**RECONCILIATION**

The notion of reconciliation refers to ‘coming together’. As an Australian Government policy it aims to achieve social justice, recognition and healing. Its purpose has been to help all Australians move forward with a better understanding of the past and how the past affects the lives of Indigenous peoples today. It involves the recognition that Indigenous peoples were the first Australians and acknowledges how the past impacts their culture and lives today. It involves both symbolic and practical approaches.

**SYMBOLIC RECONCILIATION**

Symbolic reconciliation is a focus on the social justice component of reconciliation and recognising historical injustice and Indigenous rights, such as the formal ‘Sorry’ in 2008 to the Stolen Generations; education programs designed to combat racism and discrimination; and educating non-indigenous Australians about Indigenous history.

**PRACTICAL RECONCILIATION**

Practical reconciliation involves a focus on providing services to address the inequalities that exist in our society, such as providing funding for the ‘Close the Gap’ program.

**HISTORY OF RECONCILIATION IN AUSTRALIA**

The 1991 report from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody identified that Indigenous disadvantage is a product of a history of dispossession. This had created a cycle of poverty, poor health and social disadvantage amongst many Indigenous communities. The report recommended that all political leaders and parties acknowledge the need for reconciliation between the Indigenous and non-indigenous communities in order to address Indigenous injustice. The Australian Government later established the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. It was noted at the time that that there had been no formal previous process of reconciliation. It was the vision of the council to create a “united Australia which respects this land of ours; values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage; and provides justice and equality for all”.

Ten years later, The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation established Reconciliation Australia, a non-government organisation foundation to continue a national focus for reconciliation. Between 2001 and 2007 practical reconciliation was the official policy of the Australian Government under then Prime Minister John Howard. The focus of practical reconciliation was for the government to implement services that would improve the living standards of Indigenous Australian people. While there was much support for improving services for Australian Indigenous people, there were two significant criticisms of this form of reconciliation. Some argued that the methods employed helped improve living conditions via ‘mainstream’ rather than ‘Indigenous-led’ agencies and this resulted in a minimal change to living conditions. Another criticism highlights the need to address symbolic issues, in addition to practical concerns, such as apologising to the Stolen Generations and acknowledging contemporary forms of racism.