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Parliament Buildings
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By email to: TreatyPrinciples@parliament.govt.nz

Submission to the Select Committee on the Treaty Principles Bill

Te Whare Piki Ora o Māhutonga /The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) recognises Māori as the tangata whenua of Aotearoa - New Zealand and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people as the traditional landowners of Australia. RACS also recognises that the vast health and social inequities faced by these populations are wholly preventable and therefore sustained inequities are unjustifiable and unacceptable.

Despite successive government initiatives these inequities persist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations of Australia and New Zealand. RACS understands this situation and has made Indigenous health a priority by incorporating the thinking into strategic planning, and creating a vision of 'building workforce and increasing services to better meet the health needs of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Island and Māori populations'.

The RACS position statement on Indigenous Health ¹ outlines RACS' ongoing obligations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) and the Close the Gap Statement of Intent. It includes information that gives context to some of the issues faced by Indigenous people. It informs College Fellows, Trainees, International Medical Graduates (IMG) and external stakeholders of RACS' Indigenous health commitment, supports staff with understanding the importance of Indigenous health and how this relates to their work, and holds RACS accountable to achieving health equity.

As chair of the Indigenous Health Committee, I strongly oppose the Treaty Principles Bill introduced into Parliament in November 2024. The Bill and its 'principles' as outlined by Hon David Seymour are not congruent with the College's Indigenous Position Statement and the desired outcomes for Māori health inequities that are perpetuated by government policy decisions that are ongoing breaches of Te Tiriti/Treaty of Waitangi.

It appears the ACT party does not understand the meaning of equity in the health context.

The World Health Organisation defines equity²:

"Equity is the absence of avoidable, unfair, or remediable differences among groups of people, whether those groups are defined socially, economically, demographically or geographically or by other means of stratification. "Health equity" or "equity in health" implies that ideally everyone should have a fair opportunity to attain their full health potential and that no one should be disadvantaged from achieving this potential."

¹RACS [Indigenous Health Position Paper](#)

The United Nations Declaration on Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) also addresses health equity and the health rights of Indigenous people. Article 23 states that Indigenous peoples “have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programmes affecting them...”. Article 24 (2) states “Indigenous individuals have an equal right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.”

The impact of colonisation on Indigenous people all over the world is devastating. Today’s poorer health statistics for Māori is an outcome of colonisation, racism and deliberate acts of cultural suppression. Indigenous people have lived experiences of the current and historical impacts of colonisation and resultant social, economic and health disparities.

To deny Māori health equity is to delay social justice. As Associate Minister of Justice, Health and Education, the Hon David Seymour has a duty to honour Te Tiriti O Waitangi and instead shows complete disregard for the rights of the descendants of the signatories of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Nāku noa, nā

Ben Cribb
Chair Indigenous Health Committee

RACS represents more than 8300 surgeons and 1300 surgical Trainees and Specialist International Medical Graduates across Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia. We are the accredited training provider in nine surgical specialities. Surgeons are also required by RACS and Te Kaunihera Rata o Aotearoa - Medical Council of Aotearoa, to continue with surgical education and review of their practice throughout their surgical careers.