

ACSO POSITION PAPER 26 January – Change the Date

ACSO supports changing the date of Australia Day from 26 January to an appropriate and inclusive date, so that First Nations rich history, cultures, lore's, and customs are also honoured in national celebrations that bring all Australians together.

The Australian Community Support Organisation (ACSO) proudly acknowledges Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people as Australia's First Nations and pay respect to their rich cultures, lore's, customs, and elders past and present. ACSO strongly embraces substantive equality and an equal voice for First Nations peoples. ACSO recognises that sovereignty was never ceded and that it always was and always will be, Aboriginal land. First Nations peoples have a connection to this country which extends back over at least 60,000 years.

On 26 January 1788 British colonisation commenced and whilst the date of 26 January has been recognised in some form or other for over 100 years, it was only 1935 that the first "Australia Day" designations began and not until 1994 that all states and territories endorsed Australia Day as a national public holiday to be held on that date.

The date 26 January marks a day where the dispossession of First Nations people of their land and destruction of their cultures commenced. Intergenerational trauma, removal from kin, culture and community, systemic racism, discrimination, and marginalisation continues to flow from these events with key indicators of health and wellbeing outlined in the Closing the Gap report continuing to significantly impact our First Nations peoples.

The date 26 January represents, for many First Nations people, a reminder of the horrific impacts First Nation people and communities have and continue to suffer due to invasion and colonisation. Australia must face up to this part of our history and work with First Nations people to address the wrongs before we can say we are a fair society. Changing the date is an important step toward creating a fair and equal society, acknowledgement of past wrongs and creation of a just and inclusive society.

ACSO stand in solidarity with Australia's First Nations People. We support First Nations self-determination and will always seek to elevate and support First Nations voices in the debates we need to have around justice, mental health, disability and substance abuse. ACSO supports the principles and statements within the Uluru Statement from the Heart that invites all Australian people to participate in giving First Nations peoples' in this country a constitutionally enshrined Voice.

ACSO has embarked on its journey to reconciliation with the recent conditional endorsement of our Reflect Reconciliation Plan, the introduction of paid cultural and ceremonial leave to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, a partnership with Warrigunya to support the build of a client designed accommodation for First Nations men leaving incarceration in the Gippsland region, the appointment of experienced solicitor and proud Yorta Yorta woman Nerita Waight to the ACSO board, along with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Practice Lead which will in part, provide secondary consultations and support the establishment of our first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Panel.

We are humbled by the road ahead and look forward to continuing to review how ACSO can provide a culturally responsive workplace and services to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.