



# AUSTRALIA



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## UNITED NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES

21 April 2021

### Statement by H.E. The Hon Mitch Fifield, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations

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Australia welcomes the Permanent Forum's focus on challenges related to pandemics and responses to them, specifically the impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous peoples and their rights, and is pleased to contribute to ongoing discussions.

Australia reaffirms its support for the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The COVID-19 pandemic has touched every aspect of Indigenous people's lives and Australia recognises that Indigenous peoples around the world have been adversely impacted by the pandemic.

Australia values the voices of Indigenous Australians and making sure they are heard and have greater participation and input into the policies and programs that affect their lives. This includes Australia's response to the pandemic and efforts in protecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

peoples through a broad range of measures under the Australian Health Sector COVID-19 Emergency Response Plan.

Australia has demonstrated that an effective response in minimising the impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous Australians can be achieved with genuine partnership when the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and health experts are prioritised. By working in partnership with Indigenous communities and organisations, infection rates for Indigenous Australians were substantially lower than overall: of more than 800,000 Indigenous Australians, only 152 contracted COVID-19, and no cases were acquired in remote communities.

Australia continues to take the necessary actions to ensure all Indigenous Australians are safe, protected and have access to appropriate health care now and beyond COVID-19.

A national rollout of the COVID-19 Vaccination Program commenced on 22 February 2021. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples along with health workers and the elderly have been prioritised in the initial phases of the COVID-19 vaccination roll-out.

Australia also continues to engage a broad range of measures to minimise the impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous Australians, and recognises that a collaborative approach between Government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples provides the best chance of success.

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