



YWCA  
CANBERRA

# AUSTRALIA HAS A BLACK HISTORY





**YWCA CANBERRA PROUDLY RECOGNISES THE RIGHTS OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES TO OWN AND CONTROL THEIR CULTURE AND PAYS OUR RESPECT TO THESE RIGHTS.**

**YWCA CANBERRA ACKNOWLEDGES THE NEED TO RESPECT AND ENCOURAGE THE DIVERSITY OF INDIGENOUS CULTURES AND PAYS RESPECT TO INDIGENOUS WORLDVIEWS, LIFESTYLES, AND CUSTOMARY LAWS.**

**WE EXTEND OUR RESPECT TO THE ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER WOMEN WHO FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS HAVE PRESERVED THE CULTURE AND PRACTICES OF THEIR COMMUNITIES ON COUNTRY.**

**THIS LAND WAS NEVER SURRENDERED, AND WE ACKNOWLEDGE THAT IT ALWAYS WAS AND WILL CONTINUE TO ALWAYS BE ABORIGINAL LAND.**

# A SHORT HISTORY

## OLDEST LIVING CULTURE

Aboriginal Australians are the world's oldest surviving continuous culture, with a history spanning at least 65,000 years. They represent distinct populations with unique languages, customs, and spiritual connections to the land.



## COLONISATION

- Colonisation began in 1788 when European settlers first arrived. This was devastating to Aboriginal Australians who endured dispossession, violence and disease.
- Imported diseases such as influenza and smallpox resulted in significant population loss among Aboriginal people.
- European legislation and customs were imposed, and native practices were banned.
- Policy was introduced which involved forcefully removing Aboriginal children from their families to be placed in homes or institutions. This occurred between 1900 and 1970 and is referred to as the 'Stolen Generation'.
- The removed children were then placed in institutions or with non-Indigenous families. This meant disconnecting the children from cultural connections and caused long-term trauma.



## LONG TERM IMPACT

- While the policy of forced removal was eventually abolished, Aboriginal children are still disproportionately represented in the numbers of out-of-home care children.
- Systemic inequalities have resulted in long-term disadvantages. Some of these include social and financial disadvantages, poor health and lower life-expectancy for Aboriginal people.
- Despite these problems, Aboriginal Australians have demonstrated incredible resilience and self-determination. Efforts to revive threatened Aboriginal languages are ongoing.



*JOURNEY TOWARDS HEALING* by Linda Huddleston and the YWCA Canberra Senior's Group

# WHITE AUSTRALIA POLICY

Australia had a “White Australia Policy” which further oppressed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and was used to limit the arrive of new migrants. It was abolished in the 1970s, but its legacy and impact remains.

Present ideas focus on cultural recovery, reconciliation, and eliminating historical discrimination.

These ideas focus on bridging the gap across Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. Understanding the history and impact of previous policies is critical to create a more inclusive and fair society.

## DID YOU KNOW?

The term “Indigenous Australian” includes both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

-AIATIS



# WHAT IS RECONCILIATION?

Reconciliation aims to strengthen ties between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous peoples for the benefit of all Australians.

Reconciliation requires the Australian community accepting and valuing Aboriginal culture and contributions and taking active steps to incorporate recognition and advancement in their workplaces or social settings.

Reconciliation is about working together towards a more equal and respectful future.

By doing so, we establish relationships and communities that respect the histories, cultures, and futures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



# CANBERRA'S TRADITIONAL OWNERS

The Ngunnawal people are the traditional owners of the area that includes Canberra and the surrounding region.

Ngunnawal Country is situated in the northern part of the Snowy Mountains which provides strong links and pathways to the coast from the mountains. These water courses and byways follow and represent Songlines and Dreamings.

Ngunnawal people have deep cultural interest in conservation, water, and fire management and maintain connections to their land through storytelling and artistic expression.

# THE ONGOING IMPACT OF COLONISATION

The colonisation of Australia has had long-lasting effects. This can be seen through:

- Health Impacts - Aboriginal Australians having a greater incidences of chronic diseases, this is believed to be related to past trauma and limited healthcare access.
- Shorter Life Spans - Aboriginal Australians have much lower life expectancy than non-Indigenous Australians.
- Lower Education Outcomes - historical discrimination and inadequate funding among Indigenous schools have resulted in lower academic performance. There are also ongoing issues with support and resources.
- Employment Issues - Aboriginal Australians experience greater unemployment rates. This is due to historical marginalisation, racism and limited employment opportunities, as well as workplace discrimination.
- Trauma Presentations - There is significant intergenerational trauma impacting Aboriginal Australians, most significantly from the Stolen Generations. This can be observed through mental illness and social dynamics within communities.





## WELCOME TO COUNTRY VS ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY?

A Welcome to Country ceremony is held by an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Elder to welcome visitors to their land. It may involve dancing, a smoking ceremony or a speech. A Welcome to Country can only be delivered by a Traditional Custodian of the land where the event is being held.

An Acknowledgement of Country allows any individual to demonstrate their respect for the Traditional Owners and the ongoing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to Country. It is typically delivered at the start of a function by a non-Indigenous person or an Indigenous person with no ancestral ties to the land.



# IMPORTANT DATES AND EVENTS

- **Anniversary of National Apology Day (February 13):**

National Apology Day is a time to reflect on the ongoing impacts and intergenerational trauma experienced by the Stolen Generations, their families, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

- **National Close the Gap Day (the third Thursday of March):**

National Close the Gap Day is dedicated to encouraging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to learn and use the services across Australia that can improve their health and wellbeing. National Close the Gap Day has been celebrated annually since 2006 and has the pledge of achieving indigenous health equality by 2030.

- **National Sorry Day (May 26):**

The first Sorry Day was held on 26 May 1998 in Sydney. It commemorates the mistreatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were forcibly removed from their families and communities, known as The Stolen Generations. Australians across the country also observe this day, reflecting on how we can contribute to healing for our people and nation.

- **Anniversary of the 1967 Referendum (May 27):**

On 27 May, we celebrate the anniversary of 1967 Referendum. The result changed how the Australian Constitution referred to Indigenous Australians, meant Aboriginal Australians would be counted in the national Census and gave the Commonwealth Government power to make laws for the benefit of Indigenous peoples.



- **Reconciliation Week (27 May – 3 June):**

National Reconciliation Week (NRW) is a time for all Australians to learn about our shared histories, cultures, and achievements, and to explore how each of us can contribute to achieving reconciliation in Australia.

- **NAIDOC Week (First week of July each year [Sunday to Sunday]):**

NAIDOC originally stood for 'National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee'. NAIDOC Week celebrations are held across Australia each July to celebrate the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. NAIDOC is celebrated not only in Indigenous communities, but by Australians from all walks of life. The week is a great opportunity to participate in a range of activities and to support your local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.



# WHAT IS MEANT BY 'THE DREAMTIME'?

The Dreamtime, also known as The Dreaming, refers to a holistic belief system that captures key aspects of Aboriginal spiritual beliefs, storytelling and existence.

Dreamtime is the basis of Aboriginal religion and culture. It is around 65,000 years old. It goes by various names in Aboriginal languages, including Ngarranggarni and Tjukula Jukurrpa. It tells the story of what happened, how the universe was created, how humanity was formed, and how the Creator intended for humans to behave in the world they knew.

Spiritual ancestors built the natural world during the Dreamtime, which included animals, trees, plants, hills, rocks, waterholes, and rivers. The Spirits also created both the land and the people.

The Dreamtime, according to indigenous people, is an ongoing process. They believed that the Dreamtime existed on an infinite chain that connected the past, present, and future.



# WHAT IS MEANT BY 'CHANGE THE DATE'?

January 26 was chosen as the date of Australia Day because it marks the arrival of the first European settlers and the establishment of the colony.

For many Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders however, this date marks the beginning of dispossession and displacement and is not a day for celebration.

Changing the date of Australia Day will provide an opportunity for all Australians to come together and rejoice and move further toward reconciliation.



# REFERENCES AND WHERE TO LEARN MORE:

## **Indigenous Australians: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people | AIATSIS:**

<https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/indigenous-australians-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-people>

## **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and history - VPSC:**

<https://vpvc.vic.gov.au/workforce-programs/aboriginal-cultural-capability-toolkit/aboriginal-culture-and-history/>

## **What is reconciliation? - Reconciliation Australia:**

[www.reconciliation.org.au/reconciliation/what-is-reconciliation/](http://www.reconciliation.org.au/reconciliation/what-is-reconciliation/)

## **Reconciliation | Bringing Them Home (humanrights.gov.au):**

<https://bth.humanrights.gov.au/healing/reconciliation>

## **National Reconciliation Week - Reconciliation Australia:**

[www.reconciliation.org.au/our-work/national-reconciliation-week/](http://www.reconciliation.org.au/our-work/national-reconciliation-week/)

## **Timeline: Recognition of Australia's Indigenous people - ABC News:**

[www.abc.net.au/news/2015-07-06/indigenous-recognition-timeline-of-australian-history/6586176](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-07-06/indigenous-recognition-timeline-of-australian-history/6586176)

## **What is the Dreamtime and Dreaming? - Aboriginal Contemporary:**

[www.aboriginalcontemporary.com.au/pages/what-is-the-dreamtime-and-dreaming](http://www.aboriginalcontemporary.com.au/pages/what-is-the-dreamtime-and-dreaming)

## **What is Aboriginal Dreamtime? (aboriginal-art-australia.com):**

[www.aboriginal-art-australia.com/aboriginal-art-library/aboriginal-dreamtime/](http://www.aboriginal-art-australia.com/aboriginal-art-library/aboriginal-dreamtime/)

## **The history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples advocating for the right to be heard | Australian Human Rights Commission:**

<https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-social-justice/history-aboriginal-and-torres-strait>

## **National Close The Gap Day - Thursday, 16 March 2023 (wincalendar.com) National Apology Day - a reminder of the past and a call to our future | Life Without Barriers:**

[www.wincalendar.com/au/Close-Gap-Day](http://www.wincalendar.com/au/Close-Gap-Day)

## **National Apology Day - a reminder of the past and a call to our future | Life Without Barriers:**

[www.lwb.org.au/news/national-apology-day-a-reminder-of-the-past-and-a-call-to-our-future/](http://www.lwb.org.au/news/national-apology-day-a-reminder-of-the-past-and-a-call-to-our-future/)

## **Let's Talk...Sorry Day - Reconciliation Australia:**

[www.reconciliation.org.au/publication/lets-talk-sorry-day/](http://www.reconciliation.org.au/publication/lets-talk-sorry-day/)

## **What is NAIDOC Week and why is it important? - Ashburton Aboriginal Corporation:**

[www.ashburton.net.au/story/what-is-naidoc-week-and-why-is-it-important/n](http://www.ashburton.net.au/story/what-is-naidoc-week-and-why-is-it-important/n)

## **1967 Referendum: a profound change for Indigenous peoples | Indigenous.gov.au:**

[www.indigenous.gov.au/news-and-media/stories/1967-referendum-profound-change-indigenous-peoples](http://www.indigenous.gov.au/news-and-media/stories/1967-referendum-profound-change-indigenous-peoples)

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