

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Benevolent creates first Aboriginal Executive role to drive major reconciliation and reform**

The Benevolent Society Board has appointed Melissa Riley as its first Executive Director of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, in a move the organisation says marks a major step in strengthening Aboriginal leadership at the highest levels.

Ms Riley is a proud Wiradjuri woman and Benevolent's first Aboriginal Executive Director.

Benevolent CEO Kevin Barrow said Ms Riley's appointment reflected a clear commitment to Benevolent's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, clients and partners.

"Mel is stepping into one of the most important and transformative pieces of work underway at Benevolent right now," Mr Barrow said.

"She will help drive real change across our organisation, from how we partner with community, to how we design services, make decisions with and deliver outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families."

The appointment comes on the back of two other board initiatives as Benevolent prepares to launch a new Reconciliation Action Plan in July and implement its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategy, projects both led by Ms Riley since she started at Benevolent in 2025.

It also builds on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and representation across the organisation, including Aboriginal representation on the Benevolent Board, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Board Advisory Committee, the Staff Reference Group and Benevolent's commitment to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.

"Mel is an exceptional leader with deep community connection and a strong track record of driving change."

"We know reconciliation requires honesty, listening and a willingness to examine the role organisations like ours have played in systems that have caused harm," added Mr Barrow.

Ms Riley brings experience across philanthropy, corporate and community systems, with a focus on strengthening First Nations leadership and embedding culturally grounded, strengths-based approaches that influence decision-making at every level.

"I'm proud to step into this role and continue building strong relationships between Benevolent and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities," Ms Riley said.

"Communities should be involved in shaping decisions from the very beginning. When people feel heard and respected, we make better decisions and create services that work better for families.

"I'm excited about what we can achieve together and the opportunity to keep building trust, connection and delivering real outcomes for our clients."

Mr Barrow thanked the Board for their commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation as a key part of Benevolent's strategic plan.

"This appointment is a strong statement of support for Aboriginal leadership and an important part of our broader strategy to strengthen reconciliation, accountability and partnerships with community," Mr Barrow said.

"This appointment is a significant milestone and reflects our commitment to ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices are represented at the highest levels of leadership. As the first Aboriginal executive, Mel brings cultural knowledge, lived experience and professional expertise that will strengthen our organisation and help create better outcomes for our communities," said Dave Wenitong, Board Director and Chair of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Board Advisory Committee at Benevolent.

Ken Smith, Board Chair at Benevolent, thanked the leadership of fellow Board Director, Dave Wenitong and the external leaders of Benevolent's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Board Advisory Committee.

"The Board fully supports Mel's appointment as a member of the executive leadership team. It complements our strategic decisions to develop a specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strategy and renew our Reconciliation Action Plan," said Mr Smith.

**ENDS**

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**About The Benevolent Society**

The Benevolent Society, provides integrated support services to children, young people, families, older Australians and carers. Since 1813, our history reflects a passion for helping people live life their way. As one of Australia's first charitable organisations, The Benevolent Society has pioneered positive social change and uses its practice wisdom to advocate for a just, caring society.

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