



Australian
Human Rights
Commission



Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices)

Now and Beyond: From the National Summit to designing a National Framework for Action and Institute for First Nations Gender Justice and Equality.

*Let's design the future, and together,
we can make it happen ...*

This paper invites you to share in the journey of Wiyi Yani U Thangani, to reflect on what has been achieved and to appreciate what works. The paper asks all Summit participants (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) to contribute to shaping the next stages of work as we translate evidence into action and drive lasting systemic change.

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The landmark Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices) Project, delivered by the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) in partnership with the National Indigenous Australian's Agency (NIAA), is the most extensive and longest running First Nations women and girls' national project ever undertaken in Australia. Over five years and across three extensive stages of First Nations women-led work, the project has:

- Engaged with over 2,000 First Nations women and girls and counting, from the age of 12 upwards, including senior women, across Australia
- Tabled in Federal Parliament the *Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices): Securing our Rights, Securing our Future 2020 Report* (the Report), a comprehensive document reporting on First Nations women and girls' strengths, rights and aspirations
- Socialised the Report and its findings with federal and all state and territory governments
- Produced the documentary animation—*Yajilarra nhingi, mindija warrma (from dreams, let's make it reality)*, translated it into four First Nations languages
- Designed and launched the Wiyi Yani U Thangani Implementation Framework 2021
- Convened an online Women's Safety Policy Forum and published the corresponding Policy Forum Outcomes Report 2022, providing recommendations for how to develop the proposed Standalone First Nations National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children.

The Wiyi Yani U Thangani National Summit: *We Are The Change*, is a celebration of the work so far, and an opportunity to strengthen what exists, while planning for the work ahead. Over three days, many impressive women-led initiatives will be showcased, which are grounded in culture, charting a visionary course, while combatting entrenched inequalities and discrimination.

The Summit is a once-in-a-generation platform for agreement-making and for designing the mechanisms to guarantee First Nations women and girls are not excluded or left behind, and that women's knowledges and lived experiences are central to making the decisions and policies that impact their lives.

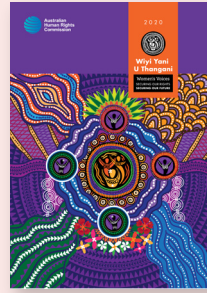


BUILDING TOWARDS FIRST NATIONS GENDER JUSTICE AND EQUALITY

2018 - 2020

Extensive **national engagements** with over 2,000 First Nations women and girls throughout 2018.

Stage 1



Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices): Securing our Rights, Securing our Future Report 2020

2021

Socialising of the findings of the Report with First Nations women and girls, peak bodies, and governments and developing tools and resources for implementation.

Stage 2



Implementation Framework 2021

2022-2023

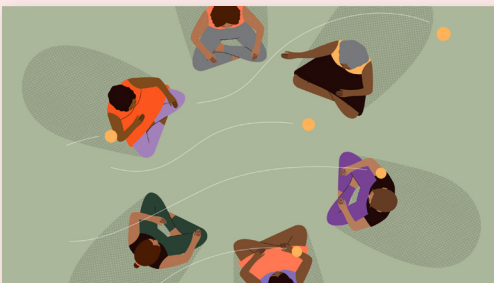
Delivery of the First Nations Women and Girls **National Summit**. Summit messages and recommendations to inform the strategic focus of the **National Framework for Action**.

Stage 3



April-August 2023

Engagements and focus groups to develop the Framework with First Nations women and girls, governments and key stakeholders.



May-June 2023

A governance process established for the design and implementation of the National Framework for Action. Initial Framework and Institute feedback questions remain open for Summit delegates and the public to respond to via QR code and the website by the end of May.

August-September 2023

National Framework for Action submission process to comment directly on a Framework concept document.



March 2024

Framework for Action and First Nations Gender Justice Institute launched

The Wiyi Yani U Thangani Project

In 2017, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, June Oscar AO, launched the multi-year systemic change project, Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices). It has been the priority of Commissioner Oscar, as the first woman to be the Social Justice Commissioner, to shine a spotlight on the strengths, lives and rights of First Nations women and girls—to elevate their voices and knowledges from Countries across Australia to the decision-making tables of all governments and diverse stakeholders.

The landmark *Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices): Securing our Rights, Securing Our Future 2020* Report (the Report) is the culmination of the most extensive nationwide engagement with First Nations women and girls as a collective, since the Women's Business Report in 1986. The Report weaves together the stories of over 2,000 First Nations women and girls, from all states and territories, speaking from settings such as prisons, youth groups, community halls, and around campfires.

Since then, further stages of work have begun to translate the Report's findings into action. Hundreds more First Nations women and stakeholders voices have contributed to the development of implementation tools, including the 2021 Implementation Framework. Now, the 2023 Wiyi Yani U Thangani Summit, brings the largest national gathering ever of First Nations women (inclusive of cis, trans women, and gender diverse and non-binary people) to Canberra—Australia's decision-making centre—where voices will commit to strategic priorities and the pathways for action.

This paper, and the Wiyi Yani U Thangani Project including the next phases of work, defines 'women' as all First Nations women who identify as women, including transgender women, and First Nations people who are gender and sex diverse often referred to as LGBTIQ+SB.¹

What the Report and Project tells us

For the first time in a generation, the Report, Implementation Framework, and ongoing conversations, provide a necessary First Nations gender lens across all aspects of life, from housing to education, healing and economic development. Wiyi Yani U Thangani lays an indisputable foundation of evidence that First Nations women have remarkable strengths derived from diverse lived experiences and cultures and Laws. Women are maintaining societal health and wellbeing, largely through unpaid and unrecognised work at home, in communities and on Country. Without adequate formalised supports in place, women are:

- Caring for children, elders and those with disabilities, often in overcrowded housing.
- Delivering frontline crisis and holistic services.
- Maintaining cultural practices and connection to Country for children and elders.
- Supporting family to navigate oppressive and complicated systems from the courts to child protection.
- Leading healing work in contexts of entrenched poverty and increasing trauma.

Over five years, the work of Wiyi Yani U Thangani clearly shows that First Nations women are key to holding society together, healing, reducing harms and violence, and guaranteeing cohesion and healthy environments for everyone. Despite this, women and girls' voices are not being effectively incorporated into the policies and mainstream structures which govern their lives and the lives of those in communities.

¹ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Asexual, Non-Binary, Sistergirl and Brotherboy. This definition also recognises that Sistergirls and Brotherboys might be non-binary, female or male, and Brotherboys experience of discrimination before and after transitioning.

Realising the major recommendations of the Report

First Nations women and girls have been clear: mechanisms are needed to progressively respond to the findings of the Report and Implementation Framework, ensure women's voices are informing evidence-based policy, and sustained meaningful change is achieved for communities, everywhere.

In responding to First Nations women and girls, Wiyi Yani U Thangani puts forward a comprehensive plan for structural change, including seven overarching recommendations. The first two recommendations of the Report are to formalise the way ahead:

01

A National Action Plan on advancing the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls

All Australian Governments commit to the development of a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women and Girls Action Plan to address the challenges, priorities and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls.

02

Conduct a National Summit and establish a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women and Girls Advisory Body

The Australian Government fund a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Summit to design the key elements of the National Plan and an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women and Girls Advisory Body to lead and implement the National Action Plan and retain a monitoring role to hold all governments to account.

The Wiyi Yani U Thangani National Summit: *We Are The Change*, hosted by Commissioner Oscar and Co-Host, Michelle Deshong, is a direct response to Recommendation Two—for First Nations women to come together and identify gender-responsive priorities and actions that will realise the rights and aspirations of women and girls.

In attendance at the Summit are over 700 delegates. First Nations women have joined together from communities across Australia, with Indigenous and non-Indigenous Federal and State/Territory Government representatives, parliamentarians and Ministers, alongside diverse stakeholders from academia, and private and public sectors.

The discussions, actions and recommendations called for by participants at the Summit, including in the Summit Communique and Youth Statement, will inform the design and focus of the National Framework for Action to achieve First Nations Gender Justice and Equality.

The National Framework for Action—designed with First Nations women and girls, and in consultation with governments and stakeholders post-Summit and launched in 2024—will realise Recommendation One of the Report.

To support the implementation and monitoring of the Framework for Action, a First Nations Gender Justice Institute is currently being designed and established at the Australian National University (ANU). The Institute elevates Recommendation Two beyond an Advisory Body, to a dedicated independent space for First Nations women and girls. It ensures that women and girls will have the structure and mechanisms to continue to inform the way ahead for how the Framework for Action will be implemented.

Why do we need a National Framework for Action and an Institute?

Australia does not have a nationally consistent approach to responding to First Nations women and girls (inclusive of cis, trans women and gender diverse and non-binary people). Nor do national mechanisms exist to strategically invest in First Nations women and girls' initiatives and to achieve the many dimensions of First Nations gender justice and equality.

UN forums and nation-states everywhere recognise gender equality as one of the single greatest measures to combat global challenges, inequalities, gender-based violence and improve all social, economic, environmental and climate outcomes. When First Nations women are invested in and empowered, harms are reduced, children thrive, economies grow, and more equitable and sustainable ways of organising society are introduced.

Developing the Framework for Action and establishing the Institute is about creating the formal pathways and structures to ensure this happens.

What is the Framework for Action?

The National Framework for Action will be an overarching generational roadmap, to provide the structural support for the diverse work taking place across communities and regions.

A living document, designed by and for First Nations women and girls—inclusive of cis, trans women and gender divers and non-binary people—the Framework will be a powerful shared commitment for the future, including the steps needed to get there and how to form the enabling conditions for women and girls to pursue their unique rights and interests.

The Framework will be a useable document, for First Nations women and girls to encourage investments in identified initiatives and to influence policy and legislative reforms to improve broader systems to enhance lives, ultimately combatting inequalities and disadvantages which impact everyone, including children and men. Governments will be able to use the Framework as a guide for incorporating a First Nations gender lens into policymaking.

To do this, the Framework will likely:

- Define First Nations women and girls' visions and aspirations for a flourishing society.
- Capture strategic priorities, actions and systemic change initiatives to progress meeting these aspirations.
- Be inclusive of First Nations women and girls with a broad range of lived experiences and knowledges, including but not limited to, those with disability, those who have been in prison, and those who identify as LGBTIQ+SB.
- Align with other significant Federal Government policies and strategies, including, but not limited to, Closing the Gap, the National Gender Equality Strategy, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children and the Standalone First Nations National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children.
- Include accountability and monitoring mechanisms, and indicators of success, to track progress against a First Nations conception of gender justice and equality.

How will the Framework for Action be developed?

The Framework will draw on the recommendations of the Wiyi Yani U Thangani Report (2020) and build on the 4 Thematic Areas, 9 Major Priorities and 24 Action Areas outlined in the Implementation Framework (2021). Below is a snapshot of the Implementation Framework's approach to achieve First Nations gender justice and equality.

The Framework for Action will be informed by, and include mechanism that are responsive to, the many interconnected systemic change initiatives raised by women and girls throughout Wiyi Yani U Thangani and showcased at the Summit.

This will likely include initiatives and approaches across the thematic areas set out in the Implementation Framework of: Leadership and Self-Determination; Culture, Languages, Country and Water Rights; Societal Healing; and Economic Justice. Initiatives may relate to sustaining social and environmental health and combatting climate change, creating culturally safe birthing models, strengthening political voice, growing on country therapeutic healing models, and forming economic models that recognise women's care work to lift women and families out of poverty.

The Summit will also mandate a broad principled process for the Framework's development. As a starting point the Framework will be grounded in the Report's principles, included below.

Post-summit, there will be engagements and focus groups with First Nations women and girls, governments and other stakeholders, and a submission and survey process. The AHRC will continue to work with Federal Government departments who are forming First Nations women and children related policies as the Framework for Action is developed.

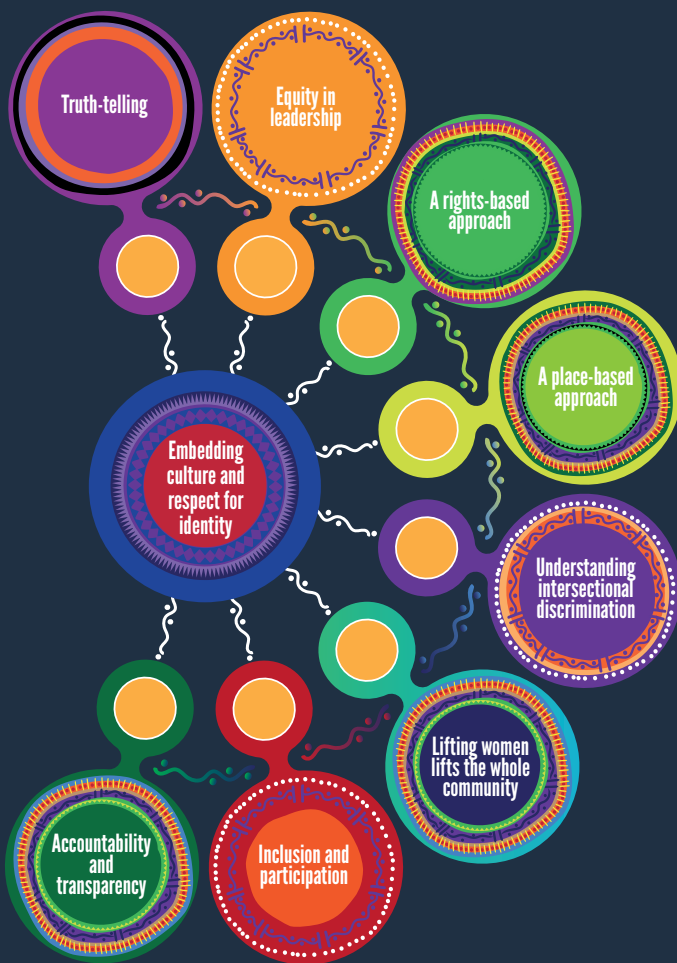
What will be the focus and function of the Institute?

The Institute will carry on the legacy of the Wiyi Yani U Thangani Project and will lead the implementation and monitoring of the National Framework for Action. The Institute and Framework for Action are fundamentally co-related. The Framework for Action is likely to set the key priorities for the Institute, and the Institute's work will drive the implementation and iterative development of the Framework's objectives.

Through strong partnerships and collaborations with First Nations women, governments, the private sector and philanthropists, the Institute will design and scale-up First Nations gender-informed approaches and initiatives such as those showcased at the Summit and outlined above. Projects run by the Institute will put forward the evidence to reform systems and develop policies that are responsive and supportive of women and girls, are holistic and capable of dealing with multiple needs to deliver far-reaching solutions which reflect reality. The Institute will do this through three core focus areas of: **research; practice; advocacy and policy recommendations.**

The Institute at the ANU will add to the existing ecosystem of women-led and First Nations-led research which is well established at the University. To these areas of research, it will bring a new intersectional lens, and more First Nations women into the academic space and the space of innovative policy development. The ANU is highly regarded for producing world-class evidence that can support the formation of effective policies.

Wiyi Yani U Thangani Report and Project Principles



Embedding culture and respect for identity:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls are able to learn and practise their culture, knowledge and languages, and their diverse identities are respected.

Truth-telling: All Australians recognise past and contemporary injustices experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including women and girls, and understand the ongoing impacts of these on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Equity in leadership: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls are respected and equally represented in leadership roles.

A rights-based approach: Human rights are built into policy and decision-making processes of government, are co-designed and proactively seek to address existing inequalities.

A place-based approach: Governments acknowledge the efficacy of place-based initiatives that promote community leadership, participation and solutions.

Understanding intersectional discrimination: It is understood that the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls are informed by a complex mix of race, gender, age and other attributes.

Lifting women lifts the whole community: It is understood that measures designed to enhance the enjoyment of human rights by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls are of benefit to their entire communities.

Inclusion and participation: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls are able and supported to participate in decision-making that affects their lives.

Accountability and transparency: The basis of government actions and decisions is transparent and there exists accountability for outcomes, including through robust measurement and targets that are relevant and agreed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

THEMATIC AREA 1
LEADERSHIP and DECISION-MAKING
FOR SELF DETERMINATION



Major Priority 1:

First Nations women and girls are strong in identity and empowered leaders in both worlds

Action 1.1: Collective leadership from the start of life

Action 1.2: Reinvigorate cultural governance and invest in place-based leadership

Major Priority 2:

First Nations women and girls are represented and responded to across all areas of decision-making

Action 2.1: Mainstream readiness to become First Nations gender responsive

Action 2.2: Women and girls have access to mechanisms to advocate for their rights and interests

THEMATIC AREA 2
LANGUAGE, LAND, WATER
and CULTURAL RIGHTS



Major Priority 3:

Cultural rights are secured, practised and lived by First Nations women and girls

Action 3.1: Thriving languages, spoken every day, throughout all of life

Action 3.2: Women's knowledges reinvigorated and embraced across sectors

Major Priority 4:

Access to and autonomy over ancestral country

Action 4.1: Culturally-layered, resilient and adaptable infrastructure for vibrant living

Action 4.2: Women making decisions, governing, and negotiating for Country

Action 4.3: Innovative on-Country supports, education and economies

Major Priority 5:

First Nations gender-just climate solutions

Action 5.1: First Nations women at the heart of climate and Country justice

Action 5.2: Girls and young women leading the way in sustainable solutions

SOCIETAL HEALING and INTERGENERATIONAL WELLBEING



Major Priority 6:

Healing-informed, engaged and transformed systems and society

- Action 6.1:** National coverage of women-designed and led healing models on Country and in community
- Action 6.2:** Healing-informed workplaces and workforces
- Action 6.3:** Truth-telling, language and culture throughout education
- Action 6.4:** A nation engaged in truth-telling, recognition and recovery

Major Priority 7:

Every First Nations child is born into an empowered, healthy, and sustainable community

- Action 7.1:** Women and child-centred culturally-safe maternal and early life models of care
- Action 7.2:** A transformed First Nations children, women and family centred early childhood education and support system
- Action 7.3:** Affordable, culturally-secure and liveable homes in safe, connected and sustainable communities

THEMATIC AREA 4 ECONOMIC JUSTICE and EMPOWERMENT



Major Priority 8:

Control over income and financial resources and engagement in meaningful economies

- Action 8.1:** Institutional supports to lift women and children out of poverty and guarantee their financial wellbeing
- Action 8.2:** Women and girls enjoy the right to financial information, knowledge and literacy
- Action 8.3:** Empowering conditions for women's training and employment
- Action 8.4:** Sustainable local economies and business

Major Priority 9:

A transformed care economy

- Action 9.1:** The full spectrum of women's care work is recognised and valued
- Action 9.2:** Wrap-around caring infrastructure for collective wellbeing and empowerment

Next Steps ...

We want to hear your thoughts on the National Framework for Action and the Institute. First Nations and non-Indigenous women (cis, trans women and gender diverse and non-binary people) are welcome to respond to the **questions on the last page, via the QR Code**.

Summit participants are invited to the 'Designing the Framework for Action and Institute for First Nations Gender Justice' session on Wednesday 10 May, 3.30 – 4.45pm to explore these questions together.

Summit participants will receive updates about the development of the Framework throughout 2023.

The Framework will be launched for International Women's Day 2024, along with the establishment of the Institute for First Nations Gender Justice. For further details, please see the timeline above.



HAVE YOUR SAY...

Summit Participant Questions

ANSWER VIA THE QR CODE AT THE BOTTOM OF THIS PAGE

We want to hear your thoughts about the National Framework for Action to achieve First Nations Gender Justice and Equality.

- 1 What do you think are important principles and processes to ensure the effective design of the National Framework for Action?
- 2 Reflecting on the Implementation Framework snapshot (double page spread above), do you think there are other themes, priorities and actions that should be included in the National Framework for Action?
- 3 Is there a key message, action and/or recommendation that you have heard at the Summit which should be included in the National Framework for Action?
- 4 How do you think the National Framework for Action should be measured and reported?

We want to hear your thoughts about the design of the Institute for First Nations Gender Justice to be based at ANU

- 5 What major themes and issues do you think the institute should explore?
- 6 What areas of policy and/or systems reform do you think could have the greatest impact on First Nations women and girls?
- 7 What research, advocacy and practice models exist in Australia and/or internationally that can guide the development and sustainability of the Institute?

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the development of the Framework for Action and the Institute?





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