



Australasian Society for Developmental Paediatrics

## ASDP Position Statement: The Voice to Parliament

27/09/2023

The Board of the Australasian Society for Developmental Paediatrics (ASDP) (formerly known as the Neurodevelopmental and Behavioural Paediatric Society of Australasia) endorses the Uluru Statement from the Heart and supports the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Australian Constitution through implementation of the Voice to Parliament. In our opinion this could enable more successful care for children who have, or are at risk of, developmental, behavioural and mental health problems.

The ASDP is a professional body representing over 800 specialist paediatricians and doctors in Australia, New Zealand, and South-East Asia. Our members support children with, or at risk of having, neurodevelopmental and behavioural challenges, in order that every child can achieve their personal potential for a happy and fulfilling childhood and adult life.

Across Australia in 2021, just 34.3% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children commencing school were assessed as being developmentally on track in all five domains of the Australian Early Development Census, compared to 56.2% of non-Indigenous children.<sup>1</sup> In addition, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children remain significantly over-represented in out-of-home care placements and the youth justice system,<sup>1</sup> both of which are associated with disadvantaged development and wellbeing.<sup>2,3</sup>

We believe that successful care for children is best achieved within a deep respect for the diversity of beliefs, values and cultures held by families and communities. At the core of our practice is the recognition of the importance of child and family centred care. Child development is impacted by what we do at all levels – individual, family, community and society.<sup>2</sup> For this reason, we believe that self-determination and autonomy is central to achieving best health outcomes for children.

The ASDP Board acknowledges the ongoing strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in sustaining the world's oldest living cultures and the deep connection they have with their ancestral land. We believe that better and more equitable health and developmental outcomes are achieved when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have a genuine say in the design and delivery of policies, programs and services that affect their communities.<sup>1</sup> This is why building on the strong foundations Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have through their deep connection to family, community, and country is central to improving developmental outcomes for children and young people.<sup>1</sup>

Excerpt from the [Uluru Statement from the Heart](#):

*“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.*

The Board respects the diverse perspectives held by individual ASDP members and encourages everyone to engage in discussion about the Voice with care and respect. The ASDP seeks to support initiatives with the potential to genuinely improve the developmental wellbeing of

disadvantaged populations of children, regardless of the political origin of those initiatives. This we believe is in line with the core aims of our society.

**References:**

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3. Leckning B, Condon JR, Das SK, He V, Hirvonen T, Guthridge S. Mental health-related hospitalisations associated with patterns of child protection and youth justice involvement during adolescence: A retrospective cohort study using linked administrative data from the Northern Territory of Australia. *Children and Youth Services Review*. 2023 Feb 1;145:106771; <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2022.106771>
4. Story of Our Children and Young People; [https://cmc.nt.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0020/1061372/story-of-our-children-and-young-people-2021.pdf](https://cmc.nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/1061372/story-of-our-children-and-young-people-2021.pdf)
5. Recognition through a Voice; <https://voice.gov.au>