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Top philanthropists say Yes with \$17m to support Voice campaign

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A group of Australia's richest philanthropists and family foundations have pledged \$17 million to support the campaign for an Indigenous Voice to Parliament, as the Yes and No camps sharpen their plans of attack ahead of the referendum.

More than 20 philanthropists including the Besen Foundation, Jo Horgan's Mecca M Power, the Nelson Meers Foundation, the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation, Geoff Ainsworth's Oranges and Sardines, the Snow Foundation and The Myer Foundation have signed the pledge.



Left to right: Julie Kantor, Annamila First Nations Foundation; Tabitha Lovett, Besen Family Foundation; Leonard Vary, The Myer Foundation; Kristy Muir, Paul Ramsay Foundation; Georgina Byron, The Snow Foundation; Kate Kennedy, Barlow Impact Group; Jill Reichstein, Reichstein Foundatio; Sarah Hardy, The Ross Trust; Caitriona Fay, Perpetual; Catherine Brown, Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation; Maree Sidey, Australian Communities Foundation. **Eamon Gallagher**

The total amount includes the Paul Ramsay Foundation's \$5 million donation to Australians for Indigenous Constitutional Recognition (AICR), which was announced in February.

"We have to be bold, and we have to be courageous enough to be public about things that we know are drivers for change," said Kristy Muir, who officially took over as chief executive of the foundation in September.

Supporters of the Voice plan to ramp up campaigning after legislation for the vote passes parliament in June.

Uluru Dialogue co-chair Megan Davis told *The Australian Financial Review Magazine* more television ads are also planned for next month, coinciding with the sixth anniversary of the Uluru Statement.

"Getting to Yes in the referendum will be such a powerful thing for our young people. It will be transformative," she said. "The substance of the reform is to create a culture in which the government, the bureaucracy, the parliament just consult with mob from day one."

Leading figures from both Yes and No camps spoke at length to *AFR Magazine* about how their campaigns will take shape. Sports including the AFL, NRL, cricket, netball and rugby will join the Yes campaign mid-year, with plans for a co-ordinated campaign highlighting Indigenous stars peaking in finals season, weeks from voting day. Sydney Swans dual premiership player and Brownlow medallist Adam Goodes will play a leading role.

Meanwhile, on the No side, Recognise a Better way, run by Nyungai Warren Mundine is targeting so-called "soft supporters" for Yes with slogans of "If you don't know, vote no," and "This is not our Voice."

"It's not clear this proposal will do what it says on the box," Country Liberal Party senator Jacinta Nampijinpa Price says. "Will it help close the gap?"

Yes23 campaign director Dean Parkin said the campaign would use the funds raised by philanthropists and the community to boost on-the-ground campaign efforts, including town hall information sessions, designed to give undecided voters information about the referendum proposal.

"Winning a referendum is never easy, and is not helped by the decisions recently of a small number of politicians in Canberra," he said.

“The funding from generous donors will support our effort to engage Australians in this historic moment.”



Yes23 campaign director Dean Dean Parkin **Alex Ellinghausen**

Melbourne University chancellor and philanthropist Jane Hansen, who runs the Hansen Little Foundation established with her husband Paul Little, said she doesn't usually talk publicly about the causes her family foundation supports around youth and the future.

But she's concerned by how fractured the country is becoming, particularly with many young Australians more reluctant to celebrate Australia Day.

“Regardless of the date, there should be a point where we can all come together and celebrate being part of this great country,” she said.

“The Voice is part of a three-stage process. It's essential, so we may reconcile our past, how we came to occupy this land and how we treated First Nations.

“Only then will we be able to move forward, feel united and proud as a nation. And First Nations people deserve a stronger and more direct say in how to manage their own.”

Ms Hansen said the voice to parliament would help unify Australia. But before that happened, she said, “People need to separate out the blatant political partisanship

and make their own informed assessment.”

The foundation donors will give a minimum \$100,000, and hope the pledge will spur more people to support the campaign.

Philanthropists have historically been reluctant to fund campaigns which could be seen as political. But the 2017 plebiscite for same-sex marriage changed that, with several established players in the sector helping fund that yes vote.

The Snow Foundation’s Georgina Byron said her foundation has become known for its early commitment to marriage equality, led by her brother Tom Snow. The Snow Foundation is among those who’ve pledged to help fund the Yes campaign for the Voice.

“We know when you bring many together, you can make social change in a louder and more validated fashion. We’ve learnt over the years whether it’s advocacy or social change you need many people to get it right,” she said.

The group of philanthropists funding Yes also includes the Annamila First Nations Foundation, Australian Communities Foundation, the Balnaves Foundation, the Barlow Impact Group, Dusseldorp Forum, the Reichstein Foundation, the Albert family’s Tony Foundation, the Wyatt Foundation, and the Ross Trust.

More than 70 philanthropists signed an open letter supporting the Uluru Statement in 2019. ACF director Chris Croker said the Voice was “one of the original asks from the Uluru Statement tabled to the federal government in 2017”.

“By practically listening to Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal communities, we can have more efficiency in tackling systemic changes, which are legacies of colonisation. It’s past time to get these things fixed,” he said.

“Even though there’s a political divide in Canberra, I don’t think that translates across the Australian community. The vast majority of donors we work with are happy to support the Voice.”

ACF has pledged to raise \$1 million to create positive outcomes in the referendum. The organisation will donate to Yes23, Passing the Message Stick and the Uluru Dialogue, as well as support community discussion events.

Aspen Medical’s Glenn Keys [<https://www.afr.com/politics/federal/no-yachts-islands-or-helicopters-for-this-self-made-man-20210505-p57p83>] and his wife Amelda (Mel) are also

supporting the campaign. Mr Keys said they would follow the Snow Foundation and Ms Byron in where to give the money, which will be AICR and the Uluru Dialogue.

“As a family, we’ve discussed what the Voice means to us. We know that Australia has been kind to us, but we know there is inequity in our broader community,” he said.

“The upcoming referendum is a unique and perhaps once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that will allow us to contribute positively to a mechanism that will help address that inequity - and it starts with a foundation document such as the Constitution.”

The Tony Foundation’s Emily Albert said every Australian needed to step up as much as they can.

“Even if it doesn’t necessarily affect every non-Indigenous Australian the same way it affects every Indigenous Australian, we’ve been offered this very generous invitation from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders,” she said.

“This group is accepting that generous invitation to walk together to a better future in which First Nations people have a say over matters that actually affect them. That needs lots of Australians to step up as much as they can.”



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