# Supporting Students following the Voice to Parliament Referendum

## Purpose

This resource provides guidance to school-based and regional health wellbeing and inclusion workforces on how they can support students, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, following the Referendum for the Voice to Parliament held on 14 October 2023.

## Context

The Voice to Parliament Referendum (the Referendum) was a significant event in Australia’s political history. The Referendum focused on whether to change the Constitution to recognise the First Peoples of Australia by establishing a body called the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice.

Some students may have been eligible and able to vote in the Referendum, however, most students were not. This may have been disempowering to senior secondary students on the cusp of turning 18.

All students, regardless of age and background, will likely have heard commentary about the Referendum in the media, at home and within their communities, and some may need additional support during this time, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

## Potential Impact on Koorie students following the Referendum

Supporting the mental health of Koorie students following the Referendum is crucial, as it may have a profound impact on their overall wellbeing. The emotional and psychological effects of the referendum debate may resonate with various aspects of a student’s identity, such as their family, the impacts of colonization on their community, and their relationship with other students. This may affect how students perceive their place in society and their connection to cultural heritage.

Negative experiences or conversations on the outcome of the Referendum outside of school may be internalised by students and impact how they feel they are perceived by others. Schools should therefore focus on providing students with impartial and factual information about the outcome of the Referendum and encouraging students to consider what it might mean to different people, how they might be affected by it and how they can support their peers. Any difficult conversations should be navigated in a constructive and supportive way.

## Student Mental Health

In the period following the Referendum, it is crucial to promote cultural safety due to the potential variety of emotions experienced by different student groups. In accordance with [Child Safe Standard 1](https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/child-safe-standards/the-11-child-safe-standards/standard-1/#TOC-1), schools should establish a culturally safe environment in which the diverse and unique identities and experiences of Aboriginal children and young people are respected and valued.

When supporting students following the Voice to Parliament Referendum schools should consider:

* helping students practice self-care by encouraging open dialogue and reaching out for support and staying connected to trusted adults, supportive friends, family and/or the school’s Mental Health Practitioner or other wellbeing team member
* promoting the concept of healthy boundaries for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to prioritise self-care during this time
* creating safe spaces within the school where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students can express their feelings and concerns without fear or judgment. This can be done through cultural clubs, support groups, or dedicated rooms for cultural activities
* encouraging non-Aboriginal students to show respect by being mindful of those boundaries and only engaging in supportive and constructive conversations
* advising students that they may feel a wide range of emotions, for example, anxiety, anger, sadness or fear. Students should know that mixed emotions are normal and understandable during this time.

## Department Mental Health Supports

* [Schools Mental Health Fund and Menu to support student mental health and wellbeing](https://www.schools.vic.gov.au/schools-mental-health-fund-and-menu-support-students)
* [Mental health and wellbeing toolkit](https://www.vic.gov.au/mental-health-and-wellbeing-toolkit)
* [Mental Health in schools](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/mental-health-schools/print-all)

## External Mental Health Supports

* [Headspace](http://www.headspace.org.au/eheadspace): 1800 650 890
* [Kids Helpline](http://www.kidshelpline.com.au/): 1800 551 800
* [Beyond Blue](http://www.beyondblue.org.au/): 1300 224 636
* [Yarning SafeNStrong (YSNS)](https://www.vahs.org.au/yarning-safenstrong/): 1800 959 563
* [13YARN](https://www.13yarn.org.au/): 13 92 76
* [The healing foundation](https://healingfoundation.org.au/): (02) 6272 7500

## Racism Resources

* [Schools Standing up to Racism](https://www.cmy.net.au/schools-standing-up-to-racism/)
* [Call it Out](https://callitout.com.au/)
* [All Together Now](https://alltogethernow.org.au/)
* [Report Racism hotline](https://www.vic.gov.au/report-racism-or-religious-discrimination-schools): 1800 722 476

## Relevant department policies

* [Child Safe Standards](https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/child-safe-standards/the-11-child-safe-standards/standard-1/)
* [Student Engagement](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/student-engagement/policy)
* [Bullying Prevention and Response](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/bullying-prevention-response/policy)
* [Equal Opportunity and Human rights – Students](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/equal-opportunity-human-rights-students/policy).