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### **Mental health benefits in constitutional recognition of Indigenous Australians**

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists supports the recognition of Indigenous Australians in the Australian Constitution and encourages all Australians to contribute to a national conversation on the issue.

The release of a public discussion paper on Indigenous constitutional recognition and the corresponding [www.youmeunity.org.au](http://www.youmeunity.org.au) website by the Australian Human Rights Commission provides the platform for a national conversation about updating the Australian Constitution to reflect modern Australia. Recognition of our first peoples and their culture will benefit all Australians.

“The lack of acknowledgement of a people’s existence in a country’s constitution has a major impact on their sense of identity and value within the community, and perpetuates discrimination and prejudice which further erodes the hope of Indigenous people. There is an association with socioeconomic disadvantage and subsequent higher rates of mental illness, physical illness and incarceration,” said Dr Maria Tomasic, President of The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists.

“Recognition in the Constitution would have a positive effect on the self esteem of Indigenous Australians and reinforce their pride in their culture and history. It would make a real difference to the lives of Indigenous Australians, and is an important step to support and improve the lives and mental health of Indigenous Australians” said Dr Tomasic.

“The Indigenous people of Australia suffer levels of mortality, morbidity and compromised wellbeing far in excess of non-Indigenous Australians. This reflects issues of social injustice, persistent social and economic disadvantage and the historical legacy of colonisation with its destruction of Indigenous culture,” said Dr Tomasic.

“We need to recognise that social injustice and racism are still causing serious suffering and mental ill health for Indigenous people,” said Dr Tomasic.

“Despite recent developments such as the ‘Apology’ from Prime Minister Rudd, the ‘Closing the Gap’ campaign and other positive steps, as well as initiatives and resilience of Indigenous communities, the current high rates of social disadvantage, emotional and physical health problems continue,” said Dr Tomasic.

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists encourages people to read the discussion paper and think about and discuss the issues with family, friends and work colleagues. Consider attending a consultation meeting, providing feedback or submitting a written submission to the Expert Panel on the constitutional recognition of Indigenous Australians so that all Australians are part of the conversation.

#### **For further information**

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#### **About The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists**

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) is the principal organisation representing the medical specialty of psychiatry in Australia and New Zealand and has responsibility for training, examining and awarding the qualification of Fellowship of the College to medical practitioners.