

**MEDIA RELEASE** – 28 September 2023

## **Voice to Parliament offers significant economic benefits for Australia**

Lowitja Institute has identified significant economic benefits for Australia, including the potential for up to \$10 billion-a-year savings in health, from a constitutionally embedded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament.

The economic opportunities are outlined in a new Lowitja Institute policy position paper: *Better outcomes and value for money with a seat at the table: How an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice can lead to more effective Australian Government investment for First Nations communities.*

Lowitja Institute CEO Adjunct Professor Janine Mohamed said those benefits could come on top of the critical human rights, justice, equity and self-determination value that a Voice would offer Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

“The report shows that government expenditure on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is not getting where it is needed,” she said.

“Our peoples continue to experience more than twice the burden of disease than non-Indigenous people, but it is clear that the funding is not being directed where it needs to be – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled initiatives that we know work.”

The report highlights that overall government expenditure on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is 6% of total public expenditure, but only 18% of this is specifically targeted towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

“A Voice would provide an opportunity for our communities to publicly hold governments to account on their commitments and to showcase ‘what works’,” Adjunct Professor Mohamed said.

The report finds that an independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice would be a strong external mechanism by which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities could assess how investment is allocated and used — not only improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s wellbeing, but also government return on investment.

It shows that small improvements across portfolios in how that funding is spent — efficiencies offered through the representative power of a Voice — would generate significant savings, both directly and through flow-on impacts to other policy areas.

Lowitja Institute chair Selwyn Button said one example highlighted by the paper is how overall investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health could be improved, including through programs like Queensland's Birthing in Our Community (BiOC) program, which has delivered significant health and financial benefits.

"If better targeted investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander preventative and primary healthcare could reduce our people's hospital admission rate to the overall nationwide average, savings on hospital expenditure could exceed \$10 billion annually," he said.

"The report shows how a Voice could support more effective public investment in our wellbeing because our communities know what they need and how to deliver outcomes with the right supports," he said.

The report finds the Voice would provide a permanent channel for the Federal Parliament and Executive Government to hear expert advice from our communities across the country, including through:

- proactive identification of issues and solutions
- sharing 'what works' in programs across the country so learnings can be tested in other communities
- supporting earlier, more consistent and effective Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander input into every stage of policy development
- monitoring outcomes more effectively by measuring what really matters to our communities
- overcoming government policy silos where separate portfolio issues do not always connect effectively
- improving the coordination of grants and service delivery.

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Read the report at [lowitja.org.au](https://www.lowitja.org.au)

*For more information or to arrange an interview with Selwyn Button or Adjunct Professor Janine Mohamed, please contact Jo Cackett on 0474 727 506, [communications@lowitja.org.au](mailto:communications@lowitja.org.au)*