

Media Release

The Hon Gabrielle Williams MP
Minister for Mental Health
Minister for Treaty and First Peoples



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COMMEMORATING THE SERVICE OF FIRST NATIONS VICTORIANS

Victorians have today paid tribute to First Nations people who have served on behalf of Australia as they were honoured at the Victorian Aboriginal Remembrance Service.

Held each year during Reconciliation Week, the service recognises the sacrifice and courage of First Nations Victorians and acknowledges that for far too long their contribution was not adequately commemorated.

Deputy Premier Jacinta Allan, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples Gabrielle Williams and Minister for Veterans Natalie Suleyman joined the Victorian Aboriginal Remembrance Committee today at Melbourne's Shrine of Remembrance.

Today's service included the story of Charles Melbourne Johnston, an Aboriginal man who served in the Australian Imperial Force during the First World War.

A brave and natural leader, Charles was awarded the Distinguished Service Order and mentioned three times in dispatches. Despite this, Charles' Aboriginal heritage was hidden due to discriminatory enlistment standards.

His name now proudly appears on the Australian War Memorial's First World War Indigenous service list.

For more information about the Victorian Aboriginal Remembrance Service, visit firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au.

Quote attributable to Deputy Premier Jacinta Allan

"The bravery and resilience shown by First Nations people who served our country is a testament to the strength of their culture. The treatment they endured in the aftermath must never be repeated and may this service and the indigenous service list always stand as powerful reminders of their sacrifice."

Quote attributable to Minister for Treaty and First Peoples Gabrielle Williams

"The contributions and bravery of First Nations people who have served is vital to the history of our country and for far too long they were not appropriately recognised – their sacrifices are a reminder of the importance of the work towards Voice, Treaty and Truth."

Quote attributable to Minister for Veterans Natalie Suleyman

"First Nations people have served in conflicts and peacekeeping missions for Australia for more than a century. It's so important that their service and sacrifice is acknowledged at memorial services such as these."

Quote attributable to Victorian Aboriginal Remembrance Committee member Andrew Peters

"The Victorian Aboriginal Remembrance Service is a wonderful and important opportunity to remember and honour the lives and contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have served and ensure their legacy lives on for future generations in the spirit of reconciliation."