in the Torres Strait and overturns the fallacious legal concept of <i>terra nullius</i> after a long legal battle by Koiki Mabo and other plaintiffs.
1993	In response to the High Court's Mabo decision the Keating Government passes the <i>Native Title Act 1993</i> (Cth) providing a mechanism for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to claim back some of their ancestral lands.
1996	The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation launches Australia's first National Reconciliation Week.
1997	The <i>Bringing Them Home</i> report on Australia's Stolen Generations is launched at the inaugural Australian Reconciliation Convention in Melbourne attended by nearly 2,000 people.
1998	National Sorry Day is commemorated for the first time.
2000	<p>Hundreds of thousands of Australians walk across Sydney Harbour Bridge, and other bridges around Australia, to show support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aspirations.</p> <p>Noongar writer, Kim Scott, becomes the first Aboriginal writer to win the Miles Franklin Award—Australia's most prestigious fiction prize—for his novel, <i>Benang</i>.</p>
2001	Reconciliation Australia is established.
2004	The Australian Government creates a memorial to the Stolen Generations at Reconciliation Place in Canberra.

2007	<p>The Australian Parliament suspends the <i>Racial Discrimination Act</i> (Cth) in order to implement the so-called Emergency Intervention into Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory.</p> <p>National Indigenous Television (NITV) is launched.</p>
2008	<p>Prime Minister Kevin Rudd formally apologises to the Stolen Generations on behalf of the Australian Parliament and people.</p>
2010	<p>Noongar man, Ken Wyatt, becomes the first Aboriginal member of the House of Representatives after winning the Perth seat of Hasluck for the Liberal Party.</p>
2013	<p>The Australian Parliament passes with bi-partisan support the <i>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition Bill 2012</i>, recognising the unique and special place of First Nations peoples as the original owners of the Australian continent and islands.</p>
2016	<p>South Australia, Victoria and the Northern Territory announce their intention to commence Treaty discussions with First Nations peoples.</p>
2017	<p>The National Constitutional Convention at Uluru releases the Uluru Statement from the <i>Heart</i>, a unified statement to the Australian people calling for an Indigenous Voice to Parliament, the establishment of a Makarrata Commission to develop agreements or treaties, and a process of truth-telling.</p> <p>The Turnbull Government rejects the Uluru Statement from the Heart.</p>
2018	<p>Victoria becomes the first Australian state to pass Treaty legislation when it passes the <i>Advancing the Treaty Process with Aboriginal Victorians Act 2018</i> (VIC).</p>
2019	<p>Queensland and the Northern Territory establish their own processes towards a treaty with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations.</p> <p>The Budj Bim Cultural Landscape of the Gunditjmara Nation, a 6,600-year-old Aboriginal aquaculture site in south-west Victoria, is added to the UNESCO World Heritage List.</p>
2020	<p>Tens of thousands of Australians attend Black Lives Matter marches in cities across the country to protest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths in custody and high rates of incarceration of First Nations peoples.</p> <p>Mining company Rio Tinto destroys two 46,000-year-old sites in the Juukan Gorge, Pilbara, and is suspended from Reconciliation Australia's Reconciliation Action Plan community; Senate Inquiry held; CEO and two senior executives resign.</p> <p>Vincent Namatjira wins the 2020 Archibald prize for his portrait of Adam Goodes, becoming the first Indigenous artist to win in its 99-year history.</p> <p>Meyne Wyatt awarded 2020 Archibald Packing Room Prize for self-portrait, becoming the first Indigenous artist to be awarded the prize in its 99-year history.</p> <p>Hubert Pareroutja wins the Wynne Prize for his painting of Tjoritja (West MacDonnell Ranges, NT), becoming the fifth Indigenous artist in a row to win the prize.</p>

End notes

1. In an effort to reduce the incarceration and recidivism rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, Elevate RAP Partner Insurance Australia Group (IAG) have made commitments to support initiatives to lower engagement with the criminal justice system in the Mt Druitt area of Western Sydney.
2. From May to March of 2020, Reconciliation Australia undertook a series of interviews with stakeholders on the state of reconciliation. Those interviewed included leaders of national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, leaders of relevant non-Indigenous organisations, corporate leaders and RAP partners.
3. Reconciliation Australia has collected a range of case studies identifying examples of effective reconciliation across the framework of the five dimensions. These case studies provide evidence of what reconciliation looks like in practice, through the individuals and groups who are making a difference. These are the stories we want readers to remember when they think about reconciliation in Australia.
4. Since 2008, Reconciliation Australia has biennially surveyed the views of the Australian public about reconciliation and related issues. Known as the Australian Reconciliation Barometer (ARB or “the Barometer”), the survey is a key tool for helping understand how the nation is performing on its journey towards reconciliation.
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