

13th session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples – Statement on the impact of COVID-19 on the rights of Indigenous peoples under the UNDRIP



New South Wales
Aboriginal Land Council

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The New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council (**NSWALC**) is the peak body representing Aboriginal peoples across the State of New South Wales and the largest Aboriginal member-based organisation in Australia.

We are working closely with our Aboriginal community controlled counterparts to lead and respond to crises, including COVID-19.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the resilience of our communities, it has highlighted and exacerbated ongoing issues. Solutions must be developed and delivered in genuine partnership with Indigenous peoples and community-controlled organisations.

Key challenges affecting Australia's Indigenous peoples, heightened by COVID-19, include health and mental health concerns, the lack of access to safe, affordable and culturally appropriate housing, and food insecurity.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up 3 per cent of Australia's population but 20 per cent of the nation's homeless. This is predicted to increase substantially due to COVID-19.

Prior to COVID-19, there was a social housing supply gap for Aboriginal families in New South Wales of 11,000 dwellings, which was predicted to rise to over 30,000 dwellings by 2031. Due to COVID-19 these numbers are expected to be much more.

COVID-19 has increased the social and economic isolation experienced in Indigenous communities, disrupted the education of our young people, and increased unemployment.

Without increased efforts, goals set prior to the pandemic, including to increase the educational outcomes of our young people, will not be met.

The restrictions on movement, combined with existing economic and social inequalities, have limited the ability of Indigenous people to exercise cultural practices. Indigenous Elders and persons with a disability are particularly impacted by isolation and effects of reduced outreach services to communities.

The NSW Aboriginal Land Council is taking a proactive approach to alleviating the negative effects of COVID-19. We have strongly advocated to Government to ensure Indigenous communities are not forgotten during the recover recovery phase and aftermath. We are developing tailored programs to support Indigenous communities, businesses, entrepreneurs and the work of Indigenous community controlled health organisations.

We are running food relief programs, distributing approximately 6000 food and hygiene boxes, prioritising Elders in remote communities. We also run programs to assist indigenous businesses via the Yarpa Business Hub.

We have secured donations from corporates, including 99,000 single use face masks.

ALWAYS WAS ALWAYS WILL BE ABORIGINAL LAND

Head office	Western Zone	Northern Zone	Northern Zone (Tamworth)	Eastern Zone	Southern Zone	Far Western Zone
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PO Box 1125 Parramatta NSW 2124	PO Box 1196 Dubbo NSW 2830	PO Box 1912 Coffs Harbour NSW 2450	PO Box 890 Tamworth NSW 2340	PO Box 670 Gosford NSW 2250	PO Box 619 Queanbeyan NSW 2620	Ph: 08 8087 7909 Fax: 08 8087 3851
Ph: 02 9689 4444 Fax: 02 9687 1234	Ph: 02 6885 7000 Fax: 02 6881 6268	Ph: 02 6659 1200 Fax: 02 6650 0420	Ph: 02 6766 4468 Fax: 02 6766 4469	Ph: 02 4337 4700 Fax: 02 4337 4710	Ph: 02 6124 3555 Fax: 02 6280 5650	

Positively, our communities have experienced a rate of COVID-19 infection **six times lower** than the broader Australian population. This highlights the success and importance of Indigenous community controlled organisations and peoples leading and responding to crises.

To help overcome this crisis, and protect Indigenous rights in the recovery stage and aftermath, Governments need to work in genuine partnership with, and resource, Indigenous community controlled organisations to be at the forefront of leading responses. This includes dedicated economic stimulus measures to support our communities.