

MEDIA RELEASE

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Catholic Social Services launch joint webinar series on Indigenous Voice to Parliament

Catholic Social Services Victoria and Catholic Social Services Australia have opened registration for their three part webinar series on this year's Voice to Parliament Referendum.

The joint event titled, *Indigenous Voice to Parliament: Moments for healing this country*, will bring together a range of speakers to interrogate why this democratic decision is happening in 2023, and how either a positive or negative outcome of the referendum will be a defining moment for all of us living in modern Australia.

Professor Melissa Castan, director of the Castan Centre for Human Rights Law at Monash University, will kick off the webinar series on Thursday May 25 drawing from her extensive experience in Public Law, Constitutional Law, Human Rights Law, Indigenous Legal Issues and Legal Education. Some of the questions Melissa will explore in the first session include: What is the history surrounding the referendum? Should First Nations people have a Voice in Parliament? Why is it being proposed as an adaption to the Australian Constitution?

The second webinar will be given by Fr Frank Brennan SJ AO - Jesuit priest, former CEO of CSSA and Rector of Newman College at the University of Melbourne. He will look at how the Catholic Church has engaged in Aboriginal affairs and why Catholics should take serious interest in this referendum, and how they might approach their vote from a context of Catholic Social Teachings. This session will provide a deeper understanding why reconciliation is a core issue for the Faithful, and how Aboriginal Spirituality has contributed to the Faith thus far and how it might enrich all Australians.

The final session in the joint webinar series will feature three different voices of First Nations peoples, who will form a reflective panel that will consider what the Voice means for them, and what the referendum might mean for their communities and Australia. We will hear from Uncle Ron Briggs, of Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand, Aunty Violet Sheridan an Ngunnawal Elder (Canberra) and Esmail Manahan from MacKillop Family Services.

Uncle Ron is Senior Aboriginal Cultural Advisor for GSANZ, and has worked in Aboriginal Men's health for more than 20 years and co-facilitated a drug and alcohol program within the Victorian prison system. Ron is on the Board of Directors for the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service and sits on various committees concerned with the health and wellbeing of the Melbourne Aboriginal community.

Aunty Violet Sheridan is a pillar of the community in Canberra and the region, who was recently recognised when she was named ACT NAIDOC Elder of the Year 2022. She is a passionate Ngunnawal Elder who shares her cultural knowledge and expertise so the next generation can learn about and understand the oldest continuous living culture in the world.

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Esmail Manahan is a proud Yorta Yorta woman, who was brought up in a politically active family and someone who remains passionate about making positive change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Esmail is trauma and family therapy trained and responsible for the oversight of cultural safety at MacKillop Family Services. She is an advocate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, and families, particularly the most vulnerable in the areas of child protection and out of home care. Esmail has spent many years working in key roles in the Aboriginal community sector and State Government.

Both CSSV and CSSA have released their own statements on the referendum earlier this year urging deeper engagement and consideration by all in the ask for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament, alongside the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and Catholic Religious Australia, who previously endorsed the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

This webinar series is for a broad spectrum of people who want to enhance their knowledge and understanding of the upcoming referendum and inform their vote. This webinar series is for those working and volunteering in programs, classrooms, health practitioners, those leading in board rooms and in organisations.

Catholic social services, education and health organisations should encourage members and staff to sign up. Clergy and parishioners are invited from across the country to attend the webinar series to enrich their decision-making process through the lens of Catholic Social Teaching and the expertise of the presenters.

Monique Earsman, Executive Director CSSA, said: "We want our webinar series to provide those working in Catholic Social Services, Health, Education and parishes across Australia to be better informed, with a deeper understanding of the issues currently being debated in the public sphere.

"As the referendum approaches, discussions in the media and our communities will intensify, and some may attempt to create divisions or spread fear. We aim for our three events to ease those concerns and tensions while providing a platform for thoughtful and well-reasoned debate.

"We would strongly urge those within leadership roles at our members and those non-members within the Catholic sector to promote and allow staff to attend the series. We all have a role to play in furthering Reconciliation in Australia as articulated in the Uluru Statement from the Heart."

Joshua Lourensz, Executive Director CSSV, said: "A Constitutional referendum doesn't come around too often – so it is so important that we take them seriously. The invitation inherent in the Uluru Statement of the Heart is vibrant and generous. Our consideration of the actions and activities that flow from it should be in the same spirit."

The webinar series will begin at 4pm on Thursday May 25, Thursday June 29 and Thursday July 27. The format will include an introduction, keynote speaker(s) followed by a Q&A section before concluding at 5pm.

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Registration is essential to be sent the online link. Tickets for CSSV & CSSA members are free and non-members can purchase tickets for \$12 per session or \$30 for all three sessions.

To book your place, please visit www.trybooking.com/CHXKH

For enquiries and further comment please contact:

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