

What is Truth-telling?

Reconciliation Australia:
**Community Truth-telling
Pathways**

Truth-telling enables a fuller and more accurate account of Australia's history to recognise the strength and contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It acknowledges the historical silencing of injustices and ongoing impacts of colonisation on First Nations peoples. Truth-telling is fundamental to advancing reconciliation.

Why is it called truth-telling?

The term 'truth-telling' is used because First Nations perspectives and experiences have been persistently excluded, misrepresented or ignored in official accounts of Australia's history. A narrow version of history has become widely accepted as true and complete. This limits our collective ability to understand the past and why things are the way they are today.

'What does truth-telling mean? It's honesty and I think honesty is the foundation of good relationships.'

– Participant, *Coming to terms with the past? Identifying barriers and enablers to truth-telling and strategies to promote historical acceptance* report

What is truth-telling about?

Truth-telling deals with colonial conflict, massacres, racism and dispossession. It also celebrates and promotes the strength, contribution, resilience and leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures.

What does truth-telling look like?

Truth-telling takes different forms at different levels of society.

National and state or territory level

Truth-telling has taken the form of inquiries, commissions and formal apologies.

Examples:

- Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991)
- Bringing them Home Report (1997)
- National Apology to the Stolen Generations (2008)
- Yoorrook Justice Commission (2021-2025)

Organisational level

Organisations can conduct their own truth-telling by reviewing their own institutional history, policies and practices that have impacted First Nations peoples. For example, the Wyatt Family Trust website hosts a timeline of Dr Wyatt's life and actions from a First Nations perspective.

Local and individual levels

At the local level, First Nations individuals report that truth-telling is part of their everyday interactions. Communities are working together to do place based truth-telling in a range of ways – from commemorative events to local history publications or websites, renaming, public talks, signage, statues, and art exhibits. [Explore examples of local truth-telling.](#)

Descendants

Descendants of the perpetrators of colonial violence also have truths to tell. Examples:

- [Appin Massacre Memorial](#)
- [Yoorook Justice Commission](#)
[Descendants Day](#)
- [Journalist Sam Carmody writes his family's settler history](#)

Truth-telling is a process not an event

Truth-telling is not a 'one-off' event or activity. It is an ongoing process of dialogue, engagement and intergenerational change. Truth-telling is a process that aims to shift our collective understanding of Australia's past so it can guide us to a better path in the future.

It can be helpful to think of the truth-telling process as an ongoing cycle with multiple steps: the act of **telling** the truth about Australia's history; deep **listening** to learn from that truth; and **acting** on that new understanding. This can include changes in our attitudes, actions and institutions.

Read the Guide - Truth-telling: Ways for Everyone to Participate on the resources hub to learn more.



reconciliation.org.au/truth-telling

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