**Saturday, 14 October 2023**

# Hard truths remain despite Voice to Parliament’s ‘No’ result

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples must have a say in the policies that shape their health outcomes, regardless of the Voice to Parliament referendum result.

Australian Medical Association President Professor Steve Robson said it was crucial for Australia to move forward sensitively following the referendum’s ‘No’ outcome.

“We have seen, at times, difficult debate during the Voice to Parliament campaign, which will have had a significant impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples,” Professor Robson said.

“We need to be conscious of that as we talk about how to move forward and genuinely tackle the worrying disparity in health outcomes among First Nations communities.”

Professor Robson said the AMA supported establishing a Voice as a way of helping address this gap.

“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have a life expectancy that is on average 8.2 years shorter than other Australians. This is unacceptable,” Professor Robson said.

“Despite the referendum result, we all know we must listen to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples if we are to develop programs and policies that truly address the gap in health outcomes.

“Governments need to do better at consulting Indigenous communities and ensuring their views are adequately built into policies that affect them.”

Professor Robson said it was incumbent on governments around Australia to genuinely act on the input received from Indigenous communities, such as the need to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility.

“Governments had collectively supported the Voice but we know most states and territories are still yet to act on recommendations to raise the age. This is despite the extremely clear evidence — directly from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples — that the current minimum age of 10 has a profoundly negative impact on them.”

The AMA has a long history of strong advocacy in support of policies aiming to deliver better health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and will continue to do so despite the referendum outcome.

In partnership with the Australian Indigenous Doctors Association, the AMA’s Taskforce on Indigenous Health has a strong and focused agenda, including advocating on the importance of access to culturally safe health care, and addressing the determinants of health in a thoughtful and respectful way.