



VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT **ABORIGINAL** REPORT 2014/2015
AFFAIRS

Throughout this document, the term “Aboriginal” is used to refer to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Use of terms “Koori”, “Koorie”, and “Indigenous” are retained in the names of programs and initiatives, and, unless noted otherwise, are inclusive of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

“Booniaricool Benanee” Copyright © 2015.

This artwork is reproduced with the consent of Tati Tati, Mutti Mutti, Wadi Wadi artist, Brendan Kennedy.

The Booniaricool Benanee painting is a representation of the artist’s deep connection to culture, and extensive knowledge and understanding of the waterways and cultural landscape of Booniaricool Benanee in Tati Tati Thanggi.

Authorised and published by the Department of Premier and Cabinet, Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne
© State of Victoria, December 2015

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 licence
(creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/au). It is a condition of this
licence that you credit the State of Victoria as author.

ISSN 2206-0154

Available at aboriginalaffairs.vic.gov.au



Contents

Message from the Premier	4
Message from the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs	5
Message from the Chair, Secretaries' Leadership Group on Aboriginal Affairs	6
About This Report	8
A Commitment to Self-Determination	9
New Approach to Aboriginal Affairs	9
Closing the Gap Joint Statement	9
Partners	12
Priorities and Investments	14
Progress against Key Indicators	22
COAG and the National Indigenous Reform Agreement	22
Overview of Key Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework Indicators	22
Aboriginal Population	23
Maternal and Early Childhood Health and Early Years	24
Education and Training	28
Economic Participation	31
Health	34
Housing and Disability	38
Child Protection and Out-of-Home Care	41
Family Violence	43
Justice	46
Native Title	51
Local and Regional Initiatives	53
Acronyms	56

Message from the Premier



I am pleased to introduce this Government's first report on Aboriginal Affairs to the Victorian Parliament.

The Report serves as a touchstone; an opportunity to reflect on our partnership with Aboriginal Victorians and our progress in addressing the inequities and injustices too many continue to face. Because only by taking stock and acknowledging the work still to be done, can we influence real change. Only by working together, can we make the much-needed inroads in closing the gap between Victorian Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

In the first week of this Parliament, we were welcomed by Aunty Joy Murphy-Wandin and Aunty Caroline Briggs, representing the Wurundjeri and Boonwurrung people respectively. The welcome of visitors onto the traditional land of the Kulin Nation, followed by a smoking ceremony, was an important way to begin the life of this Parliament. This recognition of Victoria's Traditional Owners was reaffirmed when earlier this year, for the first time, the Aboriginal flag was raised permanently above the Victorian Parliament.

It serves as a powerful symbol, acknowledging Australia's First Peoples and the continued strength of Aboriginal Victorian culture and identity. It also reaffirms this Government's commitment to the empowerment of Aboriginal people – a clear statement regarding the need for self-determination if true reconciliation is to be achieved. Because while closing the gap targets are a crucial baseline, they are just the beginning.

While we must improve on measures of health, education, employment and justice, closing the gap must extend beyond these metrics and measurements. We must also be closing the gaps that Aboriginal Victorians themselves identify. We must acknowledge that the best outcomes are achieved when they are led by Aboriginal communities. And we as a Government, and a Parliament, must ensure Aboriginal people have a voice – and that we are listening.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dan Andrews'.

The Hon Daniel Andrews MP
Premier of Victoria
State of Victoria

Message from the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs



For thousands of years, Aboriginal people have existed on this land. Their lives, societies and culture have left an enduring and indelible legacy – and it is one that continues to this day.

Since taking on the role of Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, it has been a privilege to learn more about this rich history. To see the strength and pride of Victoria's Aboriginal people, communities, and organisations. To see the positive outcomes that can be achieved when Aboriginal people are at the centre of decision making.

I have, however, also encountered the ongoing hardships that far too many Victorian Aboriginal people still face. As a Government, we must and will do more.

The \$30.2 million commitment to the Aboriginal Affairs portfolio in our first budget is one small part of what needs to be done. Including dedicated funding to empower Aboriginal leadership and support self-determination programs, it is a step forward.

Our commitment continues with our changes to the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006, strengthening the protection of Aboriginal heritage and ensuring that for the first time, Victoria's Traditional Owners have a say in what happens to their Ancestors' remains.

And it is further realised through our support to Local Aboriginal Networks (LANs) and their work to give Aboriginal people a strong voice at a local level, developing and enacting community plans, and empowering Aboriginal Victorians to participate in civic and community life.

But as this report shows, much needs to be improved. Along with the Aboriginal community, we are deeply concerned about the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in the justice system, the continued inequities in Aboriginal health outcomes and the number of Aboriginal children in the child protection system.

We are disturbed that there continues to be many who are simply not afforded the same opportunities as others.

Addressing this requires dedication from all levels of government. We all share a responsibility to do better – and this requires the Commonwealth Government to deliver equitable funding and a commitment for change in areas of common concern.

While the Commonwealth's recent family violence package included funding targeted to remote Aboriginal communities, the majority of Aboriginal Victorians live in urban communities. Funding should address need.

Similarly, education and early childhood development is a shared responsibility. This Government is working to ensure any national reform provides strong benefits to Aboriginal communities. But to do so, any agreement between tiers of government must be accompanied by a plan for adequate and sustainable funding. Anything less, and we will simply fail to effect change.

The Victorian Government remains committed to playing its part. By ensuring we are sitting at the table with Aboriginal people – including through the Premier's Gathering with Aboriginal leaders, the new Victorian Government Ministerial Forum, and the Aboriginal Children's Forum and the Aboriginal Justice Forum – we are working to find better solutions.

Closing the gap, affording Aboriginal culture and heritage the recognition and respect it deserves, ensuring Aboriginal people receive the same opportunities as non-Aboriginal people – these are the priorities of this Government.

But key to this is ensuring Aboriginal Victorians have a say in their own futures. Only through real dialogue can we reach real change. And only together, we can ensure a better future.

The Hon. Natalie Hutchins MP
Minister for Aboriginal Affairs



Message from the Chair, Secretaries' Leadership Group of Aboriginal Affairs

The Premier and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs have made it clear they want Aboriginal people to be central to decision making on Aboriginal affairs. Having Aboriginal affairs located within the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) offers significant opportunities to achieve this and influence actions across the whole of government.

DPC supports the Premier and key Ministers in their negotiations with the Commonwealth Government around funding arrangements and with the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) on the Close the Gap reform agenda. Through these, we will ensure the Victorian Government maximises benefits and outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians.

As the Secretary of DPC, I am also Chair of the Secretaries' Leadership Group of Aboriginal Affairs (SLG). The SLG includes all departmental secretaries, and now the Chief Commissioner of Police, and is charged with implementing Government priorities, coordinating whole-of-government integrated effort on the Closing the Gap reform agenda, and implementing the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2013-2018 (VAAF).

This annual report highlights how the combined efforts of government and the Aboriginal community have produced positive results in education, early childhood, and youth justice. However, we have not been able to reduce the gaps in perinatal mortality rates and in reading, writing, and numeracy. In employment and adults in the justice system, the gap is widening. The lack of progress in family violence and improving health outcomes is of concern and there is clearly more to be done in child protection and housing. Through the SLG we will collaborate to ensure appropriate investment is directed towards areas most in need of improvement and to closing the gaps in outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

Government departments work in partnership and through a number of engagement structures with Aboriginal communities and organisations to deliver on the VAAF. The Victorian Government will be strengthening these relationships to ensure programs meet the needs and local priorities of Aboriginal people and communities.

In Victoria, Aboriginal community controlled organisations (ACCOs) and Aboriginal community controlled health organisations (ACCHOs) are an important part of the service system for Aboriginal people around the state. While these are vital, they cannot, and should not be expected to, meet all the needs of all Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people also need access to mainstream services that are appropriate and culturally safe.

In 2014, the Victorian Auditor General's Office conducted an audit into the Accessibility of Mainstream Services by Aboriginal Victorians. It found there was insufficient consultation with the Victorian Aboriginal community and a need to improve access to mainstream services. There are a range of reasons why Aboriginal people may not be accessing services including historical factors, cycles of intergenerational trauma, and past and present experiences with mainstream services. This must therefore be addressed sensitively.

Through the SLG, we are implementing the audit's recommendations. A key element of success in improving access to services for Aboriginal people is building real partnerships between Aboriginal and mainstream organisations. Government must also ensure mainstream services are accessible, deliver culturally responsive services, and employ more Aboriginal people in their organisations.



We need to do more to increase Aboriginal employment in the Victorian Public Service. The recently established Aboriginal Employment Unit in the Victorian Public Service Commission will help drive progress on this.

Departments are also continuing to implement their Aboriginal Inclusion Action Plans, with all Departments expected to have a plan in place by the end of this year.

We have achieved much in the past year, but we can do much more. I look forward to continuing to work across government and with Aboriginal Victorians to achieve better outcomes over the coming years.

Chris Eccles

Chair, Secretaries' Leadership Group
of Aboriginal Affairs



About this Report

This Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Report 2014/2015 outlines Victoria's progress against key targets and measures towards closing the gap and presents Government priorities for the year ahead. The period covered by the Report is from the beginning of 2014 up to the most recently available data at the time of the Report's finalisation in November 2015.

Reporting against targets keeps governments accountable. The current Report also analyses progress to inform future action and refocus efforts where no change can be determined or where outcomes have worsened.

Key Aboriginal stakeholders have been asked to reflect on Victoria's progress, and their thoughts are included in this Report.

This Report also differs from previous reports in that detailed data tables have been published separately on the Department of Premier and Cabinet's website.



A Commitment to Self-Determination

New Approach to Aboriginal Affairs

Victorian Aboriginal people have a long tradition of supporting each other and advocating for the rights of their communities. There is a broad range of Aboriginal organisations and networks across the state, characterised by strong leadership and effective delivery of services and support. Victoria also has a number of influential state-wide Aboriginal organisations that advocate on both state-wide and local issues.

The Victorian Government is committed to strengthening the role and influence of Aboriginal people, communities, and organisations, particularly in their relationships with Government. We will not close the gap in outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people without the active involvement of Aboriginal Victorians in shaping their own future.

The Government will be working with Aboriginal Victorians to develop mechanisms that better support self-determination, and lead to a state that can be proud of its reconciliation effort. This will guide the Government's approach to Aboriginal affairs.

In keeping with the Victorian Government's commitment to self-determination and partnership with Aboriginal communities, this Report includes reflections from a number of key Aboriginal stakeholder organisations and community bodies.

Closing the Gap Joint Statement

In 2007-08, national and Victorian Aboriginal organisations led a campaign to close the gap between Aboriginal and other Australians. This campaign contributed to the development of the Council of Australian Governments' **National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA)** and the **Victorian Statement of Intent to Close the Gap** in 2008, which was re-endorsed by the Victorian Government in 2011.

On 19 March 2015, National Close the Gap Day, the new Victorian Government and the State Opposition reaffirmed their commitment to the Close the Gap agenda together with the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) and other Aboriginal organisations and community members. Through the Closing the Gap Joint Statement, the Government and the Opposition agreed to continue to drive effort to achieve long-term generational change that builds on the strengths of Aboriginal Victorians.

We share an ongoing commitment to improve outcomes and close the gaps and to do so in partnership with Aboriginal organisations, partners, and communities across all sectors throughout Victoria.



A Commitment to Self-Determination

Victoria has a long tradition of bipartisan support for better outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians. This also includes recognition in the Victorian constitution, apologising to the Stolen Generations, and jointly signing the **Statement of Intent to Close the Health Gaps**.

Victoria's overarching strategic framework for working with Aboriginal Victorians to drive action and improve outcomes is the **Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2013-18 (VAAF)**. This Report provides an update on progress against specific VAAF targets and measures.

The VAAF is built around a holistic life course approach that recognises the important role of the supporting foundations that influence a person's life outcomes, such as family, community, opportunities, place (home and connection to country), as well as access to all services. Disadvantage in Aboriginal communities remains intergenerational and widespread and the VAAF recognises that Closing the Gap in outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people involves time and requires sustained effort.

The VAAF acknowledges that positive experiences early in life lead to more economically independent and resilient people in their adult years. It focuses on improving the life expectancy, wellbeing, economic prosperity, and quality of life of Aboriginal Victorians and concentrates efforts on improved early years, education, health, employment, economic and justice outcomes. The VAAF builds on the strengths of Aboriginal people and the role of Aboriginal culture in creating resilience and prosperity.

The Commonwealth Government's policies and universal services also heavily influence outcomes for many Aboriginal Victorians, including through:

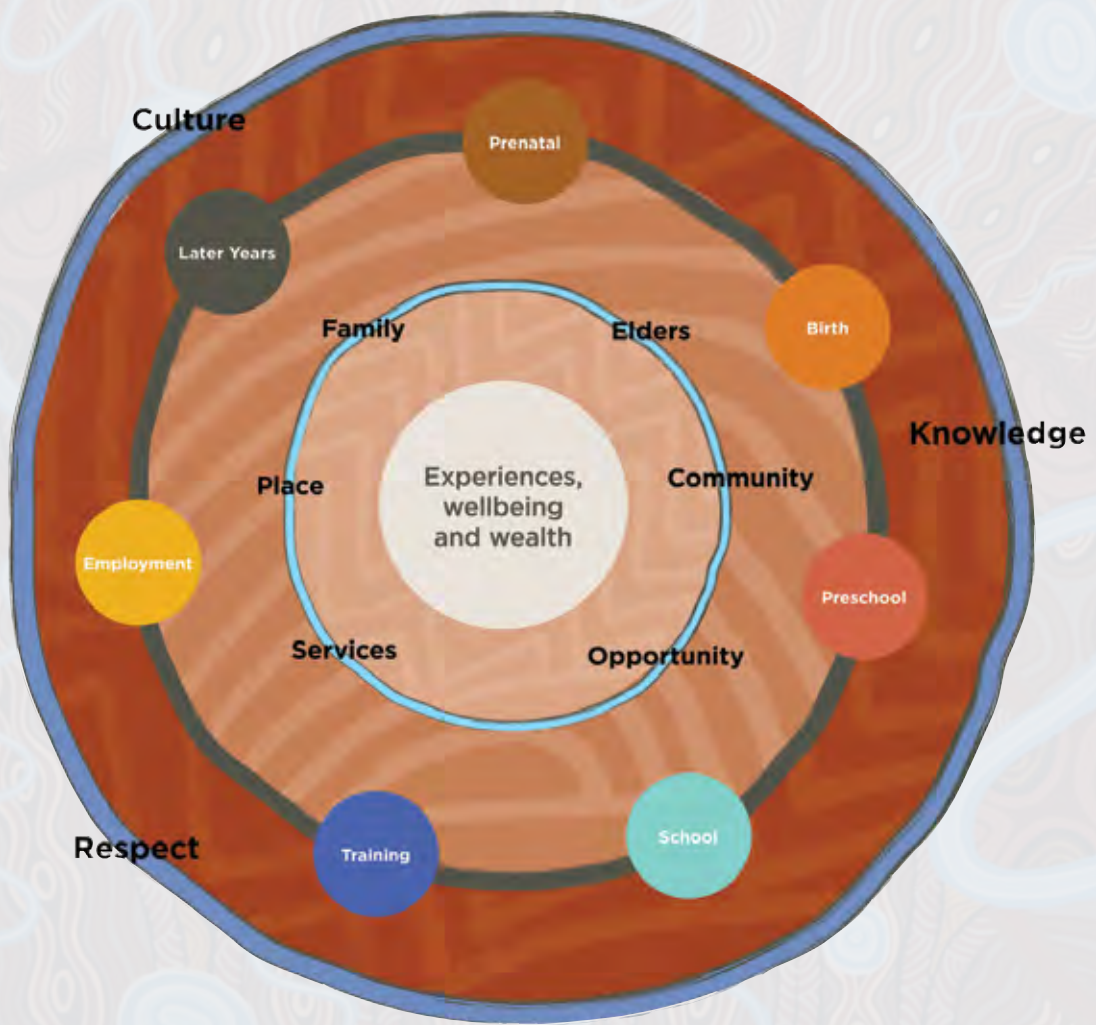
- the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS);
- primary health care (through both management of the Medical Benefits Scheme and payments to Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations);
- employment services;
- investment in early childhood initiatives (delivered by both Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and mainstream non-government providers) through the IAS and via National Partnership Agreements; and
- income support.

Responding to the national emergency of family violence and supporting Aboriginal communities are shared responsibilities of all levels of Government. The Commonwealth's recent \$100 million family violence package included over \$17 million targeted to remote communities, but none of this will reach the majority of Aboriginal Victorians, who live in urban communities.

Likewise, early childhood, schooling, and tertiary education are shared responsibilities and this Government is working to ensure that proposals such as national reform in early childhood align with our vision for Victoria as the Education State. Adequate and sustainable Commonwealth funding must accompany any changes in responsibilities agreed between the States and the Commonwealth.



Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework Life Course Approach





A Commitment to Self-Determination

The Victorian Government continues to work bilaterally with the Commonwealth, and through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) process, to ensure that efforts are co-ordinated and consistent with the circumstances and needs of Aboriginal Victorians.

Partners

We will only be able to close the gap and improve outcomes if we work in partnership with Aboriginal communities. The Victorian Government has over successive years worked with key Aboriginal stakeholders to develop and implement strategies to achieve this. The Government is committed to expanding and strengthening partnerships to ensure we work with Aboriginal people to achieve better outcomes for individuals, families, and communities.

Local Aboriginal Networks

Since the establishment of what were originally called Local Indigenous Networks (LINs) in 2007, voluntary Aboriginal networks have grown steadily. There are now 39 Local Aboriginal Networks (LANs) across Victoria, with over 2,100 Aboriginal Victorians participating.

Each LAN sets local priorities and develops a community plan. LANs provide a safe and welcoming space for the Aboriginal community to connect, share, learn and lead. By promoting partnerships and collaborative action at a local level, LANs create the conditions in local communities to improve outcomes for Aboriginal people.



The LAN is a key element in paving the way for the generations to come. The LAN offers more than the social and community benefits. It can be a great place to get things done, like influencing organisations or getting projects happening. The LAN makes this easier due to the safe, encouraging, and supportive nature it informally creates.

SISSY AUSTIN, Ballarat LAN

The LAN has been a safe, neutral space for us to come together, which has significantly increased what we can do with our local community. It hasn't been hard to find out what priorities we have in common with the LAN. Working together we can achieve much more. We are going from strength to strength, which is benefitting our local Aboriginal community.

RAYLENE HARRADINE, Bendigo LAN and CEO of the Bendigo and District Aboriginal Co-operative



Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council

The Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council (VAHC) works with key partners to influence policy and build a better understanding and appreciation of Victoria's rich Aboriginal heritage. It consists of Victorian Traditional Owners with extensive knowledge and experience in Aboriginal cultural heritage management. The VAHC is established under the **Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006** to ensure Aboriginal people throughout Victoria play a central role in the protection and management of their heritage. One of their key functions is making decisions about Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP) applications.

Victoria currently has ten RAPs, which have significant statutory responsibilities in managing and protecting cultural heritage in their respective areas, including evaluation of Cultural Heritage Management Plans (CHMPs) and Cultural Heritage Permits. CHMPs provide a practical process for industry to manage the potential impact of any development on Aboriginal cultural heritage values effectively.



The VAHC's foremost priority has been engagement with Traditional Owner groups, the Office of Aboriginal Affairs Victoria (OAAV) and Museum Victoria to see the protection of Ancestral Remains and their return to their rightful place.

Other initiatives to promote awareness of Aboriginal cultural heritage have included submissions to 17 government reviews and critical partnership projects such as the Shared Values Project undertaken with the Heritage Council of Victoria.

The VAHC continued to proactively engage with RAPs, the Municipal Association of Victoria, the Metropolitan Planning Authority and Parks Victoria to seek opportunities for strengthening relationships between RAPs and government organisations in land management.

The VAHC made decisions on seven RAP applications (2014-15).

Over the next year, the VAHC will continue to deliver outcomes within its core functions, and work through outcomes from the review of the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 which are likely to expand the VAHC's functions in Aboriginal cultural heritage management and protection.

VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL HERITAGE COUNCIL



A Commitment to Self-Determination

Priorities and Investments

Self-Determination

Victoria has a proud history of Aboriginal community leadership. The Government wants to build on this. A key priority of this Government is supporting Aboriginal self-determination. The Government is listening to and working with the Victorian Aboriginal community on mechanisms to strengthen state-wide and regional engagement approaches.

The Government is establishing a new engagement framework with Aboriginal leaders to inform policy priorities and action, including:

- A **Premier's Gathering** with Aboriginal leaders, focussing on high-level strategic issues relating to the future of Aboriginal people in Victoria
- A new **Victorian Government Ministerial Forum**, held with Ministers across government and Aboriginal peak and state-wide service delivery agencies
- A new **Aboriginal Victoria Forum** with Traditional Owners, Registered Aboriginal Parties, Aboriginal community organisations, peak bodies, state-wide agencies, other representative groups and the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs.

The Government already has developed a number of strong partnerships with the Aboriginal community particularly in health (through **Koolin Balit: Victorian Government Strategic Directions in Aboriginal Health 2012-2022**), justice (through the Victorian

Aboriginal Justice Agreement) and family violence (through the **Indigenous Family Violence 10 Year Plan: Strong Culture, Strong Peoples and Strong Families: Towards a safer future for Indigenous families and communities**).

Each of these partnerships involves state-wide input from relevant Aboriginal peak bodies as well as local or regional Aboriginal representation. They often include regional committees and/or local action groups. These partnerships have been able to achieve state-wide reform and deliver culturally responsive services that reflect local needs. A key element in the success of improving access to services for Aboriginal people is through many of the partnerships that have developed between Aboriginal and mainstream organisations.

Aboriginal representatives also provide important input through a number of Government councils and committees - the Premier's Jobs and Investment Panel (PJIP), the Premier's Ice Action Taskforce, and the Minister for Families and Children's Advisory Committee for Children in Out-of-Home Care. In addition, the VAHC advises the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs on Aboriginal cultural heritage matters.

A key area of strengthening this is through developing the leadership capabilities of Victoria's Aboriginal young people. The Government will continue to support the significant role of the Koorie Youth Council in promoting the participation, skills and leadership capabilities of Aboriginal young people around the state.



Education

The development of an Aboriginal education strategy features in both the VAAF and the Victorian Aboriginal Economic Strategy 2013-2020 (VAES) and is a 2014 election commitment. The Department of Education and Training (DET), working in partnership with the OAAV and key Aboriginal organisations – VAEAI (Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated), VACCHO, and the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) - is developing a new Aboriginal Education Plan. VAEAI's regional structure, comprising 32 Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups across Victoria, ensures there will be state-wide Aboriginal community input into the development and implementation of the plan. The plan will ensure that Aboriginal Victorians benefit from the broader Victorian Government commitment to making Victoria the Education State.

Education and training are vital to achieving better life outcomes for all young people. The Victorian Government's Education State reform agenda focusses on creating the best educational opportunities and outcomes for Victorians. This includes specific effort for Aboriginal Victorians. Strong foundations in education and training are essential to ensuring Aboriginal people have increased choice and economic opportunities.



VAEAI holds a holistic philosophy on education and firmly believes that it is a lifelong process, placing the Koorie student at the centre of education policy and decision making.

This philosophy of Koorie education is a 'birth to death' process which calls for the provision of services that integrate all sectors of the education system, beginning from the provision of early childhood services right through to post-compulsory education and training, creating educational pathways into employment.

VAEAI recognises the influences of social and economic issues on the individual and the impact this has on the Koorie community. Economic and social disadvantage cannot be overcome without placing a firm emphasis on culturally-respectful and inclusive education. VAEAI believes that a cross-sectoral approach, where education works collaboratively across all sectors, as well as collaborating closely with health, housing and employment, is necessary for the social wellbeing and economic development of Koorie communities.

Neville Atkinson, Wurreker Manager
Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc



A Commitment to Self-Determination

Employment and Economic Participation

The Victorian Government's commitment to creating jobs and securing economic growth is especially relevant to the Victorian Aboriginal community where we know there are high levels of unemployment. The VAES provides a blueprint for ensuring Aboriginal Victorians benefit from broader economic and employment initiatives. The Victorian Government has committed \$4.5 million over four years to funding key initiatives under the VAES. This will enable the establishment of a Victorian Aboriginal Economic Board to facilitate industry employment and investment agreements and landmark projects that will increase the capacity of Aboriginal businesses. The Board will link to the PJIP, which is providing strategic advice to the Premier on driving economic growth and creating high-skill, high-wage jobs in Victoria. The VAES includes a commitment to leverage procurement processes to provide for growth in Aboriginal employment and supply chain opportunities for Aboriginal businesses. In addition, a Koori Business Strategy (KBS) is under development to promote the growth of small to medium Aboriginal enterprises.

Family Violence

The Victorian Government is committed to reducing the levels of family violence throughout the Victorian community. The appointment of the Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence and the establishment of the Royal Commission into Family Violence (RCFV) will focus efforts to improve systems and implement recommendations of the RCFV to reduce family violence. The Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum (IFVPPF) is working to address the impacts of family violence in the Aboriginal community. The Government has provided additional funding to assist with local efforts to reduce Aboriginal family violence, but will address this more comprehensively following the recommendations of the RCFV.

Child Protection and Out-of-Home Care

Family violence and other impacts of intergenerational disadvantage particularly affect young people, with some children entering the child protection system as a result. The rates at which Aboriginal children and young people are entering the child protection system are of particular concern. The Government and the Aboriginal Commissioner for Children and Young People are reviewing 1000 cases of Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care. The goals are to identify opportunities to reduce the number of Aboriginal children and young people in the child protection system and the length of time they spend there.



The Government also recently established an **Aboriginal Children's Forum** to develop strategies for the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people in, or at risk of entering, out-of-home care. Aboriginal Victorians are represented on the Expert Working Group for the system wide **Roadmap for Reform: Strong Families, Safe Children** project, which is looking to improve the Victorian child and family service system to help prevent neglect and abuse, intervene early, keep more families together through crises, and secure better futures for children.

Health

The Government continues with its focus on efforts to work with Aboriginal people to improve health and wellbeing outcomes, with major investment supporting the implementation of **Koolin Balit: Victorian Government Strategic Directions in Aboriginal Health 2012-2022 (Koolin Balit)** and ensuring mainstream service systems are responsive to Aboriginal peoples' needs. Improving Aboriginal health outcomes will also be considered through the Health 2040 work on the design of Victoria's future health system.

Victoria has a particularly unique partnership around health through the Victorian Advisory Council on Koori Health (VACKH). The partnership is significant as it brings together VACCHO and the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments to collaborate on efforts to improve Aboriginal health outcomes in Victoria.

Justice

The Government will continue to address the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the justice system through implementation of the **Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement (AJA)**, and with guidance from the **Aboriginal Justice Forum (AJF)**. The AJF oversees the delivery of AJA initiatives and supports agencies across the justice portfolio to provide more appropriate and responsive services to Aboriginal people.

Traditional Owners

Victoria's Traditional Owners continue to maintain strong connections to land and are actively involved in caring for country and managing and protecting Aboriginal cultural heritage. Aboriginal culture enriches all Victorians.

Recognising Victoria's Traditional Owners through reaching settlement agreements is a priority and the Government continues to negotiate with Traditional Owners to reach formal agreements. The Government is supporting the resolution of issues around Traditional Owner group membership and boundaries through the **Right People for Country (RPfC)** Program. These are sensitive issues and can take time to resolve.

The Victorian Government has boosted the ability of RAPs to function as viable organisations, given the important role they have in protecting and managing Aboriginal cultural heritage in this state.



A Commitment to Self-Determination

The Victorian Government is amending the **Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006** by strengthening some key elements of the Act including:

- introducing respectful processes for dealing with Aboriginal ancestral remains;
- improving the Act's transparency around determining when CHMPs are required;
- reducing red tape and improving relationships between public land managers and RAPs;
- improving the efficiency of RAP appointments processes;
- improving the enforceability of the Act; and
- increasing the transparency, accountability, and effectiveness of RAPs and the VAHC.

Stolen Generations

A higher proportion of Aboriginal people in Victoria have been directly affected by the Stolen Generation than any other state or territory. The Government continues to support the vital role Connecting Home plays in the provision of support services to members of the Stolen Generation as well as supporting the Koorie Heritage Trust to deliver the Koorie Family History Program.

LANs Five Year Plan

Into the future, LANs will continue to bring Aboriginal people together to set priorities, develop community plans, strengthen communities, and empower Aboriginal Victorians to participate in civic and community life. The Government is supporting the growth of these important community networks around the state. A key focus will be on implementing the **LAN Five Year Plan** for 2016-2020.

Reconciliation and Inclusion

The Victorian community has been increasingly active in supporting reconciliation. Reconciliation Victoria has played an important role in this. It supports a network of local reconciliation groups and provides advice to local government, community organisations and the corporate sector regarding the development of Reconciliation Action Plans. The Government continues to support Reconciliation Victoria in this important role. It has been fostering a better appreciation of Aboriginal history and supports building relationships between Aboriginal people and the wider community in Victoria.

The Victorian Government requires all departments to have Aboriginal Inclusion Action Plans showing the steps being taken to improve the access of Aboriginal people to services and government employment and procurement opportunities.



Machinery of government changes have meant that a number of departments have revised their plans to reflect the new administrative arrangements. The new Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) released their plan earlier in the year and the Departments of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) and Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources (DEDJTR) will release their plans in late 2015. As part of their ongoing commitment to Aboriginal inclusion, DET and the Department of Treasury and Finance (DTF) have released refreshed plans in 2015.

The Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) continues to action its plan, which was released in October 2014.

An evaluation of progress and achievements of Aboriginal inclusion planning will take place in 2016-17. Originally scheduled for 2015-2016, the evaluation was pushed back to allow the implementation of plans to progress and build momentum. The evaluation will assess progress and explore opportunities to strengthen the delivery of outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians.

Aboriginal Inclusion Plans

Department	Status
DEDJTR	New plan will be released in December 2015
DET	Wirnalung Ganai – Aboriginal Inclusion Plan 2015-17
DELWP	New Plan will be released in December 2015
DHHS	Moondani – Aboriginal Inclusion Action Plan 2015-2018
Department of Justice and Regulation (DJR)	Mingu Gadhaba, 'Beginning Together' – Koori Inclusion Action Plan (2012)
DPC	DPC Aboriginal Inclusion Action Plan 2014
DTF	DTF Aboriginal Employment and Inclusion Action Plan 2015-2018



A Commitment to Self-Determination

2015-16 Victorian Budget Initiatives

The Victorian Government made a major investment across the Aboriginal affairs portfolio in the 2015-16 Victorian Budget. The Government allocated \$30.2 million – more than seven times the level of funding provided in the previous year’s budget – to deliver on the following key initiatives:

- Aboriginal Leadership and Self-Determination - \$3.5 million over four years to deliver governance initiatives, support Aboriginal inclusion and reconciliation, and work with Aboriginal organisations and communities to invest in leadership initiatives.
- VAES - \$4.5 million over four years for the VAES to build job opportunities and investment.
- **Victorian Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Strategy** - \$20.9 million over four years to strengthen the protection and management of Aboriginal cultural heritage including supporting sustainable RAPs, strengthening the role of the VAHC and continuation of Certificate IV in Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Management and the RPfC Program.
- Reducing Aboriginal family violence - \$1.3 million in 2015-16 to reduce Aboriginal family violence, as part of a broader whole of government family violence package (funding after this date will be considered as part of the Government’s response to the RCFV).



Progress against Key Indicators



Progress against Key Indicators

COAG and the National Indigenous Reform Agreement

In 2011, COAG agreed that 'Closing the Gap' was a national priority for governments. Through the NIRA, national targets were set based on 2008 data. NIRA is a generation long commitment. Closing the gaps requires sustained effort to strengthen engagement with Aboriginal people and to ensure effective access to universal and targeted services delivered and/or funded by government.

The COAG targets are:

- Close the gap in life expectancy within a generation (by 2031).
- Halve the gap in mortality rates for Aboriginal children under five by 2018.
- Ensure access to early childhood education for all Aboriginal four year olds in remote communities by 2014.
- Halve the gap for Aboriginal students in reading, writing, and numeracy by 2018.
- Halve the gap for Aboriginal people aged 20-24 in year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates by 2020.
- Halve the gap in employment outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians by 2018.

In 2014, COAG agreed to a new target to close the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal school attendance by 2018.

Overview of Key Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework Indicators

The VAAF focusses on improving the life expectancy, wellbeing, economic participation, and quality of life of Aboriginal Victorians. It gives focus to Strategic Action Areas (SAAs) that are interconnected and directly link to the VAAF's holistic life course approach.

The SAAs are fundamental to closing the gap and creating the right environments for Aboriginal people to feel valued and culturally safe and to build prosperity for themselves, their families, and community.

Strong and achievable targets and measures for closing the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Victorians are set out in the VAAF.

As this Report shows, Victoria's progress in meeting targets and improving measures identified in the VAAF is mixed. These targets and measures have been agreed to as representing critical milestones that help indicate whether the gaps in outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people are closing. Some areas in this year's Report show strong improvements, while for others there has been no discernible improvement. Of particular concern however are the areas where the gap has increased and outcomes have worsened.



Over 2014-15, we have seen strong improvement in:

- Visits to Maternal and Child Health (MCH) services at the 12 month and 18 month key ages.
- Participation of Aboriginal four year olds in funded kindergarten programs.
- Year 7 to 12 and Year 10 to 12 apparent retention rates and Year 12 completion.
- Certificate III or higher completions.
- Aboriginal smoking and alcohol-related emergency department presentations.
- Closing the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal rates of youth justice supervision.

Other areas have shown slow improvement or minimal change, including:

- Perinatal mortality.
- Aboriginal babies born with a birth weight below 2500 grams.
- NAPLAN performance across reading, writing, and numeracy.
- School attendance.

Areas for significant concern, where outcomes have worsened include:

- Visits to MCH services at the 2 week, 8 week, and 4 month key ages.
- Rates of Aboriginal Victorians that are overweight and obese.
- Self-harm related emergency department presentations.
- Homelessness.

- Rates of child protection substantiations and Aboriginal children in and out-of-home care.
- Family violence.
- Rates of adult justice supervision.
- Aboriginal people returning to prison within two years of their release.

Aboriginal Population

According to the most recent Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) estimates from 2014, there are over 51,000 Aboriginal people living in Victoria, representing 0.9 per cent of the state's population. Victoria's Aboriginal population continues to grow at a faster rate than Victoria's overall population. It has increased 41 per cent between the 2006 and 2011 Census. The rise in the Aboriginal population in Victoria is due to higher birth rates, and the work undertaken at community level by the ABS to increase the number of people identifying as Aboriginal by the ABS

Just over half of Aboriginal Victorians live in regional and rural areas and just under half in metropolitan areas.

The Aboriginal population is much younger than the non-Aboriginal population. The average age of Victoria's Aboriginal population is 22 years, compared with an average age of 37 years among the non-Aboriginal population. Almost 60 per cent of Victoria's Aboriginal population is aged 25 or younger, compared to 32 per cent of Victoria's non-Aboriginal population.



Progress against Key Indicators

A life expectancy estimate is not available for Victorian Aboriginal people from the ABS. The national gap in estimated life expectancy is 10.6 years for men and 9.6 years for women.

Aboriginal Victorians have remained strong and resilient despite the impacts of past practices and policies of removal and family separation, which have had long-lasting and intergenerational impacts on individuals, families, and communities.

Maternal and Early Childhood Health and Early Years



VAAF SAA 1 Maternal health and early childhood health and development

The first years of life are critical in establishing health and developmental platforms for young people. All children deserve a great start in life and the opportunity to fulfil their potential, regardless of background or circumstances. The health of mothers and babies during pregnancy and in early childhood, and access to quality early childhood education, can have a far-reaching effect on children’s survival, development, and wellbeing well into adult years.

Improving Aboriginal infant survival and health

VAAF Targets

By 2023, close the gap in the perinatal mortality rate

By 2023, close the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal babies with a birth weight below 2500 grams

VAAF Measures

The rate of reported smoking use in pregnancy by mothers of Aboriginal babies

The proportion of Aboriginal children attending MCH services at key age milestones

The perinatal mortality rate for babies of Aboriginal mothers has ranged from a low of 10.7 per 1,000 births in 2011 to a high of 20.7 in 2013 and the gap between rates for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal mothers has widened in that time from 3.9 in 2011



to 13.5 in 2013. This data should be treated with caution – 2011 being an atypical year – and numbers can vary significantly between years due to the small numbers of Aboriginal perinatal deaths each year. The average gap between 2008 and 2013 was 10.5. The measure also fails to take into account Aboriginal babies born of an Aboriginal father and non-Aboriginal mother.

The percentage of all Aboriginal babies with a birth weight below 2500 grams was 11.1 per cent in 2013. It has ranged from a low of 10.6 per cent in 2010 to a high of 12.1 in 2011. Between 2010 and 2013, the gap between rates for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal babies has widened very slightly, from 4.1 in 2010 to 4.7 in 2013. This data should be treated with caution as numbers can vary significantly between years and the longer term trend is positive.

Smoking during pregnancy increases the risks of a wide range of problems including miscarriage, premature labour, low birth weight, increased infection and long-term health problems as adults¹. The percentage of all Aboriginal women smoking in the first 20 weeks of pregnancy has ranged from a low of 39.5 per cent in 2011 to a high of 41.7 in 2013. Between 2011 and 2013, the gap between rates for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women smoking in the first 20 weeks of pregnancy has widened, from 28.4 percentage points in 2011 to 31.6 percentage points in 2013. This is because while the overall

Aboriginal rate has been stable, the rate for non-Aboriginal women is gradually decreasing.

Aboriginal families continue to use the universal MCH service less than non-Aboriginal families. Over 2013-14, there was a 7.2 percentage point decrease in the gap in participation at the 18 month consultation and a 6.1 percentage point decrease at the 12 month consultation. However, the gap widened by an average of 2.7 percentage points at the 2 week, 8 week, and 4 month consultations. This highlights the need to secure better performance by MCH providers in improving access to services.

MCH services to Aboriginal Victorians are provided through a mix of universal platforms and specialist Aboriginal services that both augment access to the universal platforms and provide culturally secure services to children, pregnant women, and families.

The 14 Koori Maternity Service (KMS) programs (located in Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations and public hospitals) have had a vital role in providing a wide range of complementary health and social services to Aboriginal people and their families. Data shows that the number of women attending the program for antenatal and postnatal care continues to increase each year. In 2014, the KMS program supported more than 40 per cent of all Aboriginal women who gave birth in Victoria. More than 45 per cent of these women presented for care at the gestational age of less

¹ Hofhuis, W., de Jongste, J.C. and P.J.F.M Merkus, (2003), 'Adverse health effects of prenatal and postnatal tobacco smoke exposure on children', *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, vol 88, no 12, pp. 1086-1090.



Progress against Key Indicators

than 13 weeks. This shows that the KMS program is successfully engaging Aboriginal women in antenatal care early in their pregnancy, which has been shown to be a significant factor in reducing preterm birth and low birth weight².

DET continues to explore and address the barriers experienced by Aboriginal families and ways to support better engagement with MCH services. A review of Aboriginal participation in MCH was undertaken to find out the reasons for lower participation by Aboriginal parents, and specifically whether it is barriers to access that cause lower participation, or rather choice of options offered by other providers. DET is now developing a 10 year early childhood development reform plan as part of the Education State framework, which will prioritise strengthening universal provision, including growing the capacity of universal services to respond to the needs of Aboriginal people.

DET has also provided a suite of professional development opportunities to MCH nurses, including a state-wide MCH conference on identifying and supporting vulnerable families.

DHHS is developing KMS program guidelines, which will support the continued improvement of all Victorian KMS sites to ensure access to and uptake of high-quality maternity care, to improve maternal and neonatal outcomes, and ensure KMS meets the needs of the community now and in future.

Increasing Aboriginal kindergarten participation

VAAF Targets

By 2014, the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal 4 year old children having access to a high quality kindergarten program will be closed

VAAF Measures

The number of Aboriginal 3 year old children participating in a kindergarten program

The percentage of Aboriginal four year olds participating in a funded kindergarten program was 79.6 per cent in 2014. It has ranged from a low of 59 per cent in 2007 to a high of 81.6 per cent in 2012. The average number of hours that Aboriginal children are spending at kindergarten has risen from 11.8 in 2012 to 14.3 hours per week in 2014. A gap remains between the kindergarten participation of Aboriginal four year olds and non-Aboriginal four year olds; however, this gap is decreasing (from 19.2 percentage points in 2013 to 16.8 percentage points in 2014). While this is positive, it is notable that the VAAF target to close the gap by 2014 has not been achieved. Consideration will be given to whether a new target should be set, and how to continue the work of closing the gap, as part of the development of the new Aboriginal Education Plan.

² Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council. (2012). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework 2012 Report. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.



2014 saw a significant increase in the number of Aboriginal three year old children enrolled in kindergarten, with 462 enrolments, compared with 329 enrolments in 2013. The growth in the number of three year old Aboriginal children in kindergarten is not reflected in the participation rate due to the re-based ABS Aboriginal population data. The participation rate of three year old Aboriginal children attending kindergarten in 2014 is 37.1 per cent.

The evidence indicates that children participating in kindergarten are better placed to transition to, and prosper in, primary school and subsequent education³. The Victorian Government continues to support access of three and four year old Aboriginal children to kindergarten. In addition to the universal kindergarten system, and 'enhanced' services targeting vulnerable children, DET delivers fee subsidies for Aboriginal children to access free three and four year old kindergarten programs and a number of Aboriginal specific programs, including:

- The **In-Home Support Program** which assists Aboriginal families to strengthen their parenting capacity and improve the health, learning, and wellbeing of Aboriginal children aged zero to three years.

- The **Home-Based Learning Program** which assists Aboriginal families to build positive home learning environments for children aged three to five years, and supports parents as the primary educators for their children to increase the chances of successful kindergarten and early school experiences. DET runs both the **Home-Based Learning and In-home Support Programs** in partnership with VAEAI.
- The **Koorie Kids Shine** campaign, which focuses on getting more Aboriginal children to start three and four year old kindergarten. The campaign includes direct engagement with local government and support services in areas with higher numbers of Aboriginal families.
- The **Aboriginal Best Start Program**, run in partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Agency Ltd. (VACSAL), which provides access to child and family support, health services and early education, and parenting support.

DET's Koorie Education Workforce (KEW) is working with early years' services to support increased participation in early years' programs and transition to school. The KEW facilitates culturally appropriate engagement between Aboriginal children and young people, their families, early childhood services, and schools.

³ Hirst, M., Jervis, N., Visagie, K., Sojo, V. and Cavanagh, S. (2011). Transition to primary school: a review of the literature. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

Progress against Key Indicators

Education and Training



VAAF SAA 2 Education and training

Successful education and training outcomes enable more Aboriginal Victorians to have increased choice, economic opportunity, and healthier and more prosperous lives. We need to ensure that all learners have opportunities to succeed, irrespective of their circumstances.

The Government has committed to Victoria becoming the Education State and DET is working with the Aboriginal community (through VAEAI, VACCHO, and VACCA) to develop an Aboriginal Education Plan, which will ensure Aboriginal

Victorians can fully benefit from the Education State reforms.

As part of developing the plan, DET convened a Roundtable on Aboriginal Education in July 2015, which was attended by the Deputy Premier and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, along with Aboriginal community organisations, education experts, service providers, and Victorian Aboriginal community representatives.

Key features of the new plan will include:

- an ambitious, 20 year vision combined with clear actions in the short-to-medium term;
- a life-course approach that addresses engagement with education throughout life, from birth through adulthood;
- actions based on meaningful sustained partnership between government and Aboriginal communities; and
- drawing out the benefits of the Education State reforms for Aboriginal people, taking a whole-of-government approach and ensuring mainstream reforms appropriately highlight the importance of Aboriginal culture, people, and education in Victoria.



Improving literacy and numeracy in Years 3, 5, 7, and 9 for Aboriginal students

VAAF Targets

By 2018, halve the gap for Aboriginal students in reading, writing, and numeracy

VAAF Measures

Retention of Aboriginal students to Year 10

School attendance rates for Aboriginal students

The number of Aboriginal students enrolled in Victorian schools continues to increase, with 13,004 students in 2014 (up from 12,139 in 2013). Students were dispersed across over 1,600 government, Catholic, and independent schools, with around 85 per cent of Aboriginal students in Victoria attending government schools.

In 2014, Victorian Aboriginal students continued to perform above the national average for Aboriginal students in NAPLAN achievement. However, between 2008 and 2014, NAPLAN performance of Victorian Aboriginal students across the majority of domains and year levels remained relatively unchanged, indicating we must do more to close the gap, which in 2014 ranged from a low of 7.1 for Year 3 writing (persuasive) to a high of 23.7 for Year 9.

Aboriginal students in Victoria have a higher absenteeism rate than the average for all students, at all year levels. There has been little change in the attendance gap over the last seven years. The Aboriginal primary school absence rate is around 80 per cent higher (25 days) than the all student

average (14 days), and the Year 9 Aboriginal absence rate is around 86 per cent higher.

Apparent retention rates are calculated as the number of full-time school students in Year 10 or 12 as a percentage of their respective cohort at the commencement of secondary schooling at Year 7. The Year 7 to 10 apparent retention rate for Aboriginal students decreased from 104.3 per cent in 2013 to 98.5 per cent in 2014; however, the general trend since 2005 has been upwards and has remained stable at almost 100 per cent over the last few years. The Year 7 to 12 apparent retention rate continued to increase (from 55.1 per cent in 2013 to 60.5 per cent in 2014), as did the rate for Year 10 to 12 (from 58.0 per cent in 2013 to 60.3 per cent in 2014).

DET is targeting learning of core literacy and numeracy skills, lifting school attendance, and increasing engagement as areas where specific initiatives can augment system capacity through:

- The **Early Years Koorie Literacy and Numeracy Program**, which is available for all Aboriginal students in Prep to Year 3 who require additional support in literacy and numeracy to meet expected levels.
- A state-wide KEW – more than 120 across the state working with schools and early years providers to support systemic change through cultural inclusion initiatives, strengthening school–community partnerships, and supporting schools to promote pathways.



Progress against Key Indicators

- Five Clontarf Academies (Bairnsdale, Mildura, Swan Hill, Robinvale, and Warrnambool) and three Wannik Dance Academies (Ballarat, Mooroopna and Eaglehawk) to boost school attendance and learning outcomes by developing students' self-esteem and positive attitudes.
- The Koorie Academy of Excellence pilot program in North West Victoria Region (metropolitan area), which brings together students to experience leadership, cultural, and social activities.
- Professional learning for school leaders in developing a culturally inclusive school in partnership with their local Aboriginal community. In 2013 and 2014, more than 100 school leaders took part in these programs.

In 2014, COAG agreed to a new target to close the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal school attendance by 2018 and agreed to develop attendance specific strategies where attendance is below 80 per cent. DET commenced this on a school-by-school basis for schools with more than ten Aboriginal students and average attendance below 80 per cent.

Increasing the proportion of Aboriginal young people aged 20-24 who have completed at least Year 12 or equivalent

VAAF Targets

By 2020, halve the gap between the Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal 20-24 year olds

VAAF Measures

The rate of transition of Aboriginal young people aged 18-24 years to employment and/or further education

The number of Aboriginal people aged 20-65 with or working towards post school qualifications in Certificate III or above

The number of Aboriginal students who completed Year 12 or equivalent increased in 2014, with Year 12 completion in the school sector reaching a record 512, up from 380 in 2013. The number of Aboriginal students completing Year 12 or equivalent in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector (aged 19 and below) reached 352 in 2014, up from 317 in 2013. The number of Aboriginal students aged 20-64 years who completed a Certificate III or higher qualification reached 841 in 2014, an increase of 206 based on the 2013-reported number of 635.

Twenty-one Koorie Liaison Officers are working with TAFE and dual sector institutes to provide advice on training pathways and mentoring and cultural support as required and eight Wurreker Brokers are facilitating Aboriginal community engagement with training providers and industry. There are also Wannik Education Scholarships for high achieving Aboriginal students studying Years 11 and 12 in Victorian government schools, with 127 scholarships awarded since 2009. In addition, there is fee support for Aboriginal learners in government-subsidised training and a 1.5 loading to VET providers enrolling Aboriginal learners through the Victorian Training Guarantee.



Economic Participation



VAAF SAA 3 Economic participation

Increasing the number and range of opportunities for Aboriginal Victorians to secure jobs or to operate business enterprises builds economic wealth, increases social participation and strengthens the Victorian economy generally.

Increasing Aboriginal labour force participation

VAAF Targets

By 2018, halve the gap in employment outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Victorians as measured by:

Employment to population ratio,
for 15 to 64 years old

Unemployment rate

Labour force participation rate

VAAF Measures

The proportion of Aboriginal people in various income bands

The representation of Aboriginal people on boards and committees

The Aboriginal unemployment rate has increased between 2008 (15.5 per cent) to 2012-13 (18.6 per cent). While the labour force participation rate has increased slightly from 2008 (58.6 per cent) to 2012-13 (59.9 per cent), the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participation has increased from 6.6 percentage points to 19.8 percentage points.

The employment to population ratio for Aboriginal Victorians has slightly improved from 2011 (48.2 per cent) to 2012-13 (48.7 per cent). However, the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people for employment to population ratio for working age Victorians has increased from 2008 (12.7 per cent) to 2012-13 (27.8 per cent).



Progress against Key Indicators

Census 2011 data also shows that Aboriginal people are continuing to earn less than their non-Aboriginal counterparts do, with only 22 per cent earning over \$800 a week (compared to 40 per cent of the non-Aboriginal population).

Aboriginal people represent 1.2 per cent of members on Victorian Government boards and committees.

The VAES provides the policy platform to increase Aboriginal employment and business growth. The 2015-16 State Budget allocated \$4.5 million over four years to create the soon to be formed Victorian Aboriginal Economic Board (the Board), a key component of the VAES. The Board will broker industry-wide agreements and facilitate landmark projects that secure economic outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians.

The Board will engage the private and philanthropic sectors to support initiatives that will build Aboriginal employment and enterprise. Its members will comprise business leaders in the Aboriginal community and those linked to key industries and sectors across the economy. The Board will connect with the PJIP to leverage their goals to drive economic growth and create high-skill, high-wage jobs in Victoria.

During 2014-15, the **Employment Start Up for Indigenous Jobseekers (ESIJ)** Program achieved 156 employment outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians (with a minimum of 16 weeks employment). The ESIJ Employment Network met regularly throughout 2014-15. The role of the network is to enable employment program providers to support

one another, to leverage off each other and build industry links, and to build their capacity and knowledge of Aboriginal Victoria.

The **Aboriginal Business Advisors Program** concluded in 2015. The Program engaged with 400 Aboriginal businesses providing a range of services including business coaching, business support, leadership development, events, and networking. Achievements included 350 hours of business coaching to 50 Aboriginal businesses, four networking events, and a pilot Leadership Development Program for Aboriginal business leaders.

Work commenced in June on a review of Victorian Government employment and employment-related programs to inform the design of a whole-of-government employment policy and program framework. This work is expected to be completed by the end of 2015 and will contribute to the 2016-17 Budget process.

The Victorian Government has committed to developing a Koori Business Strategy (KBS). This will improve the accessibility and appropriateness of business support, enhance the profile of the Aboriginal business sector, and strengthen entrepreneurial culture and business experience among Aboriginal Victorians. The KBS will be finalised in 2016.

The Victorian Government is investigating the development of a procurement policy to further support the growth of Aboriginal businesses.



Increasing workforce participation by Aboriginal people in the public sector

VAAF Targets

By 2018, employment of Aboriginal people in the Victorian public service will increase to 1% of total employees

The Victorian Public Service (VPS) continues to employ the highest number of Aboriginal people (322 employees or 0.8 per cent of its workforce in 2015) compared to the wider public sector. Overall numbers have remained steady in recent years, although they vary between agencies.

In the broader public sector, relatively high numbers of Aboriginal employees are found in public health care (168 employees or 0.2 per cent of the workforce) and government schools (179 employees or 0.3 per cent of the workforce).

The Victorian Public Sector Commission's newly created Aboriginal Employment Unit (AEU) will have a central role in driving action to improve Aboriginal employment outcomes within the VPS and across the public sector.

The AEU will establish and promote strategic initiatives to increase the number of Aboriginal employees and leaders across the Victorian public sector and to support the career development and progression of Aboriginal employees. The Unit will develop a cadetship and scholarship program for Aboriginal undergraduate students and career development and progression initiatives for Aboriginal employees.

The DJR Koori Employment Strategy aims to ensure that at least 2.5 per cent of its workforce is Aboriginal – to date, over 1.7 per cent of the department's staff are Aboriginal. One of the key Aboriginal employment pathways under this strategy includes the Department's Koori Graduate Development Scheme (KGRADS). In 2014, the DJR placed two Aboriginal graduates under the KGRADS program. During 2015 the DJR placed a further three Aboriginal graduates under the scheme. Out of the five graduates placed during 2014-2015, four are still currently employed by the department.

DHHS is developing an Aboriginal Recruitment and Retention Strategy. The department provides three fully-funded places for Aboriginal staff in each year's intake of the Graduate Certificate in Public Sector Management. The Graduate Certificate offers targeted leadership development activities for Aboriginal staff with leadership potential.



Evidence regarding the importance of economic independence for Aboriginal people clearly states that economic independence combined with meeting cultural aspirations is the underlying necessity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to achieve real self-determination and real participation in the wider Australian community.

Continued next page

Progress against Key Indicators

Continued from previous page

As Australia's original innovators, we can use businesses as a vehicle to create the same opportunities without being made the same.

We are developing (support the development of) capabilities to participate across the whole of the economy, from family focused businesses to international global economies. Whether it is in employment or business, we should not be 'pigeon holed' into particular industries or jobs, but given support to really push the boundaries into whatever sector, industry or job we may choose to have a go at.

Our people are entrepreneurial in their thinking and actions; we are capable of being leaders in whichever field we choose. We want to support people exercise their choices – to be in charge of the goals they set for their own futures. It is incumbent on the rest of us, that being community, private sector and government, to help fulfil that goal.

KAREN MILWARD, Chair
Kinaway Aboriginal Chamber of Commerce

Health



VAAF SAA 4 Health, housing and well-being

A healthy start to life and accessible health services are important for a person's health, wellbeing, and overall quality of life. The creation of DHHS in January 2015 allows integration of policy and service delivery across diverse portfolio areas and establishes a holistic framework addressing both the underlying social determinants of health and wellbeing and improved responses. DHHS has actively embraced self-determination and collaborative working relationships with the Aboriginal community and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) in the co-design of policies and programs through



Regional Aboriginal Health Committees to identify local issues and develop local responses. DHHS comes together with VACCHO and the Commonwealth Government through VACKH to develop a coordinated approach on strategic and systemic issues.

Koolin Balit continues to underpin the work being done across Victoria to improve Aboriginal health, supported by a \$61.7 million investment over four years from 2013-14. There are a range of projects and programs across the state, many building on initiatives first developed under Closing the Health Gap. These projects are being implemented by ACCHOs and by a range of mainstream services in partnerships. As this continues, DHHS is strengthening the focus across the social determinants of health and reflecting the Government’s commitment to self-determination. The development of Victoria’s new 10 Year Mental Health Plan included engagement with Aboriginal people to provide input into what needs to be in the strategy for it to have an impact.

A number of evaluations of key **Koolin Balit** initiatives are in place, focused on accountability, improvement, and capacity building. DHHS has commissioned external evaluations in four priority areas: the Gathering Place Model; the impacts of Aboriginal health workforce development; case management and care coordination models; and improving cultural responsiveness in hospitals. These evaluations are occurring simultaneously with program-level evaluations of **Koolin Balit**.

Improving the health status of Aboriginal Victorians

VAAF Targets

By 2031, close the gap in the proportion of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Victorians that report their health status as ‘excellent or very good’

By 2031, close the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal adults reporting ‘high or very high’ levels of psychological distress

By 2023, the proportion of Aboriginal adults who are current smokers will reduce to 21%

VAAF Measures

The proportion of Aboriginal adults who are obese

The rate of self-harm among Aboriginal people

The rate of harmful alcohol consumption among Aboriginal Victorians

The VAAF targets on self-reported physical and psychological health status and measures refer to data collected through the Victorian Population Health Survey (VPHS). The VPHS has had a declining Aboriginal sample size due to the survey methodology requiring the use of landline telephone numbers in order to obtain geographical information. To improve on this, DHHS has now secured access to ABS data which can provide similar information, however this data is subject to limitations, particularly regarding comparisons between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

The percentage of Aboriginal people aged 15 years and older who are current smokers has



Progress against Key Indicators

decreased from 47.6 in 2008 to 40.8 in 2012, but the percentage of Aboriginal Victorians aged 15 years and older who are overweight and obese has increased from 48 per cent in 2004-05 to 64.4 per cent 2012-13. While this is a matter for concern, it is consistent with an increase in those rates for non-Aboriginal Victorians and a broader worldwide trend.

The rate of self-harm related emergency department presentations per 1,000 population for Aboriginal Victorians was 5.96 in 2013-14. The rate has ranged from a low of 3.01 to 2005-06 to 6.00 in 2012-13. Between 2005-06 and 2013-14, the gap in the rate between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Victorians has widened from 1.71 in 2005-06 to 4.53 in 2013-14.

The rate of alcohol-related emergency department presentations per 1,000 population for Aboriginal Victorians was 10.55 in 2012-13. The rate has ranged from a low of 10.06 in 2005-06 to a high of 14.73 in 2010-11, from which time it has steadily decreased. Between 2005-06 and 2012-13, the rate for non-Aboriginal Victorians has remained stable and as a result, the gap in the rate between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Victorians has increased very slightly but the general trend has been that the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Victorians is decreasing. While the 2012-13 rate is the lowest rate since 2006-07, both this and the self-harm rate for Aboriginal Victorians are still four times that of the rate of non-Aboriginal people.

Another measure of Aboriginal health and wellbeing that is not included in the VAAF is the rate of admissions to hospital for chronic ambulatory care sensitive conditions, such as asthma, diabetes complications, hypertension, and nutritional deficiencies. A decrease in this rate indicates improved prevention and primary care measures. While the data suggest that there is currently no significant gap in the rate between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Victorians, this is a very indirect measure of prevention and primary care. Changes in disease coding practice and a revised estimate of the Victorian Aboriginal population may have been factors. It will be necessary to observe future trends.

The establishment of **Working Together for Health** partnerships in Loddon Mallee and Gippsland will develop state-wide improvements to prevention and early-detection.

DHHS is implementing a number of initiatives in prevention and population health in relation to Aboriginal people, led by or in partnership with VACCHO and others. These include: an Aboriginal radio advertisement developed to align with the broader **LiveLighter** anti-obesity campaign; an Aboriginal television and online advertisement as part of the **Rethink Sugary Drinks** campaign; provision of rescued fresh healthy produce to community members; the development of case studies in **Sharing the Track to Good Tucker**; and the development of healthy catering policies in ACCHOs and Aboriginal early childhood centres.



Under the **Koolin Balit Aboriginal Health Workforce Plan**, DHHS is delivering 120 training grants; implementing **32 Aboriginal Employment Plans** in Victorian Public Health Services; expanding the **Aboriginal Nursing, Midwifery and Allied Health Cadetship** program to 60 places; establishing the **Aboriginal Nursing and Midwifery Graduate** program; and establishing the **Human Resources in ACCHOs Capacity Project**. Aboriginal employment in Victorian public hospitals has increased from 74 people in 2011 to 168 people in 2014. Quality of Care Reports from health services also show a growing diversification of career paths for Aboriginal employees beyond the traditional Aboriginal Health Liaison Officer role.

Along with the Aboriginal specific health service system, Aboriginal Victorians rely upon access to state supplied mainstream services – community and hospital. DHHS will continue to work with mainstream services to ensure they provide culturally safe and responsive services. The 2013-14 Quality of Care Reports showed increased reporting on Aboriginal health within Victorian health services compared to previous years. They included many case studies of success in engaging directly with the Aboriginal community through a range of one-off and systemic mechanisms. A key element of success in improving outcomes for Aboriginal people is nurturing effective partnerships between Aboriginal and mainstream organisations. This has been central to Victoria's approach.

Aboriginal organisations are integral to good health for Aboriginal people, but there is a critical role for culturally responsive mainstream services to provide choice of service provision and services that are more geographically widespread and generally offer a broader range of specialist services.

Progress against Key Indicators

Housing and Disability



VAAF SAA 4 Health, housing and well-being

Homelessness and access to disability services are both VAAF measures, recognising the importance of sustainable housing and access to disability support to ensuring social inclusion and wellbeing.

Decreasing the proportion of Aboriginal Victorians who are homeless

VAAF Measure

The proportion of Aboriginal Victorians who are homeless

Census data shows that Aboriginal Victorians experience homelessness at over five times the rate of non-Aboriginal people, and the Report on Government Services (ROGS) 2015 shows that Aboriginal Victorians access homelessness services at almost eight times the rate.

Access to safe, stable, and affordable housing is vital if we are to achieve improved outcomes. Between 2006 and 2011, the number of Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness increased by 30 per cent (in-line with the increase in the number of all homeless people in Victoria, which increased by 30.9 per cent) although the rate increased only slightly, from 21.2 to 21.9 per 1000.

DHHS is developing options to improve the service response to people experiencing homelessness and housing need. The department has provided \$16.8 million available under the **National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing** to 15 Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) managing 383 properties across the state. DHHS provides funding to deliver new capital, upgrades, repairs, and maintenance as well as to build organisational capacity to manage their housing portfolio. A forum, the first such in more than a decade, was held in October 2015 to promote



a common approach to program implementation and to provide an opportunity for organisations to share information, develop skills, and build capacity.

DHHS administrative data indicates that the proportion of Aboriginal households in public housing increased in the two years to June 2015 from 2.8 per cent to 3.3 per cent of all tenancies (around 2,060 households). The number of Aboriginal households on the public housing waiting list increased, from 1,594 to 1,859 households. At the same time, there has been significant reduction in arrears owed by Aboriginal tenants, falling from 15.6 to 8.4 days rent in the two years to June 2015. This reflects a stronger emphasis on early intervention in the arrears cycle. DHHS is working with community sector housing and homelessness organisations to progress a statewide housing register to simplify access to social housing and improve the transparency and accountability of allocations. This will provide a better understanding of true demand from Aboriginal households. There may be a high number of applicants in common across public housing and community housing waiting lists, including that of Aboriginal Housing Victoria (AHV).

AHV owns and manages around 1,500 properties, providing housing to nearly 4,000 people, representing 8 per cent of Aboriginal Victorians. The Government made an election commitment to review the status of Director of Housing owned properties managed by AHV with a view to transferring the title of those properties to AHV. Greater self-determination over Aboriginal housing

is a goal shared by AHV and the Government. DHHS and OAAV are currently working with AHV to review properties and assess the implications of any potential staged transfer of title.

Increasing the proportion of Aboriginal people with a disability who are accessing services

VAAF Measure

.....
The proportion of Aboriginal people with a disability receiving service
.....

Between 2007-08 and 2013-14, the number of Aboriginal people with a disability receiving disability services has declined from 1,242 to 816 and Aboriginal recipients as a proportion of all people receiving a disability service has declined from 2.7 per cent (2007-08) to 1.6 per cent (2013-14). DHHS advises that this may be partly due to the correction of inaccurate data. There are encouraging signs from the Barwon National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) trial site, where there has been a growing number of Aboriginal people accessing the NDIS. At 30 June 2015, 2 per cent or 87 of the 4,392 people with approved plans identified as Aboriginal. The Barwon trial site has focussed on building Aboriginal community knowledge and participation and strengthening the capacity of Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative.

Balit Narrum, an Aboriginal disability network in the northeast Melbourne area, is delivering good results and has enabled coordination across disability and Aboriginal service sectors. Current service users



Progress against Key Indicators

are sharing their positive experiences via yarning circles across communities to encourage others to access disability related supports. Planning, engagement, active outreach, culturally supportive pathways and prioritisation of Aboriginal clients by disability services has seen a doubling in the uptake of disability support packages by Aboriginal people (from 25 packages provided in 2012 to 49 packages in 2014-15). Other examples of good practice include:

- **Let's Yarn Disability** workshops in Wodonga leading to Mungabareena Aboriginal Cooperative supported play group.
- Rumbalara autism family support group and the development of a story book on autism "Djarmbi the Different Kind of Kookaburra".
- Aboriginal **MyTime** Groups and holiday respite program framed around culture delivered through local government with Home and Community Care funding.
- VAEAI's **Koorie Kids with Special Needs** Radio program.

DHHS will draw on these and other emerging projects in 2016 to inform practice approaches across Victoria, in particular the rollout of the NDIS.

The Office for Disability has engaged Aboriginal people with a disability about their experiences to assist in monitoring the progress of the 2013-2016 Victorian State Disability Plan (SDP) and in early engagement for the next SDP 2017-2020. Feedback suggests that, like other Victorians with a disability, Aboriginal people with a disability are concerned about access to social and economic opportunities.

DHHS will use this information to help inform directions for the next SDP. Funding for the **Rights Information Advocacy Centre** has enabled an Aboriginal advocate to support 70 Aboriginal people in Greater Shepparton, Moira, Strathbogie, Mitchell, and Murrindindi Shires.



The **Aborigines Advancement League** in partnership with DHHS established the **Balit Narrum Disability Committee**. The Committee was established to bring together representatives of any organisation or agency in the North East Metropolitan Region that offer a Disability service. The Committee has successfully held yarning circles for carers of people with a disability and are in the process of holding a forum. Some of the successes of the Committee include working with the Special Schools to find out the numbers of Aboriginal children with a Disability in the schools, providing information to carers of people with a disability, giving committee members an opportunity for networking with organisations and agencies working in the same space, talking to the Department of Education and Training about the need for a KESO [Koorie Engagement Support Officer] to be involved with schools that have children with a disability (this has happened with a KESO being placed in the Special School for a term) and promoting the disability needs of Aboriginal clients.

ESME BAMBLETT, CEO
ABORIGINES ADVANCEMENT LEAGUE INC.



Child Protection and Out-of-Home Care



VAAF SAA 1 Maternal health and early childhood health and development

The Victorian Government is committed to improving outcomes for vulnerable Aboriginal children and young people, with the understanding that Aboriginal communities best know the challenges they face and how to provide effective prevention and early intervention. The Government supports the principle that Aboriginal children be placed with Aboriginal carers where possible and ensuring Aboriginal children in out-of-home care remain connected to community and culture.

Reducing the rate of Aboriginal child protection substantiations

VAAF Target

By 2023, the gap in the rate of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal child protection substantiations will be reduced by 75%

The rate per 1,000 children (0-17 years) for Aboriginal child protection substantiations has ranged from a low of 36.2 in 2009-10 to 60.3 in 2013-14. Between 2009-10 and 2013-14, the gap between rates for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children has widened from 31.4 in 2009-10 to 52.2 in 2013-14. Factors contributing to the increase in the substantiation rate include family violence, alcohol and drug misuse, mental health issues, and intellectual disability. Victorian Government reforms that support increased reporting of child neglect or abuse and family violence are also likely to have contributed to the increase. So too the higher rates of poverty and disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal communities as compared to the general population - attributed to the impacts of colonisation, policies of forced child removal, and discrimination - contribute to the vulnerability of Aboriginal children and their poorer life outcomes. ROGS data indicates that the average placement rate for Aboriginal children in out-of-home care in Victoria is 62.7 per 1,000, compared to 5.1 per 1,000 for non-Aboriginal children. This is too high.



Progress against Key Indicators

About three quarters of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care have had a health assessment in the last six months, and these show a range of health concerns, particularly in oral health and mental health.

The increasing rate of Aboriginal children in Victoria's child protection system and out-of-home care is a major concern and assertive action is being undertaken to address this over-representation. In response to concerns regarding the over-representation of Aboriginal children in the system, the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People and the Secretary of DHHS commenced the **Taskforce 1000** initiative in late 2014. The Taskforce is reviewing the circumstances of the approximately 1,000 Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care. Consisting of a detailed file audit and survey of each child's history and the convening of area based multi-disciplinary panels to provide advice and guidance to case managers, the initiative culminates in the development of 17 area based reports detailing systemic actions to be taken to improve responses. A state-wide report will also be tabled by the Commissioner following finalisation of the area reviews in early 2016.

The Taskforce initiative has developed a rich and detailed understanding of the reasons children are entering care, the circumstances and needs of Aboriginal children in care and the strategies to improve outcomes for these children. The data gathered across life domains will provide invaluable information against which planning and program development can be strengthened.

Taskforce 1000 reviews to date show that: the majority of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care are not placed with an Aboriginal carer; consultation with the **Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice Support Service** occurred in the majority of cases; and the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle was applied in the majority, but not all cases.

The Victorian Government allocated funds in the 2015-16 State Budget to improve support for vulnerable Aboriginal children and families, including the response to **Taskforce 1000**. \$1 million has been allocated to engage eight Taskforce Co-ordinator positions for 12 months to implement recommendations and actions arising from this Australian first initiative.

DHHS is also developing policy and programmatic responses to improve support for prevention of, and response to, abuse and/or neglect of children. This includes specific responses for Aboriginal children. Representatives from key Aboriginal organisations are participating in the **Roadmap for Reform** project, which focuses on long term sustainable reform of the Victorian child and family services system. In 2015, Parliament amended the **Children, Youth, and Families Act 2005** to require that a cultural support plan be prepared and provided to all Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care. This change will commence in March 2016 and will drive the maintenance and development of children's Aboriginal identity and encourage their connection to their Aboriginal community and culture. To support compliance with legislation, the department has been



working with ACCOs throughout 2015 to develop a new model for the preparation and ongoing development of cultural support plans.

In November, Parliament further amended the Children, Youth, and Families Act 2005 to address legislative barriers that impede implementation of Section 18, which allows the Secretary of the DHHS to authorise the Principal Officer of an Aboriginal agency to undertake specified powers and functions in relation to Aboriginal children subject to protection orders. Section 18 is critical to promoting the self-determination of Aboriginal communities and ensuring these Aboriginal children are cared for by their community.

In 2015 the Victorian Government established the Aboriginal Children’s Forum, chaired by the Minister for Families and Children. The forum is shaping policies and practices to reduce the number of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care. The members of the forum include Aboriginal community leaders, Chief Executive Officers of community service organisations that provide services for Aboriginal children, and government representatives.

Family violence



VAAF SAA 5 *Safe families and communities and equitable justice outcomes*

Since at least 2000, Aboriginal Victorians have worked collaboratively with the Government to review, agree, and implement responses to address the high rates of family violence among Aboriginal communities.

The Victorian Aboriginal community reinforces the importance of addressing the needs of victims and perpetrators in a holistic, family centred model, to ensure the long-term wellbeing of Aboriginal women, children and men.



Progress against Key Indicators

Reducing the incidence of Aboriginal family violence

VAAF Measure

The rate of reporting (Family Incidence Reporting) of Aboriginal violence to police

Across all available indicators, Aboriginal people are more likely to have experienced family violence in comparison to non-Aboriginal people in Victoria. The number of Aboriginal people reporting family violence incidents continues to increase on a year-to-year basis.

The number of Family Incident Reports where the affected family member is Aboriginal has almost tripled since 2006-07 (844) to 2014-15 (2,248). Family Incident Reports and other data suggest that Aboriginal people experience family violence at higher rates (per capita) than non-Aboriginal people in Victoria do.

In 2008 the Victorian Government committed to the Indigenous Family Violence 10 Year Plan: Strong Culture, Strong Peoples and Strong Families: Towards a safer future for Indigenous families and communities (10 Year Plan), underpinned by state-wide and regional partnerships with the Aboriginal community. The commitments in the 10 Year Plan were directly in response to a review and reform process undertaken with the Aboriginal community over the preceding years.

The continued commitment to the 10 Year Plan and to reducing Aboriginal family violence was reaffirmed in 2012, through the VAAF. This priority is also reflected in national and state-wide family violence frameworks, as well as the AJA.

A distinct feature of the 10 Year Plan is the lens through which family violence is viewed. From an Aboriginal perspective a range of factors contribute to family violence including dispossession of land and traditional culture, breakdown of kinship systems, inherited grief and trauma, racism and vilification, economic exclusion, and entrenched poverty.

In the 2015-16 Budget the Victorian Government committed \$81.3 million to address family violence. This included an allocation of \$1.3 million for the Aboriginal Affairs portfolio to deliver initiatives focused on immediate responses to family violence, targeted education and awareness campaigns, and better understanding experiences of family violence among Aboriginal Victorians.

The Victorian Government allocated a further \$600,000 to the DHHS for Aboriginal organisations to support Aboriginal people experiencing or recovering from family violence.

A range of activities under the 10 Year Plan and the AJA has sought to improve responses to family violence and reduce experiences of conflict, violence, and victimisation. Achievements over 2014-15 included the following:

- Two Koori Caucuses of both the IFVPF and the AJF, supported by OAAV and DJR, engaged with the RCFV including participating in face-to-face consultation with the Commissioners as well as providing a written submission.
- A mid-term evaluation of progress under the 10 Year Plan has been completed. The evaluation considered: whether governance structures are robust and effective; departmental implementation effort and evidence of achievements; strategies to strengthen partnerships



with the Aboriginal community and across departments; and performance measures that can be adopted at a state-wide and regional level.

- The mid-term evaluation Report and recommendations, along with the findings and recommendations of the RCFV, will inform future action required by the Victorian Government to reduce Aboriginal family violence in partnership with the community.
- The launch of **Orana Gunyah**, Aboriginal Women and Children's Crisis Accommodation Support Service in Morwell, has brought the number of Aboriginal specific service responses for Victorian Aboriginal women and children to three.
- \$650,000 has been provided through the Community Initiative Fund to support 33 targeted projects that respond to family violence in Victorian Aboriginal communities.
- Support has been provided for the delivery and evaluation of four Koori Community Safety Grant projects (\$2.4 million over three years) that aim to prevent violence against women and children.
- The **Dardi Munwurro Strong Spirit** (Men's Behaviour Change) Program was delivered to male prisoners and offenders across five locations.
- Evaluation of the **Koori Family Violence Police Protocols** has been undertaken and ongoing support for the development and launch of protocols in additional locations provided.

- The development of Aboriginal specific training materials has been progressed to supplement the existing **Family Violence Common Risk Assessment Framework**.

The IFVPPF, which includes Chairs of the 11 Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups, Aboriginal state-wide organisations and relevant departments, continues to meet twice a year to provide advice on issues relating to Aboriginal family violence and oversight the 10 Year Plan.

The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Minister for Prevention of Family Violence attended the 24th IFVPPF held in June 2015 and the 10th Anniversary was celebrated in Shepparton at the 25th IFVPPF.

The IFVPPF is represented on a number of committees including the **Violence against Women and Children Forum**, the **Elder Abuse Advisory Committee**, and the **AJF**.



Aboriginal family violence is acknowledged now as a significant issue and this has given us the opportunity to speak up. We are starting to see more men standing up and saying “no” and challenging violent behaviour. Some police are being more proactive. We want to be the change in the community. This has brought it out in the open. It’s a conversation that can now be heard.

ABORIGINAL AGENCY REPRESENTATIVE

Progress against Key Indicators

Justice



VAAF SAA 5 *Safe families and communities and equitable justice outcomes*

Improving justice outcomes among Aboriginal Victorians is a priority for the Victorian Government and is a key means by which to strengthen families and communities and improve safety and community wellbeing. The key strategy to achieve these aims is the AJA, now in its third phase (AJA3).

Released in 2013, AJA3 builds on a decade of joint effort between the Aboriginal community and government under the previous two Justice Agreements, AJA3 seeks to:

- minimise risk factors and increase protective factors associated with youth offending;
- reduce conflict, violence and victimisation and improve support for victims;
- prevent and reduce the progression of Aboriginal youth into the justice system;
- reduce re-offending at all points of the justice continuum; and
- increase opportunities for Aboriginal women's diversion.



Reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal people under justice supervision

VAAF Targets

By 2031, close the gap in the rate of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people under youth justice supervision

By 2031, close the gap in the rate of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people under adult justice supervision

VAAF Measures

The rate of over-representation of Aboriginal young people (10-17 years) processed by police

The proportion of Aboriginal young people (aged 10-17 years) cautioned when processed by police

The proportion of Aboriginal adults receiving a prison sentence compared with those receiving a community corrections order

The number and rate of Aboriginal young people (10-17 years) entering the criminal justice system is decreasing; a notable achievement given the Aboriginal population is young and growing rapidly. The daily average rate per 1,000 population of young Aboriginal people under youth justice supervision (either community-based or in Youth Justice Centres) was 13.9 in 2013-14. It has ranged from a low of 11.00 per 1,000 in 2005-06 to a high of 18.1 in 2010-11. Between 2005-06 and 2010-11, the gap between rates for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal young people continued to widen, from 9.9 in 2005-06 to 16.4 in

2010-11, although it has decreased since to 12.7 per 1,000 in 2013-14. If current trends persist (based on the last seven years) the gap will continue to decrease over time.

Over the past year, DJR has contributed to improving outcomes for Aboriginal youth through:

- Completion of **Frontline and Community Initiatives Program** grants process for 2014-15, providing over \$2.3 million across 10 community-based projects over the next three years to support young people including those at risk, and innovative approaches to reduce offending and enhance cultural safety.
- Provision of \$180,000 to the Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committees (RAJACs) to support implementation of their Regional Justice Plans. RAJACs used a large proportion of this funding to support local, community-based initiatives to reduce the risk of Aboriginal children and young people becoming involved in the criminal justice system.
- Expansion of the **Children's Koori Courts** network throughout regional Victoria and establishment of Melbourne circuit Children's Koori Court that also sits at Heidelberg and Dandenong.

In the adult justice system, the rate of Aboriginal adults under justice supervision (per 1,000) has ranged (since 2005-06) from a low of 22.8 in 2006-07 to a high of 37.9 in 2014-15. Between 2006-07 and 2014-15, the gap between rates (per 1,000) of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal adults under justice supervision has widened significantly, from 20.2 in



Progress against Key Indicators

2006-07 to 34.5 in 2014-15. This is largely due to legislative changes made between 2011 and 2014 that have increased involvement with the criminal justice system among those with prior contact with it. This has resulted in increasing demand for justice services. Currently, the rates of adult justice supervision (community-based and in custody) are growing faster for Aboriginal adults than non-Aboriginal adults, and as a result the gap is widening and the over-representation of Aboriginal adults in the justice system is increasing. If these trends (based on the last five years) persist, the gap between the rates of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal adults under justice supervision could continue to grow over time.

Under AJA3 to date, over 200 actions have been, or are in the process of being, implemented across more than 30 government and community agencies, RAJACS, and Local Aboriginal Justice Action Committees.

Over the past year, across the adult justice portfolio significant new policies and programs have been developed and implemented, including:

- Commencement of the **Koori Women's Diversion Program** in Mildura and development of the Gippsland pilot.
- Implementation of the **Aboriginal Social Emotional and Wellbeing Plan** which has included funding of the state-wide **Indigenous Arts Program** for a further three years, cultural safety training for prison health staff, and awarding of the inaugural **Justice Health Koori Tertiary Scholarships**.
- The creation of five Sheriff's Aboriginal Liaison Officer (SALO) roles as part of the **SALO Program**, and implementation of the **Koori Sheriff's Officer Recruitment, Training and Retention Strategy**.



The Koori Caucus of the Aboriginal Justice Forum is positive about overall progress towards the meeting the closing the gap target in over-representation of Koori youth in the criminal justice system.

However, in light of Koori youth still being over-represented in the criminal justice system and the growing cohort of Aboriginal children and young people under the age of 25 years, Koori Caucus stresses the need for Government to maintain support for programs and initiatives that focus on prevention and early intervention in the youth space and emphasised the importance of:

- Koori families and communities in building within young people a strong Koori identity
- connections to family, community and culture
- creating opportunities for families and young people to gather at events like sporting carnivals
- spending time on country through camps

- connecting with Elders through yarning circles to ensure culture is handed down and young people grew strong in their knowledge of who they are, who their families and kin are, where they are from, and in their knowledge of the old ways.
- mentoring and support for young people and their families
- funding generalist Koori youth workers in local Aboriginal community controlled organisations.

Being 'strong in culture' is an important factor in preventing all forms of abuse (child, alcohol and drugs and violence), of healing spirit and, keeping grounded, all essential to building social and emotional wellbeing and reducing contact with and progression into the criminal justice system.

Koori Caucus sees the rising rates of Aboriginal children and young people on remand as a critical and strategic priority for Government in the coming year.

KOORI CAUCUS, October 28, 2015



Progress against Key Indicators

Reducing the proportion of Aboriginal people who return to prison within two years of release

VAAF Target

By 2031, close the gap in the proportion of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who are convicted within two years of their previous conviction

The percentage of Aboriginal people returning to prison within two years of their release has ranged (since 2005-06) from a low of 46.6 per cent in 2009-10 (return year) to 55.6 per cent in 2010-11 (return year). While this data varies over time, between 2009-10 and 2013-14 the gap between the proportions of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people returning to prison within two years was significant, increasing from 14 percentage points in 2009-10 to 17 percentage points in 2013-14.

As part of the post-release reintegration services (delivered under the **Corrections Victoria Reintegration Program**), a supplementary support service for Aboriginal people coordinated by the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service began in 2015. The service provides reintegration support for eligible prisoners in custody to continue to support their individual and complex transitional needs in the community.



Koori Caucus is concerned about the increases in the numbers of Aboriginal people in Victoria under justice supervision, and a lack of progress to close the gap.

Koori Caucus identified the need to prioritise the following responses to improve adult justice supervision for Aboriginal people:

- provide specific targeted programs and initiatives for 18-25 year olds
- increase the availability and use of diversion options from police and courts
- support for Aboriginal offenders to successfully complete community correction orders through integrated case management models and strengthened initiatives such as the Local Justice Worker program
- reduce recidivism and reoffending by addressing underlying drivers of offending (such as access to alcohol and drug (particularly detox), mental health, housing and employment services)
- offer culturally specific and trauma informed rehabilitation programs for Aboriginal offenders and prisoners.

KOORI CAUCUS, October 28, 2015



Native Title



VAAF SAA 6 Strong culture, engaged people and confident communities

The Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010 (TOS Act) continues to be the Government’s preferred approach to resolving native title claims. Settlements under the TOS Act deliver both recognition and concrete measures to facilitate economic development. The Government has also committed to increasing its support for the VAHC and RAPs as the centre of decision-making about Aboriginal cultural heritage matters.

Strengthening Aboriginal culture and supporting Aboriginal people’s engagement with community and society

VAAF Measures

The rate of access by Aboriginal Victorian to their traditional lands

In April 2015, the Government agreed to proceed with settlement negotiations with the Taungurung people, marked by a commencement ceremony held at the Cathedral Ranges in July 2015. In terms of existing TOS Act settlements, four new parks and reserves were granted as Aboriginal titles to the Gunaikurnai, who have also published a ‘Whole of Country’ Plan and are developing a Joint Management Plan. A five-year review of the Gunaikurnai agreement is under development, which will evaluate achievements to date.

The Dja Dja Wurrung established the **Dhelkunya Dja Land Management Board** and freehold titles to sites at Carisbrook and Frankford were transferred, as well as the divestment of title in a property at Mt Barker by the Indigenous Land Corporation to the Dja Dja Wurrung. The investment strategy for the **Dja Dja Wurrung Recognition and Settlement Agreement** was finalised and the first of three economic development fund payments made. Settlement funds deposited in the Victorian Traditional Owners Trust continue to grow.



Progress against Key Indicators

Eastern Maar Traditional Owners have progressed through TOS Act threshold processes, which are a prerequisite for negotiations to proceed. Threshold conferencing and notification have taken place – the latter invites Traditional Owner submissions on what Eastern Maar propose as their group description and the extent of traditional country.

Two new native title claims were filed in the Federal Court of Australia – Gunaikurnai in December 2014 and Millewa-Mallee in October 2015.

The state continues to encourage the two groups who secured positive determinations prior to the TOS Act commencing – Gunditjmara and Wimmera peoples – to consider negotiating a more comprehensive settlement agreement under the Victorian legislation.

DJR's relationship with the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations – a peak body representing a number of Victorian Traditional Owner groups recognised through native title and cultural heritage processes – continues to develop.

In leading the Government's response to native title claims, DJR continues to seek to build a whole-of-government response to Traditional Owners' native title aspirations through inter-agency communication and coordination.

The RPfC Program supports Traditional Owner groups make agreements about boundaries and extent of country, and group membership and representation. These agreements can assist

Traditional Owner groups to apply to be a RAP under the **Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006** and seek settlements with the Victorian Government under the TOs Act and the Native Title Act 1993 (Commonwealth). RPfC has supported seven agreement making projects in 2014-15, working with Traditional Owner groups across Victoria.



Right People for Country Program is about Traditional Owners setting the agenda, deciding what support and process they need to reach agreements. Agreements need to make cultural sense and facilitate better relationships within and between groups as well as assisting Traditional Owners to gain formal recognition.

MICK HARDING, Right People for Country Steering Committee Chairperson



Local and Regional Initiatives

Evidence shows that some Victorian localities experience greater disadvantage, and many of these locations are also where greater numbers of Aboriginal people live. These areas need priority attention to create stronger opportunities for individuals and communities to define local problems and initiate local solutions.

The VAAF identifies an important role for place based approaches via a commitment to develop key work with communities in locations with large Aboriginal populations, where the community has sought joined up action, and where data suggests a need for concerted action.

Place based projects can also build on a number of existing approaches currently in operation such as with IFVRAGs, RAJACs, Local Learning and Employment Networks, Best Start sites, and Local Area Partnerships.

The VAAF gives specific recognition of the role of local government as a partner in delivering improved outcomes. In particular, councils deliver vital services and opportunities across the life course, fostering reconciliation, and engagement with Aboriginal communities, building access to land and protecting cultural heritage. In October 2015, the **Maggolee** website was launched which provides a resource for local councils to work more closely with Aboriginal communities. Developed by Reconciliation Victoria and with funding from the Victorian Government, the website provides information on how each council engages with the Aboriginal

community, as well as information on local Traditional Owners and Aboriginal organisations, key contacts, demographic data, and services.

There is also opportunity to foster great collaboration with the 39 LANs, which could both strengthen and complement the work of many current place based projects and structures, support innovative solutions in local areas and importantly, inform regional and system wide change.

Latrobe Local Aboriginal Community Partnership Project

This project commenced in February 2011 with the establishment of a Steering Committee that included members of the local Aboriginal community, Commonwealth, State, and local government representatives and representatives of non-government agencies.

The project supports the Latrobe Aboriginal community to build on its strengths to further nurture the community where culture is celebrated, families are strong and connected, children are happy and healthy, and where young people are supported.

Included in the governance arrangements for the **Latrobe Local Aboriginal Community Partnership Project** are three sub-committees:

- an Aboriginal Advisory Group, which informs on the progress of the project and discuss current community issues;



Local and Regional Initiatives

- the Latrobe Families Group, which organises community engagement and participation events to help enhance people's connection to community and place; and
- the Youth Pathways Working Group, which organises youth pathways events to encourage young people to dare to dream about their future.

DHHS worked in partnership with the Latrobe Aboriginal community throughout 2014–15.

The themes of the last year's Steering Committee Forums were alcohol and other drugs, family violence, and the drug ice.

In addition, DHHS held a consultation on 23 January 2015 on the effectiveness of Alcohol and other Drug Services for the Aboriginal community. DHHS conveyed the main themes that arose from the consultation back to the alcohol and other drug service providers to help enhance service delivery and coordination.

Recent examples of community led activities include:

- **Deadly XFactor** talent events in Morwell
- NAIDOC 2015 Ten Pin Bowling event in Morwell
- the **Inspiring Young Koorie People** pathways events in Moe
- **Enough is Enough** anti family violence and anti-drugs event in Morwell.



I thought the Ice Forum was very important because middle and Elderly don't know enough about it. It was very informative which helps us Elderly to work with grannies and Elders.

GLORIA WHALAN, Morwell Koorie Elders Group Member, 27 October 2015

We need more meetings about what is happening in our community especially about Ice and family violence - no flash in the pan meetings. We need service providers to work closer with each other to help our community heal

CLIFF WANDIN, Aboriginal Community Representative, 27 October 2015

It would be great to see the project continue to help make positive changes over time and to have involvement from the Koorie community to help foster a better understanding of the roles that organisations have, that deal with community

LAURIE MARKS, Aboriginal Community Representative, 28 October 2015



Mildura Project

Under the AJA, DJR implements the majority of programs and services using a place based approach. This approach recognises that generating local responses to local issues is often the most effective way to resolve problems and provide responsive services.

Over the past year, DJR has undertaken significant work in partnership with Koori Caucus and the broader Aboriginal community to establish **Koori Women's Diversion** projects. In response to the growing numbers of Aboriginal women involved in the criminal justice system, and recognition of the gender specific factors that contribute to initial and ongoing contact with the system, two pilot projects have been developed. These will provide intensive case management for Aboriginal women (and their families) to prevent involvement in the criminal justice system that is more serious. The Mildura pilot has commenced, with the rapidly growing number of women involved in the program a sign of the high degree of need for such a response within the Mildura community.

Until recently, DJR also oversaw the Mildura Project. The Mildura Interdepartmental Committee was established in 2008 to provide a forum for a co-ordinated response across government departments, local government, community-based organisations, and community members to achieve VAAF objectives. DJR led this place

based project for many years, but in response to a request from Aboriginal organisations for the Aboriginal community to lead the project, governance arrangements changed in 2015. A regional governance structure that includes four ACCOs from the Loddon Mallee Region and relevant government agencies now oversees this initiative.



Koori Caucus is concerned about the significant increase in the rates of Koori women coming into contact with the justice system and see this issue as a strategic priority.

Koori Caucus fully support the development and implementation of the two intensive case management pilots in Mildura and Morwell and continue to prioritise the development of specific diversion options for Koori Women.

Koori Caucus support a feasibility study being prepared for a residential diversionary facility for Koori women.

KOORI CAUCUS, October 28, 2015



Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACCHO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
ACCO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation
AEU	Aboriginal Employment Unit
AHV	Aboriginal Housing Victoria
AJA	(Victorian) Aboriginal Justice Agreement
AJF	Aboriginal Justice Forum
CHMP	Cultural Heritage Management Plan
CIP	Community Initiatives Program
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DEDJTR	Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources
DELWP	Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning
DET	Department of Education and Training
DHHS	Department of Health and Human Services
DJR	Department of Justice and Regulation
DPC	Department of Premier and Cabinet
DTF	Department of Treasury and Finance
ESIJ	Employment Start Up for Indigenous Jobseekers
IAS	Indigenous Advancement Strategy
IFVFPF	Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum
KBS	Koori Business Strategy
RESO	Koorie Engagement Support Officer
KEW	Koorie Education Workforce
KGRADS	Koori Graduate Development Scheme
RMS	Koori Maternity Service
LAN	Local Aboriginal Network
LIN	Local Indigenous Network
MCH	Maternal and Child Health
NAIDOC	National Aborigines and Islander Day Observance Committee



NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
NIRA	National Indigenous Reform Agreement
OAAV	Office of Aboriginal Affairs Victoria
PJIP	Premier’s Jobs and Investment Panel
RAP	Registered Aboriginal Party
RAJAC	Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee
RCFV	Royal Commission into Family Violence
RPfC	Right People for Country
SALO	Sheriff’s Aboriginal Liaison Officer
SDP	State Disability Plan
SIQ	Standard Indigenous Question
SLG	Secretaries’ Leadership Group
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TOS Act	Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010
VAAF	Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework
VACCA	Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency
VACCHO	Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
VAEAI	Victorian Aboriginal Education Association
VACKH	Victorian Advisory Council on Koori Health
VACSAL	Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Agency Ltd
VAES	Victorian Aboriginal Economic Strategy
VAHC	Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council
VAP	Victims Assistance Program
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VPHS	Victorian Population Health Survey
VPS	Victorian Public Service
VPSC	Victorian Public Sector Commission





