

24 November 2022



## Voice To Parliament to be shaped after Australia's referendum

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All Australians will have a rare opportunity to come together with First Nations People to achieve a greater sense of equality, fairness and justice, the Federal Government's Special Envoy on Reconciliation, Senator Pat Dodson, has told a Parliament House Forum today.

Senator Dodson told the Leaders Forum, hosted by Australia's largest community services network, UnitingCare Australia, that it will be the role of Federal Parliament to fashion The Voice following the referendum if it was successful.

Australians will have to wait to see the form of The Voice to Parliament if it is supported through the proposed referendum to provide First Nations people with an active advisory role under the Constitution.

Senator Dodson said the referendum was an invitation to all Australians to recognise the rights and roles of First Nations people in the Constitution and in Australia.

"The referendum will decide whether or not to have a Voice to Parliament - it is about recognition in the Constitution for our First Nations people and it is also about practical outcomes," Senator Dodson said.

"A positive response from the referendum will allow all of us as Australians to bring about a greater sense of unity and of equality and fairness and justice.

"Congratulations to the Forum for grappling with these issues in a very serious way. It is a great privilege to be invited to speak to the Forum as they grapple with these very seminal issues."

Senator Dodson said there would be an education campaign to advise on the referendum as this was the "peoples' project" to decide on The Voice.

"The referendum will provide Australians with an historic opportunity to recognise the rights of First Nations People, allow them to have a say about issues that affect them and improve the lives of them and their communities," Senator Dodson said.

"A Voice means that First Nations People, the people who know what works, will advise the Parliament and the Executive in a focused and consistent manner about laws that impact their lives.

"It is about a better return on public sector monies and funding, a better input from First Nations People to the issues that they know about better than anybody else and to craft solutions to these policies.

“We have to move forward and this is what it is about – the future of First Nations People and we as Australians.”

Senator Dodson was speaking at the UnitingCare Australia Leaders Forum – Australia’s largest social services network – which is engaging with a range of MPs and decision makers on how best to support people facing vulnerability or disadvantage. most

The two-day Leaders Forum – with the theme Equality, Fairness, Justice – will hear from Senator Dodson, Assistant Minister for Competition and Charities Dr Andrew Leigh, Shadow Assistant Minister Gavin Pearce, Greens Senator Janet Rice and Independent Senator David Pocock among others, as well as showcasing innovation and best practice across the UnitingCare network. The Leaders Forum outcomes will be presented to Parliament for consideration and follow up by UnitingCare advocates.

### **About UnitingCare Australia**

UnitingCare Australia is the national body for the Uniting Church’s community services network and an agency of the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia.

The UnitingCare network is one of the largest networks of community services in Australia, supporting 1.4 million people every year across 1,600 sites in urban, rural, and remote communities, with over 50,000 staff and 30,000 volunteers.

The UnitingCare Aged Care Network is the largest not-for-profit aged care network, representing 9% of the total aged care sector.

### **Media Contact**

Anna Page M: 0432 560 975 [annap@nat.unitingcare.org.au](mailto:annap@nat.unitingcare.org.au)

Allan Yates M: 0421 150 229