

Fact Sheet

Australian Referendums

This fact sheet contains information about referendums in Australia, including what they are, how they work and how you participate in one.

What is a referendum?

An Australian referendum is a vote by the people to change the Australian Constitution.

What is the Constitution and why does it matter?

The Australian Constitution is an integral part of our political system and provides the framework for Australian democracy. It provides the rules, procedures, checks and balances for the government, setting out the powers of the federal and state governments, and establishing the High Court of Australia. The Constitution also outlines the process for amending the Constitution through a referendum.

Do I have to vote in the referendum?

Voting in a referendum is compulsory if you are an Australian citizen over 18 years old and enrolled to vote. Voting gives you the chance to have a say about whether or not the Australian Constitution should be changed. (if you are unsure if you are eligible to vote, go to aec.gov.au)

At least 4 weeks before the referendum is held, the government will send out a pamphlet to all addresses which outlines the proposed changes to the Constitution with arguments both for and against the amendments.

You will also see information in the news and across social media about the referendum topic. It is important to ensure your sources of information are reputable.

How do I vote?

The way you vote will be similar to voting in an election, but your ballot paper will look a little different. Instead of a number in each box, you will need to write either 'yes', in support of the changes, or 'no' if you do not support the changes in the box provided.

If your vote is unclear (e.g. an 'x' in the box) it will be considered an 'informal vote' and your vote will not be counted. Your vote will also not be counted if your ballot paper is left blank, if you could not be identified by something you mark on the paper, or if your ballot paper is not authenticated by an Australian Electoral Commission officer before you vote.

Voting early (known as 'pre-poll') is possible in a referendum if you are unable to vote on the day. This could be for a variety of issues including illness, travel, religious practices, employment or caring responsibilities. See aec.gov.au for your nearest pre-poll location.

Your vote is important. Make sure you understand how to vote correctly in a referendum so that your voice is counted.

What is required for a vote to pass?

Before the public vote can be held, the federal parliament will vote on a referendum bill that states the proposed question and the draft constitutional amendments. As of 30 March 2023, this next step of the referendum process has been taken with the bill currently before the federal parliament. For the bill to pass through Parliament, it requires an absolute majority (a majority of the total number of politicians) of both the House of Representatives and the Senate voting in favour of the bill. The same changes proposed in the bill will then be put to the Australian people to vote on.

The referendum requires a 'double majority' of the Australian public to vote in favour of the amendments in order to pass. A 'double majority' is a national majority (50% + 1 of eligible voters) plus a majority of States (4 out of 6 States voting in favour, not including the Territories.)

Where both hurdles are met, the proposed changes to the Australian Constitution will be enacted by the government.

