



Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs inquiry into racism, hatred and violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

Submitted jointly by:

The Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress

&

The Uniting Church in Australia

8 May 2026

Our Vision:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, nurtured and sustained by God before invasion, are celebrated at the very heart of what it means to be Australian. First Peoples' sovereignty is affirmed. First Peoples have a voice in the decision making of our country and are living out their right to self-determination. As First and Second Peoples, we heal together, creating socially just and culturally safe relationships, listening and learning from one another.¹

Executive Summary:

Australia already has a clear, credible and evidence-based roadmap to address racism, hatred and violence towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, in the Australian Human Rights Commission's (AHRC) *National Anti-Racism Framework*.² This is coupled with strong evidence that self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People by service delivery through Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) deliver better outcomes across health, housing, justice and child well-being. What is lacking is not knowledge, but political courage and sustained investment and implementation. Key to addressing racism and violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is embedding the United Nation Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Persons (UNDRIP) in government policy and legislation.

Modern racism directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia is exclusionary and rooted incidental and structural bias. Structural racism encompasses the systemic interaction of institutions and the institutional practices within them that together produce and reproduce racial inequality. While acts of explicit hate, racial abuse and physical violence against First Nations people are common and very serious and harmful, the most profound and enduring damage arises from systems and institutional arrangements that routinely

¹ Uniting Church in Australia (2025). *Our Vision for a Just Australia*. Available at: uniting.church/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Our-Vision-For-a-Just-Australia-2025_FINAL-1.pdf

² Australian Human Rights Commission (2024). *National Anti-Racism Framework: A Roadmap to Eliminating Racism in Australia*. Available at: https://humanrights.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0019/25381/NARF_Full_Report_FINAL_DIGITAL_ACCESSIBLE.pdf

expose Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to premature death, family separation, incarceration, ill-health, poverty, homelessness, spiritual violence and political exclusion.

We provide ten recommendations below in the submission to address racism, hatred and violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples:

RECOMMENDATION ONE

That the Australian Government urgently move to fully fund and implement the *National Anti-Racism Framework*.

RECOMMENDATION TWO

That the Australian Government prioritise, for immediate implementation, the first two recommendations in the *National Anti-Racism Framework*.

RECOMMENDATION THREE

That the Australian Government urgently convene an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led summit on youth justice, in line with the recent National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (NATSILS) open letter to the Prime Minister.

RECOMMENDATION FOUR

That the Australian Government prioritise the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) *Family Matters Report 2025*.

RECOMMENDATION FIVE

That the Australian Government make a commitment to working with representatives from the End Child Poverty Campaign and SNAICC to prioritise the development of legislation and policies seriously directed at ending child poverty in Australia, with a special focus on poverty impacting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

RECOMMENDATION SIX

That the Australian Government revise its current End Game Strategy approach to tackling Rheumatic Heart Disease (RHD) to ensure that culturally appropriate housing, environmental health infrastructure and adequate functional washing facilities are in place for all communities where the disease is present.

RECOMMENDATION SEVEN

That, in the short term, the Australian Government prioritise working with National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (NACCHO) members and local shire councils as part of their response of the long-term efforts to address RHD. This should include the widespread construction and maintenance of laundry and shower facilities (using solar energy where possible) in all remote and regional communities in Australia where RHD is prevalent and there is an identified shortage of such facilities.

RECOMMENDATION EIGHT

That the Australian government strengthen regulation of online hate directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by requiring collaboration between the eSafety Commissioner and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to develop initiatives.

RECOMMENDATION NINE

That the Australian government implement the recommendations from the *Change the Record (2026) Submission to the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and the *Closing the Gap Campaign Report 2026*. Priority should be given to structural transformation by embedding the UNDRIP into policy and legislation across all government portfolios.

RECOMMENDATION TEN

That the Australian government, in acknowledging First Peoples' deep spiritual connection to Country, seeks to establish forums for entering ecumenical dialogues with First Peoples church representatives. The purpose of these forums would be to better understand the role of spiritual healing and strengthening as part of a holistic approach to addressing the negative impacts of racism, hatred and violence towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Introduction:

The Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) and the Uniting Church in Australia (Uniting Church) make this joint submission as Covenant partners committed to justice, truth-telling, reconciliation and self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The UAICC, formally established in 1985, is the autonomous national body of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within the Uniting Church. It exercises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authority in matters of faith, culture, justice and public policy. The *UAICC Manifesto (1985)*, states in part: ³

One Australian inheritance from the destruction of Aboriginal people is racism - the basic and fundamental denial of our human worth. Therefore, the first requirement for action in the church must be to destroy the credibility of racism in Australian society. Honour and respect of the human worth of Aboriginal people is the essential mark of any move away from racism in Australia.

The Uniting Church in Australia was formally inaugurated in June 1977. It was created through the union of three denominations: the Methodist Church of Australasia, the Congregational Union of Australia, and the Presbyterian Church of Australia.

Since 1994, the Covenant between the UAICC and the Uniting Church has bound the Church to walk with First Nations peoples as First and Second Peoples of this land, acknowledging the unceded sovereignty of First Nations and the enduring harm caused by colonisation, racism and structural violence. The President of the Uniting Church in Australia, Reverend Charissa Suli has stated that the Covenant reminds us that reconciliation is not symbolic—it must be lived through action. ⁴

The Uniting Church has formally acknowledged its historic and ongoing complicity in colonisation, land dispossession, forced child removal and racist policy frameworks, and has committed through its Covenant with the UAICC to truth-telling, repentance and structural change rather than symbolic reconciliation. ⁵

As part of the 17th Assembly of the Uniting Church, held in July 2024, the Assembly resolved to endorse and commit to implementing the relevant principles in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous

³ Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (1985). *Manifesto*. Available at: <https://hub.ucaqld.com.au/wp-content/uploads/UAICC-Manifesto.pdf>

⁴ Uniting Church in Australia (2024). *A Call to Do Better*. Available at: <https://uniting.church/a-call-to-do-better/>

⁵ Uniting Church in Australia and Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (1994). *Covenanting Statement*. Available at: <https://ucaassembly.recollect.net.au/nodes/view/1156>;

Assembly Standing Committee Uniting Church in Australia (1996). *Acknowledgement and Apology to Aboriginal Community Regarding Family Separation*. Available at: <https://ucaassembly.recollect.net.au/nodes/view/168?keywords=UCA+1996+Apology+to+First+Nations+Peoples&type=all&highlights=eYlwljoiZmlyc3QiLCxljoiGVvcGxlcyIsjliOiJuYXRpb25hbClsljMiOiJ1Y2EiLCI0IjoiYXBvbG9neSIsIjYiOiIxOTk2IiwilNyl6ImFjdGlvbniMiLCI4IjoiGVvcGxln0%3D&lsk=e3b56319bc1d86c9dc674f99651c5f89>;

Uniting Church in Australia (2025). *Basis of Union, Constitution and Regulations*. Available at: <https://ucaassembly.recollect.net.au/nodes/view/1689>

Peoples (UNDRIP) and to encourage other councils and other parts of the Church to also endorse UNDRIP and implement the relevant principles through their policies, procedures and practices.⁶

Among other things, this resolution provides a basis for a redesign and revival of the Covenant between the Uniting Church and UAICC. In line with the *UCA National Assembly Five Year Strategy 2026-2031*, work is currently underway on this.

The Uniting Church remains one of the few national institutions in Australia to have formally apologised for its complicity in the Stolen Generations and to have enshrined its Covenant relationship with First Nations within its Constitution. This history compels the Church not only to speak, but to act in the public square when racism, hatred and violence continue to harm Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Response to Inquiry Terms of Reference:

1. The nature, prevalence and impact of racism, hatred and violence towards First Nations People, including trends over time.

Structural and Systemic Racism

Racism directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia is not episodic; it is structural and systemic. It is embedded in our culture, policy settings, service delivery systems, data practices, education, housing, health care, policing and media narratives.

First Nations man, Mr Nathan Tyson, Manager, First Peoples Strategy and Engagement with the Uniting Church in Australia's Synod of NSW and the ACT, explains it like this:

The data collected and reviewed each year in the Closing the Gap reports is evidence of the impact of racism and discrimination- systemic, institutionalised, and personal.

As Professor Scott Avery, Aboriginal scholar and disability advocate, outlines in his contribution to the Productivity Commission's Closing the Gap data reporting, structural racism shapes not only policy outcomes but also the narratives used to interpret them, meaning that apparent "failure" is frequently attributed to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples rather than to systemic design, exclusion from decision-making and the absence of Indigenous authority over data and policy.⁷

In a 2022 systematic review by Falls and Anderson, the authors set out what is already known about racism towards First Nations people:⁸

- (1) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples face continued adversity, prejudice, and discrimination on their own land.
- (2) This heightened propensity to be targeted for prejudice is a known social determinant of poorer health and wellbeing.
- (3) Understanding racial attitudes towards this group is an imperative step in understanding and combating this health disparity.

⁶ Uniting Church in Australia Assembly (18 July 2024). Assembly Wraps Up – 17th Assembly. *Insights Magazine*.

⁷ Avery, S. (n.d.). *Indigenous Story-Telling Through the Data: Surfacing the Hidden Histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People through the Respectful Use of Data*. Available at: <https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/explain/story-telling/>

⁸ Falls, T. & Anderson, J. (2022). Attitudes towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Australia: A Systematic Review. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 74 (1): 1–15. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00049530.2022.2039043>

Change the Record, an Australian First Nations-led coalition of legal, health, and family violence prevention experts, recently wrote a submission to the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, in preparation for an upcoming visit to Australia, which states:⁹

It is important to situate the above human rights crises facing First Nations people in Australia within the structural context of ongoing settler colonisation, which permeates the institutions and systems that target Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities... It is this structure, itself ongoing in Australia, that is the root cause of the cascading intersectional violence that continues to target First Nations people and their communities more broadly. The contemporary technologies of this structure include:

- *gendered violence and the disappearance of women and mothers;*
- *forced removal of children from their families and communities through so-called 'protection' systems, criminalisation and incarceration;*
- *systemic and institutional racism;*
- *over-policing and surveillance, and*
- *the criminalisation of social disadvantage, including homelessness or lack of stable housing, poverty, trauma, complex mental health conditions and disability.*

These unjust systems in Australian society have resulted in the over-representation of First Nations children and adults through their criminalisation and incarceration, over-representation in child safety systems and out-of-home care, as victims of violence, and living in social-economic disadvantage.

A prime example of institutional and structural discrimination's effect on the general community is the racist vigilantism in Queensland over the last few years as a result of the political posturing on youth justice.¹⁰ In Tewantin, a suspected vigilante arson attack on a vacant house occurred after social media posts called for violence against young First Nations girls who had been accused of serious crimes.¹¹ Their names and photographs appear in hundreds of live social media posts on multiple platforms, including calls for people to "bash" them or take retribution.¹² Information posted also includes the names of the girls' family members, their phone numbers, addresses and workplace information.¹³

In addition to political posturing on youth justice in Queensland, the repeal of the *Path to Treaty Act 2023* has occurred, ceasing the work on progressing the Path to Treaty, including the First Nations Treaty Institute and the Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner states that this action marked a major step backwards for First Nations rights:¹⁴

⁹ Change the Record (2026). *Submission to the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Country Visit to Australia 2 to 13 November 2026*. Available at: [Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples first draft](#)

¹⁰ See: [Alleged vigilantes charged, denied bail for assault... | National Indigenous Times](#); [Youth crime protesters prompt police warning against vigilante justice | 7NEWS](#); [Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk urges people to not take law into their own hands after Rockhampton protest; 'Shall be disciplined': Ominous sign as Aussie town reaches breaking point - Yahoo News Australia](#); [Cops step in as gang of 80 vigilantes plan their own justice for youth criminals - News | InDaily, Inside Queensland](#); [Police release footage of racist flyer drop as part of investigation into possible vigilante attack on Queensland house of teen girls | Queensland | The Guardian](#); [Townsville community mourning Jennifer Board one year after fatal motorcycle crash - ABC News](#)

¹¹ Smee, B. (28 April 2023). Queensland police release footage in bid to solve suspected vigilante attack on house of teen girls. *The Guardian*.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Australian Human Rights Commission. (n.d.). *Ending QLD Truth-Telling and Healing Inquiry is Harmful and Divisive*. Available at: <https://humanrights.gov.au/about-us/news/ending-qld-truth-telling-and-healing-inquiry-harmful-and-divisive>

The Path to Treaty was something our People have long called for. They believe this is what is needed to bring Queenslanders together in a way that fosters unity, understanding, respect, dignity and wellbeing for all. In particular, those Elders who have lived experience of the impacts of colonial policies and practices of the past, and our families and communities who experience the ongoing trauma and effects. Now more than ever, we need policies that promote reconciliation and unity – not division and discord. First Nations Queenslanders deserve and need to have their rights upheld and their stories heard.

Authentic dialogue, including the telling and sharing of stories, between First Peoples and Second Peoples is an integral part of acknowledging the past and moving towards healing.

The Uniting Church has publicly called for truth-telling about Australia's history in order to facilitate communal acceptance of the ongoing impact of colonisation, including the story of the Stolen Generations and the ongoing impacts of trauma on First Peoples' families and communities.¹⁵

National Anti-Racism Framework

The AHRC's *National Anti-Racism Framework* recognises that racism against First Nations peoples is foundational to Australia's colonial history and remains embedded in contemporary systems of governance and service provision.¹⁶

The *National Anti-Racism Framework* identifies racism against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as structural and foundational, and calls for a dedicated, First Nations-led anti-racism strategy encompassing legal reform, shared decision-making, justice system transformation, cultural safety across public systems, and strong accountability mechanisms aligned with Closing the Gap and UNDRIP.

The Uniting Church is one of more than 60 civil society organisations that have signed up in support of a Statement organised by the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) calling for the Federal Government to formally endorse, fund and implement the *National Anti-Racism Framework*, in partnership with communities.¹⁷

This Statement reads, in part:¹⁸

Developing the National Anti-Racism Framework was a solid first step. The next step is to bring the Framework to life — by formally endorsing, funding and implementing it in partnership with communities.

The Framework's first two recommendations are for: (1) the Australian government to commit to the National Anti-Racism Framework to eliminate racism in Australia; and (2) to establish a National Anti-Racism Taskforce to oversee and advise on its implementation, including specific implementation plans to address racism against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other affected communities.

¹⁵ Uniting Church in Australia Assembly (2025). *Our Vision for a Just Australia*. Available at: <https://uniting.church/a-vision-for-a-just-australia/>

¹⁶ Australian Human Rights Commission (2024). *National Anti-Racism Framework: A Roadmap to Eliminating Racism in Australia*. Available at: <https://humanrights.gov.au/resource-hub/by-resource-type/reports/race/anti-racism-framework>>.

¹⁷ Refugee Council of Australia (2025). *Joint Statement: Commit to the National Anti-Racism Framework*. Available at: <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/joint-statement-commit-to-national-anti-racism-framework/>

¹⁸ Ibid.

The *National Anti-Racism Framework* identifies racism against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as structural and foundational, and calls for a dedicated, First Nations-led anti-racism strategy encompassing legal reform, shared decision-making, justice system transformation, cultural safety across public systems, and strong accountability mechanisms aligned with Closing the Gap.

Given the significant delay by the Federal Government in responding to the *National Anti-Racism Framework*, coupled with the impact of the failed Voice Referendum, it is understandable that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are feeling disrespected and rejected by the Australian Government and society. One First Nations person in the Uniting Church congregation lamented recently, as follows: ¹⁹

It saddens me that there is a thread of 'it is ok to be racist', woven in the fabric across the lands now called Australia. Systemic racism is there- maybe disguised- but there. Self-determination and reconciliation are words not supported by action...

RECOMMENDATION ONE

That the Australian Government urgently move to fully fund and implement the *National Anti-Racism Framework*.

RECOMMENDATION TWO

That the Australian Government prioritise, for immediate implementation, the first two recommendations in the *National Anti-racism Framework*.

Prevalence and Trends Over Time

Data from the Australian Reconciliation Barometer, based on a national research study conducted every two years since 2008, demonstrates that experiences of racism among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have increased sharply over the past decade. ²⁰

In 2024, 54% of First Nations respondents reported experiencing racism, compared with 39% in 2014. Among young people aged 18–34, experiences of racism exceed 60%, highlighting the intergenerational transmission of racial harm. ²¹

These trends intensified around moments of national debate, including the 2023 Voice to Parliament Referendum, where hate speech, misinformation and racial vilification proliferated both online and offline, compounding trauma and undermining social cohesion. ²²

Youth Justice

Racism and systemic bias within Australia's youth justice system are widely recognised as key contributors to the persistent over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in detention. Despite longstanding evidence supporting prevention, healing-centred and community-led diversionary approaches, youth justice policies and practices continue to prioritise surveillance, policing and punitive responses. ²³

¹⁹ Interview with Alison Overeem (Smith), Statewide Manager, Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC), Leprena, Tasmania, 14 April 2026.

²⁰ Reconciliation Australia (2025). *2024 Australian Reconciliation Barometer: Racism and First Nations Peoples*. Available at: <https://www.reconciliation.org.au/publication/2024-australian-reconciliation-barometer-racism-and-first-nations-peoples/>

²¹ Ibid.

²² Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research & National Justice Project (2025). *If You Don't Think Racism Exists, Come Take a Walk With Us: The Call It Out Racism Register 2023–2024*. Available at: <https://callitout.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Jumbunna-Call-It-Out-Annual-Report-2023-2024-Final.pdf>

²³ O'Brien, G. (2021). Racial Profiling, Surveillance and Over-Policing: The Over-Incarceration of Young First Nations Males in Australia. *Social Sciences*, 10 (2): 68. Available at: <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-0760/10/2/68>

As a result, progress against the Closing the Gap target to reduce youth detention has stalled and, in some jurisdictions, deteriorated, reflecting entrenched structural bias across policing, court processes and custodial institutions.²⁴

The UAICC and the Uniting Church strongly support the substantive call made by National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) in its recent open letter to the Prime Minister, which urges the Commonwealth to exercise national leadership in response to the escalating over-incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.²⁵

Consistent with the UAICC and Uniting Church long-standing commitment to justice, human rights and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination, we endorse the letter's central position that punitive youth justice approaches are ineffective and harmful, and that an urgent, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led national summit on youth justice is required.

The letter reflects broad concern across civil society, having been supported by more than 200 organisations and leaders, and calls for evidence-based, prevention-focussed and community-controlled responses to replace policies that continue to drive systemic harm and rights violations within youth justice systems.

RECOMMENDATION THREE

That the Australian Government urgently convene an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led summit on youth justice, in line with the recent NATSILS open letter to the Prime Minister.

Child Poverty

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are disproportionately affected by poverty, culturally inappropriate and overcrowded housing, food insecurity and limited access to services. Available national data indicates that approximately 40–45 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children live in income

²⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2025). *Closing the Gap Targets: Key Findings and Implications – Youth Justice*. Available at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/indigenous-australians/closing-the-gap-targets-key-findings-implications/contents/youth-justice>, reporting that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people were approximately 27 times more likely than non-Indigenous young people to be in detention on an average day in 2022–23 and that national progress against the youth detention target is not on track; Productivity Commission (2025). *Socio-Economic Outcome Area 11 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Young People are not Overrepresented in the Criminal Justice System*. Available at: <https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/dashboard/outcome-area/youth-justice/#young-people-are-not-overrepresented-in-the-criminal-justice-system>, assessing national progress as showing no meaningful improvement from baseline; Australian Law Reform Commission (2017). *Pathways to Justice: Inquiry into the Incarceration Rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*. Available at: <https://www.alrc.gov.au/publication/pathways-to-justice-inquiry-into-the-incarceration-rate-of-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples-alrc-report-133/>, identifying systemic racism, over-policing, bail laws and punitive justice settings as drivers of Indigenous over-incarceration and recommending community-led diversion and justice reinvestment; Senate Standing Committees on Legal and Constitutional Affairs (2024). *Australia's Youth Justice and Incarceration System*. Available at: https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Legal_and_Constitutional_Affairs/Incarceration_47/Interim_Report/Chapter_3_-_First_Nations_youth_in_detention, concluding that the over-representation of First Nations children in detention is the result of historical and ongoing systemic racism and policy failures.

²⁵ National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS). (2026). *Open Letter to Prime Minister Anthony Albanese Calling for an Emergency National Youth Justice Summit*. Available at: <https://www.natsils.org.au/open-letter-pm/>

poverty, more than double the rate for non-Indigenous children, with significantly higher rates in remote and very remote communities.²⁶

Child poverty is not accidental; it reflects policy choices that fail to address income inequality and housing shortages and inadequacies. Poverty in childhood increases exposure to racism in education and child protection systems, creating lifelong harm.^{27 28}

The *More for Children* study found that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children experience disproportionately high and persistent levels of poverty, characterised not only by low household income but by multidimensional and structural deprivation.²⁹ The research shows that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are significantly over-represented among those experiencing deep poverty, including food insecurity, overcrowded and unstable housing, limited access to culturally safe services, and social exclusion.

According to this study, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children report feelings of shame, stress, and exclusion arising from material deprivation, particularly in school settings, where lack of resources undermines participation and a sense of belonging.

The *More for Children* report highlights that for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, poverty is relational and cumulative. Material hardship intersects with family stress, community disruption, and structural surveillance, including involvement with child protection and youth justice systems. These interactions often compound disadvantage rather than alleviate it, reinforcing cycles of exclusion. The findings emphasise that policies focused narrowly on income support are insufficient for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children without parallel action on housing education, health, and community-controlled services.

Importantly, the study underscores the protective role of culture, community and connection to Country, noting that strength-based, Indigenous-led responses are essential to addressing child poverty. The authors, Bessell and O'Sullivan, conclude that effective responses must be rights-based, prevention-focused and community-led, and must enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to exercise self-determination in the design and delivery of policies affecting their children.

In late 2025, the UCA signed up as a supporter of the *End Child Poverty Campaign*, joining around 180 civil society and social services organisations, including the Australian Catholic Bishops Commission for Social Justice, Mission and Service and the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC).³⁰

The SNAICC *Family Matters Report 2025* recommends a decisive shift toward prevention by investing in Aboriginal community-controlled early intervention and family support services.³¹ The *Family Matters Report*

²⁶ Markham, F. & Biddle, N. (2018). *Income, Poverty and Inequality*. Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University. Available at: <https://cipr.cass.anu.edu.au/research/publications/income-poverty-and-inequality>

²⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2023). *Australia's Welfare 2023: Income and Poverty*. Available at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/australias-welfare-2023-in-brief/summary>; see also Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2023). *Child Protection Australia 2022–23*. Available at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/child-protection-australia-2022-23/report-editions>

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Bessell, S. & O'Sullivan, C. (2024). *More for Children: Children's Experiences of Poverty in Australia*. Children's Policy Centre, Australian National University. Available at: https://childrenspolicycentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/More-for-Children_Childrens-Experiences-of-Poverty-in-Australia_Bessell-and-Osullivan_July_2024.pdf

³⁰ See: <https://www.endchildpoverty.com.au/>

³¹ SNAICC (2025). *Family Matters Report 2025*. Available at: <https://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Family-Matters-Report-2025-Web-v2.pdf>

2025 calls for coordinated action on child poverty, housing insecurity and structural inequality, as these are core drivers of child protection involvement. The report urges full implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle, strengthened accountability under the Closing the Gap framework, and genuine partnership with Aboriginal organisations to reduce unnecessary child removals.

RECOMMENDATION FOUR

That the Australian Government prioritise the implementation of the recommendations contained in the SNAICC *Family Matters Report 2025*.

RECOMMENDATION FIVE

That the Australian Government make a commitment to working with representatives from the End Child Poverty Campaign and SNAICC to prioritise the development of legislation and policies seriously directed at ending child poverty in Australia, with a special focus on poverty impacting ATSI children.

Health Impacts

Racism directly contributes to health inequities, including the persistence of diseases of poverty such as rheumatic heart disease (RHD). Over 80% of Australians living with RHD are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people, a statistic that reflects overcrowded housing, poor access to clean water and culturally unsafe health services.³²

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) explicitly characterises RHD as a disease of disadvantage, driven by social and environmental conditions including overcrowded housing, poor access to hygiene infrastructure such as clean water, and barriers to timely, culturally safe health care. Despite being entirely preventable, the persistence of RHD among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities reflects the ongoing impacts of structural and systemic racism on the social determinants of health, rather than biological susceptibility or individual behaviour.

Water

Access to clean water remains insecure in remote communities, violating the human right to water and exacerbating health disparities. Despite recognition of water as a human right, many remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities experience unsafe or unreliable drinking water due to failing infrastructure and under-investment, contributing to preventable disease and compounding longstanding health inequities linked to poverty and colonisation.³³

Dental Care

Poor dental health outcomes similarly reflect structural exclusion from preventive care. Poor dental health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples reflect structural exclusion from preventive oral health care, including limited access to affordable dental services and culturally safe primary care, resulting in higher rates of untreated decay, preventable hospitalisation and lifelong health impacts.³⁴

³² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2025). *Acute Rheumatic Fever and Rheumatic Heart Disease in Australia*. Available at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/indigenous-australians/arf-rhd/contents/summary>

³³ Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering (ATSE). (2024). *Closing the Water Gap—Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities*. Available at: https://www.atse.org.au/media/txddken/240827-atse-explainer-closing-the-water-gap_final.pdf; see also Fisher, I., Kastl, G., & Sathasivan, A. (2025). Measuring Progress to Achieve Safe Drinking Water for First Nations People. *Water e-Journal*, 11 (2). Available at: <https://info.awa.asn.au/water-e-journal/measuring-progress-to-achieve-safe-drinking-water-for-first-nations-people>

³⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). (2025). *Oral Health and Dental Care in Australia*. Available at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/dental-oral-health/oral-health-and-dental-care-in-australia/contents/priority-populations/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-australians>

Closing the Gap

Despite decades of analysis, progress on Closing the Gap remains stalled: only four of nineteen targets are on track. Reviews consistently find that outcomes lag because governments have not fully implemented the Priority Reforms, particularly genuine power-sharing and self-determination, rather than because of an absence of evidence.³⁵

This failure is not due to lack of evidence, but arguably due to a lack of political courage to fully implement priority reforms centred on self-determination.

Housing

Housing insecurity remains a defining manifestation of structural racism. One in eight Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households experience unmet housing need, with rental stress and overcrowding disproportionately affecting families and children. Homelessness Australia reports that Indigenous children make up almost one-third of children experiencing homelessness nationwide.³⁶

RECOMMENDATION SIX

That the Australian Government revise its current End Game Strategy approach to tackling Rheumatic Heart Disease (RHD) to ensure that culturally appropriate housing, environmental health infrastructure and adequate functional washing facilities are in place for all communities where the disease is present.

RECOMMENDATION SEVEN

That, in the short term, the Australian Government prioritise working with National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (NACCHO) members and local shire councils as part of their response of the long-term efforts to address RHD. This should include the widespread construction and maintenance of laundry and shower facilities (using solar energy where possible) in all remote and regional communities in Australia where RHD is prevalent and there is an identified shortage of such facilities.

2. The effect of online platforms on the reach, prominence and harm caused by racism and hate directed at First Nations people

Online platforms have dramatically increased the reach, intensity and persistence of racism against First Nations peoples. Research by the Online Hate Prevention Institute found that on 26 January alone, 71% of documented racist content targeted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, with narratives denying Indigenous identity, promoting stereotypes and endorsing colonial violence.³⁷

The AHRC reports that 88% of Indigenous Australians have seen racism directed at other Indigenous people online, and more than one fifth have received direct threats, some translating into offline fear and harm.³⁸

The AHRC's *National Anti-Racism Framework* identifies online hate as a manifestation of structural racism and recommends a comprehensive response that includes a positive legal duty to prevent racial discrimination, stronger accountability mechanisms for digital platforms, improved data collection on racial harm, and First

³⁵ Productivity Commission (2025). *Closing the Gap Annual Data Compilation Report*. Available at: <https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/annual-data-report/2025/>

³⁶ Homelessness Australia (2025). *The Housing Gap for Indigenous Australians that keeps Widening: New Analysis*. Available at: <https://homelessnessaustralia.org.au/the-housing-gap-for-indigenous-australians-that-keeps-widening-new-analysis/>

³⁷ Online Hate Prevention Institute (2025). *Annual Activity Report 2024–2025*. Available at: <https://ohpi.org.au/annual-activity-reports-2024-2025/>

³⁸ Carlson, B. & Frazer, R. (2018). *Social Media Mob: Being Indigenous Online*. Available at: <https://researchers.mq.edu.au/en/publications/social-media-mob-being-indigenous-online/>

Nations-led co-design grounded in the UNDRIP. Effective action must be preventive, structural and Indigenous-led, rather than reactive or symbolic.

The lack of moderation of racist content within online platforms and the lack of effective regulation by the Australian government of online platforms continues to result in a proliferation of psychologically harmful racism against First Nations people.

In the Australian context, sanctions typically imposed as civil financial penalties to promote compliance without the damaging stigma of criminal conviction, serve as a strong deterrent regulating and shaping public behaviour while allowing due process and judicial fairness to govern.³⁹ This should be undertaken for both individuals posting racist content and for online platforms who don't remove such content in a timely manner.

The eSafety Commissioner has reported that research with First Peoples found that some of them who are Facebook users become fatigued by engaging with racism online and instead learn to disengage from it. They found that only a minority of the targeted adults surveyed took any action after encountering online hate, such as reporting the hate to the website or app. Some targeted adults reported that they didn't take any action because they thought nothing would change.⁴⁰

The eSafety reported that First Nations adults were more likely than non- Indigenous adults to refrain from acting after encountering online hate due to fear of the possible consequences. Targeted adults may be discouraged from using reporting mechanisms if online platforms are failing to take appropriate action when online hate is reported.⁴¹

The eSafety Commissioner found that social media platforms may not be proactively detecting or reactively taking action against online hate targeting First Peoples individuals, due to limited understanding of the language or cultural context.⁴²

The eSafety Commissioner findings suggest that some platforms and services may be failing to respond effectively to reports of online hate or to prevent online hate from occurring in the first place. This may reduce confidence among those who experience online hate that their voices will be heard. In line with the Australian Government's *Online Safety (Basic Online Safety Expectations) Determination 2022*, apps and websites are expected to take reasonable steps to keep Australians safe online.

This includes having terms of use, policies and procedures to ensure safe use, and enforcing these terms. In line with the Expectations, online platforms and services should have policies regarding online hate. These policies should be clearly set out in the terms of service or community rules, and such terms or rules should be proactively enforced. This requires services to have accessible, easy-to-use and effective mechanisms for users to report any online hate they encounter on the service.

These mechanisms should lead to clear outcomes and provide feedback loops to ensure that users understand what action has been taken as a result of their report. In line with eSafety's Safety by Design principles, these policies should be informed via meaningful consultation with the user base, including those targeted with online hate such as First Peoples.⁴³

³⁹ Cover, R., Simcock, R., & Humphries, J. (2025). Digital Harms and Penalties: Australian Regulation, Platform Moderation and the Figure of the Perpetrator. *Media International Australia*, June: 1-17. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878x251350727>

⁴⁰ eSafety Commissioner (2025). Fighting the Tide: Encounters with Online Hate Among Targeted Groups. Available at: https://www.esafety.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-02/Online-hate-report_Main-Feb25.pdf

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

RECOMMENDATION EIGHT

That the Australian government strengthen regulation of online hate directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by requiring collaboration between the eSafety Commissioner and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to develop initiatives.

3. Initiatives that are effective in combating racism targeted at First Nations people and reduce individual and collective harm

Change the Record provides a range of recommendations for the Australian Government to **acknowledge, meaningfully address and remedy structural racism, of which the key recommendation is:** ⁴⁴

14. Establish a framework for the proper implementation of UNDRIP in Australian law, policy and practice through:

- *The development of federal binding legislation;*
- *The development of a National Action Plan, led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, and*
- *A full audit of existing laws, policies and practice for compliance with UNDRIP.*

This recommendation above is consistent with the Close the Gap Campaign Report 2026 suggested actions, which highlight that justice for First Peoples needs to be embedded in legislation to ensure responsibility and accountability for meeting the Closing the Gap targets and outcomes. ⁴⁵ The suggested actions are underpinned by the overarching theme of addressing systemic racism and bias towards First Nations people, and include:

- *Enshrine UNDRIP in Domestic Law Australia must embed its international human rights obligations into domestic law through a national human-rights legislative framework, incorporating the UNDRIP to ensure the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are recognised, protected and enforceable, including the following actions:*
 - 1.1. Implement the Australian Human Rights Commission's Free and Equal reform recommendations to enact a legislated national human-rights framework.*
 - 1.2. Adopt and fully implement the 2023 recommendations of the Joint Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Inquiry into the Application of UNDRIP in Australia.*
 - 1.3. Incorporate UNDRIP principles into federal legislation to ensure they are binding and central to government First Peoples relations.*
 - 1.4. Co-design a National Action Plan for UNDRIP Implementation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including timelines, clear accountability mechanisms, and measurable outcomes.*
- *Legislate and invest in the establishment of an independent National Truth-Telling and Treaty Body. Legislate a permanent, independent, nationally coordinated body to lead truth telling and oversee treaty processes with First Peoples.*
- *Establish a Governed Pooled Funding Framework. Create a cross-portfolio, pooled and flexible funding model across health, justice, education, child protection and related sectors, enabling community-led allocation to local priorities, supported by robust governance and shared accountability safeguards. Secure long-term, needs-based funding for ACCOs within the pooled framework.*

⁴⁴ Change the Record (2026). Submission to the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Country Visit to Australia 2 to 13 November 2026. Available at: <https://raisely-images.imgix.net/change-the-record/uploads/special-rapporteur-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples-ctr-pdf-90f194.pdf>

⁴⁵ Close the Gap – Campaign for Indigenous Health Equity (2026). *Close the Gap Campaign Report 2026*. Available at: <https://closethegap.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/2026-Close-the-Gap-Report-Community-Voices-FINAL.pdf>

The Uniting Church resolved to endorse the UNDRIP, and to implement its principles, including self-determination, throughout the Uniting Church's policies, procedures and practices. It further encouraged other councils and parts of the Church to endorse UNDRIP and implement it.

The Uniting Church has called for self-determination at federal, state and local levels to be informed by the UNDRIP, giving First Peoples' communities full control over decisions impacting their lives, Country and cultural sites.⁴⁶ Alongside this, the Uniting Church has also called for significant and consistent resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander controlled community health and wellbeing services, designed to achieve a closing of the gap in health, mental health and social outcomes.⁴⁷

RECOMMENDATION NINE

That the Australian government implement the above recommendations from the Change the Record (2026) Submission to the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Closing the Gap Campaign Report 2026. Priority should be given to structural transformation by embedding the UNDRIP into policy and legislation across all government portfolios.

Many positive examples exist of self-determination, co-production of policy, and community-controlled service delivery to implement solutions for and by First Nations people, which can be built on. Examples include:

- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principles in child protection systems across Australia
- The full implementation of the Child Safe Standards and Universal Principle
- Increase in uptake of Reconciliation Action Plans
- Delegated authority for child protection by state governments to ACCOs
- Increase in awareness of the history of ongoing impacts of colonisation on annual Australia / Survival Day

National Anti-Racism Framework

Australia already has a clear, credible, evidence-based roadmap in *The National Anti-Racism Framework*. The Framework's insistence that First Nations experiences be central—not peripheral—to anti-racism strategies aligns with the Uniting Church's covenantal theology and the UAICC's longstanding advocacy. The failure to implement this Framework risks repeating a cycle of inquiry without action.

Community-Controlled Approaches

Evidence consistently demonstrates that ACCOs achieve better outcomes across health, housing and justice. For example, Productivity Commission research has found that policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are more effective, sustainable and accountable when Indigenous peoples have decision-making authority over design, delivery and evaluation. The Commission explicitly identifies community-controlled organisations as best-practice service models and concludes that top-down approaches consistently underperform.⁴⁸

Reverend Ken Sumner and Reverend Will Pickett, UAICC Co-Chairs, among many Congress leaders, have emphasised that self-determination is not an ideological preference, but a practical necessity grounded in lived experience.

⁴⁶ Uniting Church in Australia Assembly (2025). *Our Vision for a Just Australia*. Available at: <https://uniting.church/au-vision-for-a-just-australia/>

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Productivity Commission (2020). *Indigenous Evaluation Strategy*. Available at: <https://assets.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/indigenous-evaluation/strategy/indigenous-evaluation-strategy.pdf>

Faith-Based Witness

The Uniting Church's ministries—through schools, UnitingCare services and congregational advocacy—demonstrate that anti-racism work must be relational, sustained and accountable. In the 2022 systematic review by Falls and Anderson, the authors stated:⁴⁹

Unsurprisingly, the studies observing religion and attitudes, consistently revealed that religion was related to attitudes regardless of how religion was operationalised (i.e., as a categorical affiliation or as a continuous measure of religiosity, Anderson, 2015 [also Deslandes & Anderson, 2018] for a discussion). As expected, those with a strong sense of national and global community exhibited more positive attitudes. Suggesting that when people are connected to their community, they hold more positive attitudes to alternative cultures.

4. The threat posed by ideologically motivated extremism towards First Nations people and the role of intelligence and law enforcement agencies in protecting the community from that threat.

Intelligence and law enforcement agencies must work in partnership with First Nations communities. Senator Pat Dodson, Minister Malarndirri McCarthy MP and Prime Minister Anthony Albanese have all acknowledged that racism undermines national cohesion and community safety. The UAICC and Uniting Church support approaches to law enforcement that prioritise prevention, transparency and human rights compliance.

5. The effectiveness of avenues for reporting and responding to racism against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including the consistency, timeliness and appropriateness of outcomes across jurisdictions and institutions.

Individual complaints mechanisms to address racism and discrimination are largely ineffective, as they ignore the systemic racism and discrimination that perpetuates racism and discrimination against individuals in the community. In addition, existing individual complaints mechanisms through a largely adversarial, western-based system are inaccessible – they are time-consuming processes that distract from the everyday struggle First Nations people face.

6. Other matters related to racism, hatred and violence directed at First Nations people Racism

In 2025, members of the Uniting Church in Queensland, the Catholic Church in Queensland and the Anglican Church in Queensland, supported young adult members of our church in *Gathering in the Spirit for Justice*. The sacrifices and leadership of generations of elders, have spoken into the need for active justice, and the next generation are ready to take their place of emerging leadership, and contribute into the shaping a new narrative of holistic justice driven reconciliation.

The Uniting Church in Australia, Assembly together with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, understands our responsibility to equip the next generation for their works of justice, spiritual leadership and emotional wellbeing. We call on the Australian government to walk purposefully alongside national churches in contributing to the development of community-based responses to systemic racism, violence and hatred towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

RECOMMENDATION TEN

That the Australian government, in acknowledging First Peoples' deep spiritual connection to Country, seeks to establish forums for entering ecumenical dialogues with First Peoples church representatives. The purpose of these forums would be to better understand the role of spiritual healing and strengthening as

⁴⁹ Falls, T. & Anderson, J (2022). Attitudes towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Australia: A Systematic Review. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 74 (1): 1–15. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00049530.2022.2039043>

part of a holistic approach to addressing the negative impacts of racism, hatred and violence towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Reverend Charles Harris reminded the nation that racism is a spiritual and moral failure as well as a political one.⁵⁰ The UAICC and Uniting Church submit that this Inquiry will be judged not by the depth of its diagnosis, but by whether it catalyses lasting structural change. Justice delayed remains justice denied.

Reverend Ken Sumner and Reverend Will Pickett, UAICC Co-Chairs, provide this concluding comment:

Australian peoples have a profound, ancient and hospitable gift in their relationships with First Peoples. We witness at this time in our shared history, disturbing echoes of the past overt hatred directed towards our people, and we lament the damage that systemic racism and exclusion have done and continues to do. As co-chairs of the UAICC National Executive we encourage relationships of truth at the tables of reconciliation between all peoples. But hearing truth and being in relationship is not enough, we need to act in unity towards a better future.

⁵⁰ Emilsen, W. W. (2018). *Charles Harris: A Struggle for Justice*. Melbourne: MediaCom Education, esp. chapters 6–8.