



RECONCILIATION

What is Reconciliation?

In recent years a steady wave of change has been taking place across Australia. Reconciliation is now daily news.

Reconciliation is a community-based movement involving Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. It is a process which strives to improve relations between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider community.

The vision of the Reconciliation movement is:

“A united Australia which respects this land of ours; values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage; and provides justice and equity for all.”

What is happening in the NSW Public Sector?

Reconciliation is taking place in all walks of life, including workplaces.

The NSW Government has taken a leading role in progressing Reconciliation. In June 1997, the NSW Parliament was the first Australian Parliament to formally apologise to Aboriginal people for the ‘Stolen Generations’.

Chief Executives of all NSW Public Sector agencies have made a joint Statement of Commitment to Reconciliation. This acknowledges Australia’s true history, apologises for damage done by previous government policies and practices and commits Chief Executives to working in with Aboriginal Australians to address disadvantage. Many agencies carry out a range of Reconciliation activities, in partnership with Aboriginal communities.

Individuals and work units are also involved. Some ways people have carried out Reconciliation in their workplaces have included: inviting members of local Aboriginal communities to speak; forming study circles; distributing information; acknowledging traditional land owners as part of meeting protocols; building better relations with Aboriginal staff and local communities; and challenging racist attitudes.



WHAT ARE THE KEY FACTORS FOR RECONCILIATION?

Understanding country

We as a community need to understand Aboriginal Australians' relationship to the land, sea and rivers and appreciate what happens when this relationship is denied.

Working together

Reconciliation means healing relationships and building upon positive ones within the Australian community. Fundamental to this is acknowledgment that a whole-of-community commitment is required to address the multiplicity of issues facing Aboriginal Australians.

Valuing cultures

The diversity and strength of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures in Australia need to be recognised so they can be truly valued.

Custody levels

Aboriginal Australians continue to be jailed at high rates and are still dying in custody, often by suicide. The Australian justice system needs to continue working in partnership with Aboriginal people to reduce the number of Aboriginal Australians entering custody.

Sharing history

Australia has a history which extends far beyond the 1770s. Knowing more about Australia's true history is fundamental to understanding the multiple disadvantages experienced by Aboriginal Australians.

Addressing disadvantage

On every social indicator, Aboriginal Australians continue to suffer significant hardship. There needs to be a focussed whole-of-community response to addressing the disadvantages experienced by Aboriginal Australians.

Self determination

Central to Reconciliation is Aboriginal leadership and participation in decision making. It is essential that Aboriginal Australians participate in decisions which will affect them.

Documents of reconciliation/commitment

Negotiated agreements such as the NSW Government's *Statement of Commitment to Aboriginal People* are symbolic and tangible ways of reconciling the interests of Aboriginal people with those of the broader community.



The Reconciliation Committee at Nepean Hospital has carried out successful Reconciliation activities since 1997. Pictured are Jean South (left) and Trish Heal holding paintings from a project where local Aboriginal artists worked with hospital staff, patients and visitors.



State

The Chief Executives of all NSW Public Sector agencies recognise the importance of Reconciliation to a society which values all its citizens. As a group and through work of our institutions:

- Acknowledge and accept the history of our shared past, including the dispossession of lands, destruction of social systems and the loss of Aboriginal people's rights.
- Respect the diversity of Aboriginal cultures and their special place in the mosaic of Australian identity.
- Acknowledge that European settlement changed the lives of Aboriginal people and is a basis of present injustices.
- Acknowledge and apologise to Aboriginal people for the previous government policies and practices, in particular those that have caused the loss of life, land and culture.

WHERE DO I FIT IN?

There are lots of reasons why you can choose to become involved in the Reconciliation movement. These could include:

- wanting to play a part in a major social change in Australia
- wanting to know more about Australia's history and how that history has determined the current socio-economic status of Aboriginal Australians
- improving your skills so that you can offer a better service to Aboriginal clients.

How do I get involved?

There are lots of ways that you can become involved in the Reconciliation movement. A few examples are:

- Read up and speak out about Reconciliation in your workplace.
- Attend Reconciliation events, attend cross-cultural awareness training or join a study circle.
- Consider how Aboriginal people are affected by agency decisions and how they might be involved. Make suggestions for improving service delivery for Aboriginal clients at agency meetings.
- Carry out a Reconciliation project.

- Organise ways your workplace can celebrate or contribute to Survival Day (January 26), Reconciliation Week (May), NAIDOC Week (July).

Where can I find out more?

- The NSW Co-ordinator for Australians for Reconciliation can give you information on what's happening now in your local area and/or how to start a local Reconciliation group (ph 1800 060 266).
- The NSW State Reconciliation Committee, based in the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, can provide you with advice on what you can do (ph 9290 8700).
- If you want to undertake an agency-based project, contact the Chief Executives' Standing Committee for Reconciliation, based in Premier's Department. They can provide advice and assistance with Reconciliation initiatives (ph 9228 5952).
- Resources, including materials for study groups, are available from the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation's internet site <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/special/rsjproject/rsjlibrary/car>.

NSW Public Sector Chief Executives

Statement of Commitment to Reconciliation

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- Respect Aboriginal people's relationship to their 'country' and commit to progressing the NSW Government's commitment to protect and support Aboriginal cultural heritage.
- Commit to addressing the barriers experienced by Aboriginal people in accessing Public Sector services and undertaking specific initiatives to improve Aboriginal people's outcomes in employment, education, health and housing.
- Commit to promoting partnerships between Public Sector agencies and Aboriginal people and providing leadership across the Public Sector on Reconciliation.
- Commit to actively support a better future for all Australians based on respect for the land we share, valuing Aboriginal heritage and justice and equity for all.

Signed on behalf of all NSW Public Sector CEOs in 1999 by: Mr Michael Reid, Director General, NSW Health, Chair, Standing Committee on Reconciliation and Dr Col Gellatly, Director General, Premier's Department.

NATIONAL STRATEGIES

The Australian Council for Reconciliation is developing a strategic plan for Governments to use in addressing the human rights of Aboriginal Australians. The plan focuses on four strategies:

National Strategy for Economic Independence

This strategy aims to improve economic independence and self-reliance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

National Strategy to Address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Disadvantage

This strategy promotes a partnership between Aboriginal Australians, Governments and the business sector to enhance outcomes in health, education, employment, housing, law and justice.

National Strategy to Promote Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Rights

Aims to recognise Aboriginal Australians' unique relationship with their traditional lands and waters, and the importance of traditional land management knowledge in sustaining the natural environment. It will recognise the aspirations for enhanced recognition and self-determination of Aboriginal Australians within the Australian Constitution.

A National Strategy to Sustain the Reconciliation Process

Aims to continue the process of celebrating the diversity of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, acknowledge cultural, social and economic contributions made by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.



Prepared by:

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