


VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS REPORT 2017





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Wilin Centre for Indigenous Arts and Cultural Development,
Faculty of the VCA & MCM, The University of Melbourne.

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Acknowledgement

The Victorian Government proudly acknowledges Aboriginal Victorian people as the First Peoples and Traditional Owners and custodians of the land and water on which we rely. We acknowledge and respect that Aboriginal communities are steeped in traditions and customs. We acknowledge the ongoing leadership role of the Aboriginal community in striving to address inequality and disadvantage and the devastating and enduring impact of colonisation.

While the term 'Koorie' is commonly used to describe Aboriginal people of Southeast Australia, we have used the term Aboriginal in this report to include all people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent who are living in Victoria. We recognise the diversity of Aboriginal people living throughout Victoria.

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Victoria's enduring commitment



When we came to government, we committed to putting self-determination front and centre.

Since then, we've worked alongside Aboriginal Victorians, ensuring they are at the heart of decision-making.

Historically, this hasn't always been the case. But that's exactly why our current approach is so important—because the policies of the past simply haven't worked.

Fundamentally, we need to transform the way government and Aboriginal communities work together.

Today, I am proud to say that this transformation is well underway.

Following our commitment to treaty, up to 7,500 Aboriginal Victorians have so far voiced how they want to be represented, with a further Community Assembly planned for later this year.

This Assembly will work to finalise the design of Victoria's first ever Aboriginal Representative Body.

We still have a long way to go.

But make no mistake: we are committed to treaty, and we're committed to listening.

Together, we can make history.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Daniel Andrews".

The Hon Daniel Andrews MP
Premier of Victoria

A year in reflection



Every day I have the privilege of meeting and working with the many dedicated Aboriginal people and organisations that continue to fight for and work to improve their local communities.

Release of the *Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Report* each year is an opportunity for all of us to reflect on the enduring strength and pride of Aboriginal people and culture. It is an opportunity to celebrate the great leadership of Aboriginal people and organisations across the state, and the successful partnerships created with government.

It is also a time to recognise that there is still a long way to go to achieving social, political, cultural and economic equality for Aboriginal Victorians, and that progress towards equality will be slow until Aboriginal culture and history is a shared source of pride for all Victorians.

Our commitment to change the way we govern and to ensure an ongoing avenue for Aboriginal Victorians to lead on self-determination has seen the establishment of the Aboriginal Executive Council, Aboriginal Treaty Working Group, Aboriginal Community Assembly, the Ministerial Forum on Aboriginal Affairs, Aboriginal Victoria Forums, the Victorian Aboriginal Economic Board and the Premier's Gathering.

I am proud of all the work the Victorian Government has done in recent years on policies to support Aboriginal Victorians. However, it is important to acknowledge we still have so much work to do.

True reconciliation with the nation's First Peoples is essential to closing the gap. While this report reflects some positive changes, it is also unflinching in its assessment of the work that still needs to be done. This is work that this government remains committed to doing in partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal community.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Natalie Hutchins".

The Hon Natalie Hutchins MP
Minister for Aboriginal Affairs

Listening to Aboriginal leadership



Guided by the leadership of the Aboriginal community, the role of the Secretaries' Leadership Group is to oversee and coordinate the implementation of Aboriginal affairs policy at the highest level of government.

Throughout 2016 and 2017, Secretaries from across the Victorian Public Service have continued to work with Aboriginal community leaders towards a more ambitious and meaningful self-determination reform agenda.

Through collaborative action, key strategic priorities have been identified to progress Aboriginal self-determination across all areas of government. Some of the key priorities identified by community members have been the need for shared values and motivation, strategic and coordinated investment for Aboriginal affairs, equal Aboriginal leadership in decision-making, and government sharing power.

This collaborative approach seeks to embed self-determination into the core business of government by undertaking transformational change to transfer power, decision-making and resources to the Aboriginal community. The Secretaries' Leadership Group has also commenced work on options for a funding reform project to address the unique funding issues experienced by Aboriginal organisations.

The second Ministerial Forum on Aboriginal Affairs in September 2017 brought together Victorian Government Ministers and senior members of Victorian Aboriginal organisations to discuss priorities to progress the self-determination agenda. This included the establishment of an Aboriginal Executive Council, which will work in partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal community and the heads of the Victorian Public Service to provide a crucial role in advising and leading government on reform priorities.

While there is still significant work to do, we are confident that the actions to embed self-determination will lay a strong foundation for lasting and meaningful change.

I look forward to strengthening the relationship between Secretaries and the Aboriginal Executive Council for the implementation of key self-determination reforms.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Eccles'.

Chris Eccles AO
Chair
Secretaries' Leadership Group

OUR JOURNEY TO DATE

The Victorian Government is committed to self-determination as the guiding principle in Aboriginal affairs. The unique knowledge, skills and expertise of Aboriginal Victorians are fundamental to informing policy design and program implementation and working towards the long-held aspiration of Aboriginal people to be self-determining.

In 2008, the Council of Australian Governments committed to implementing the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA). The aim of NIRA was to frame the task of 'closing the gap' in Indigenous disadvantage and identified the objectives, outcomes, outputs, performance indicators and benchmarks that would address this, including Aboriginal health, early childhood development, education, housing, economic participation and governance and leadership. Efforts to close the gap in Victoria and implement the strategic areas identified in NIRA resulted in the *Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework* (VAAF).



The current VAAF (2013–18) was built on the Victorian Government’s partnership with the Commonwealth Government and Aboriginal Victorians to shape a broad vision to eliminate the systemic disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal people. Six strategic action areas provide the overarching framework for Aboriginal affairs reports over the past five years. These strategic areas are:

- Maternal and early childhood health and development
- Education and training
- Economic participation
- Health, housing and wellbeing
- Safe families and communities and equitable justice outcomes
- Strong culture, engaged people and confident communities.

For each strategic action area the government has committed to 12 headline indicators each with specific targets and measures.

Reflecting on achievements and next steps under the VAAF

With the framework approaching its five-year anniversary and expiry in 2018, it is time to reflect on the successes of the VAAF and what opportunities exist to enact meaningful change for the future, as a partnership between government and the Aboriginal community.

As we reach the end of the current VAAF period, the Aboriginal Victorian community, government, and organisational partners and allies have much to celebrate. Thanks to concerted community-led efforts, we have seen dramatic improvements in maternal health, early childhood and education, as well as increases to the median household income of Aboriginal Victorians. But we must also acknowledge uneven achievements and shortfalls across justice and health. Work is not complete, and to be successful in the years to come, we must continue in the new era of self-determination and collaboration.

The development of the next VAAF will continue our strong participatory approach towards a strengths-based narrative underpinned by Aboriginal self-determination and informed by Aboriginal aspirations and expertise.

Victoria has been leading the way in advocating for a partnership approach to be adopted by the Commonwealth in their work refreshing the Closing the Gap framework, which is also due for expiry in 2018. To this end, Victoria has been advocating for a strong community engagement approach that considers Aboriginal self-determination, wellbeing and the centrality of culture as core domains.

This, and the need to shift to a more strengths-based national narrative have been strongly voiced by the Aboriginal community. Victoria is strongly committed to advocating for this approach at the national level, and embedding Aboriginal self-determination and effective community engagement as essential components of the process to refresh the Closing the Gap framework.

Understanding the VAAF in the context of colonial dispossession

The VAAF explicitly frames the understanding and response to Aboriginal disadvantage by acknowledging the influence of dispossession of Aboriginal people that occurred from European colonisation and its intergenerational impact. The consequences of this are far-reaching and include dispossession of land and traditional culture, breakdown of community kinship systems, racism and vilification, economic exclusion and entrenched poverty, the effects of institutionalisation and child removal policies, inherited grief and trauma, and loss of traditional roles and status.¹

About this report

This report provides the latest available information on how government is faring in responding to the systemic inequalities experienced by Aboriginal people in Victoria, according to the VAAF’s six strategic action areas. An assessment of progress is made by examining data from 2008 (or closest to) until the latest available data at the time of reporting, in 2017. The baseline year is 2008 as this was the year in which the National Indigenous Reform Agreement was established.

Key Aboriginal stakeholders were consulted in the development of the report and their reflections on Victoria’s progress are included.

Overview of the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework

Six strategic action areas provide the overarching framework for Aboriginal affairs reports over the past five years. For each strategic action area the government has committed to 12 headline indicators each with specific targets and measures.

SAA 1 Maternal and early childhood health and development

The health of mothers and babies during pregnancy and in early childhood can have a significant and far-reaching effect on children's survival, development and wellbeing well into adult years.

Headline Indicator 1.

Improve Aboriginal infant survival and health

Headline Indicator 2.

Increase Aboriginal kindergarten participation

Headline Indicator 3.

Reduce the rate of Aboriginal child protection substantiations

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.

Headline Indicator 4.

Improve literacy and numeracy in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 for Aboriginal students

Headline Indicator 5.

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

SAA 3 Economic participation

More opportunities for Aboriginal Victorians to secure jobs or operate business enterprises, build self-esteem, economic wealth and positive role models and contribute to Victoria's economy.

Headline Indicator 6.

Increase Aboriginal labour force participation

Headline Indicator 7.

Increase workforce participation by Aboriginal people in the public sector

SAA 4 Health, housing and disability

A healthy start to life with access to stable housing and accessible health services are important for improving a person's health outcomes and overall quality of life in later years.

Headline Indicator 8.

Improve the health status of Aboriginal Victorians

SAA
5

Safe families and communities and equitable justice outcomes

Reducing Aboriginal over-representation in the justice system and providing for safer families and communities are essential platforms for enabling all Aboriginal Victorians to achieve their cultural, economic and social aspirations.

Headline Indicator 9.

Reduce the incidence of Aboriginal family violence

Headline Indicator 10.

Reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal people under justice supervision

Headline Indicator 11.

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

SAA
6

Strong culture, engaged people and confident communities

Stronger appreciation and awareness of Aboriginal culture can foster confidence and resilience, as well as connections and respect across the Victorian community.

Headline Indicator 12.

Strengthen Aboriginal culture and support Aboriginal people's engagement with community and society



Headline outcomes

The Victorian Government continues to work in partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal community to achieve real improvements in living standards and opportunities for Aboriginal people. As in previous years, this Report sets out progress against the targets in the *Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework*.

This section provides only a snapshot of progress against key outcomes. It does not address the reasons underlying the outcomes or what is being done to address them. Policy directions and community-led responses across each strategic action area are addressed in subsequent chapters.

Aboriginal Victorians: a snapshot

Population growth for Aboriginal Victorians has far outpaced the general Victorian population.

- Between 2001 and 2016, the number of Aboriginal Victorians almost doubled, from 25,000 to over 47,000.²
- Aboriginal Victorians have a much younger population profile than the general Victorian population, with a median age of 23 compared to 37 for the general Victorian population.
- Aboriginal households have a unique composition. While the most common household composition for the general Victorian population was a couple with children (46 per cent), Aboriginal Victorian households were more diverse. A third of Aboriginal households consisted of a couple with children (29 per cent); almost a third consisted of one-parent families (26 per cent); and a third consisted of extended family and non-family members (28 per cent).

Headline Indicator 1. Improve Aboriginal infant survival and health

Aboriginal perinatal mortality rate



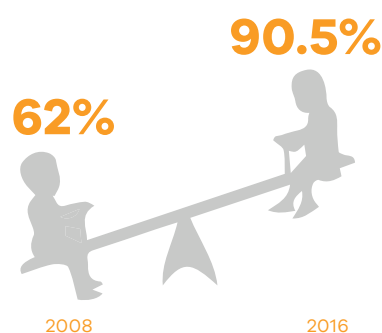
Since 2007–09, the gap in perinatal mortality has been cut by more than half.

- Perinatal mortality is 1.4 times higher for babies born to Aboriginal mothers compared to non-Aboriginal mothers; however, this gap is closing.
- While rates can vary significantly from year to year due to the small numbers, recent data shows a decrease in perinatal mortality rates, with a rate of 13.6 per 1,000 babies born to Aboriginal mothers in 2013–15, a decrease from 21.2 per 1,000 in 2007–08.

Infant health: the gap is narrowing.

Headline Indicator 2. Increase Aboriginal kindergarten participation

Aboriginal kindergarten enrolment



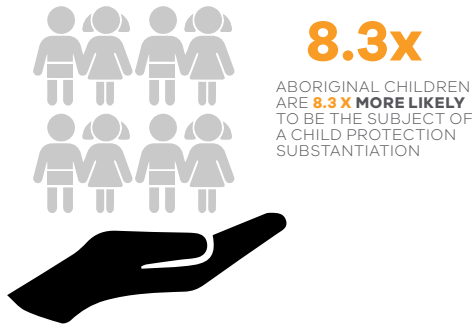
Since 2008, the gap in kindergarten participation has been cut by 80 per cent.

- The number of Aboriginal children enrolled in four-year-old kindergarten continues to grow; 1,211 children (90.5 per cent) were enrolled in 2016, up from 525 children (62 per cent) in 2008.
- Aboriginal kindergarten participation rates are not far behind the Victoria-wide participation rate of 96.2 per cent.

Kindergarten participation: rates are approaching parity.

Headline Indicator 3. Reduce the rate of Aboriginal child protection substantiations

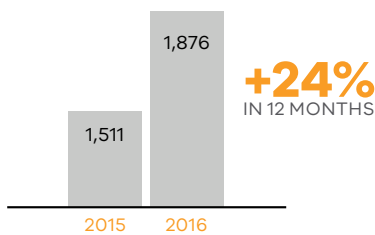
Child protection substantiations



Child protection substantiations for Aboriginal children have increased markedly in recent years.

- Aboriginal children are 8.3 times more likely to be the subject of a child substantiation than non-Aboriginal children in Victoria.
- In 2015–16, there were 80 per 1,000 child protection substantiations, more than double the rate of 38 per 1,000 in 2007–08.
- As at 30 June 2016, there were 1,876 Aboriginal children in out-of-home care, representing a 24 per cent increase in 12 months and the highest number of children in care over the last decade (up from 1,511 Aboriginal children in out-of-home care as at 30 June 2015).

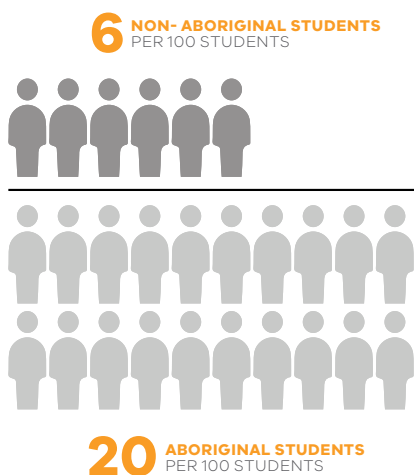
Number of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care



Child protection: we are not on track to close the gap.

Headline Indicator 4. Improve literacy and numeracy in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 for Aboriginal students

Proportion of students not meeting NAPLAN benchmarks at Year 9



Despite gains in school retention, fewer Aboriginal students meet NAPLAN benchmarks on average.

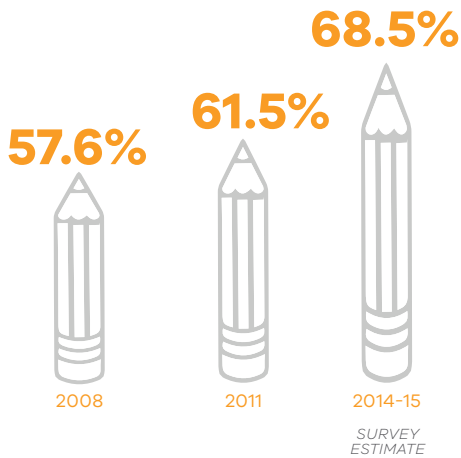
- The NAPLAN achievement gap is widest at Year 9, with between 15 and 20 per cent of Aboriginal students not meeting the NAPLAN minimum standard for reading and literacy compared to between 4 and 6 per cent of non-Aboriginal students.
- School attendance may be a contributing factor—Aboriginal students miss twice as much school as non-Aboriginal students on average.
- By Year 9, the gap in attendance equates to Aboriginal students receiving six months less schooling than their non-Aboriginal peers. This statistic remains unchanged since 2008.

NAPLAN performance: we are not on track to close the gap.

Headline Indicator 5. Increase the proportion of Aboriginal young people aged 20–24 who have completed at least Year 12 or equivalent

Aboriginal Year 12 attainment rate

From Kindergarten to Year 12, more Aboriginal students are staying in school longer.



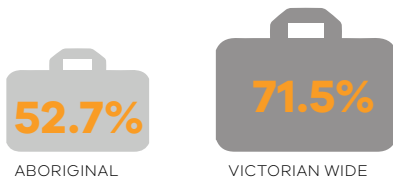
- In 2016, the Aboriginal Year 10 retention rate was 99.8 per cent, a significant increase from 81.7 per cent in 2008.
- The gap in Year 12 attainment is also closing. Between 2008 and 2014–15, the proportion of Aboriginal students who completed Year 12 or equivalent grew from 57.6 per cent to 68.5 per cent.
- After Year 12, three out of four Aboriginal school leavers go on to further study. Of these, about one-third commence a bachelor's degree and one-fifth commence vocational training.

Year 12 or equivalent attainment: the gap is narrowing.

Headline Indicator 6. Increase Aboriginal labour force participation

Workforce participation

Aboriginal people remain under-represented in the workforce.



- The unemployment rate is almost three times higher for Aboriginal Victorians than the general Victorian population (16 per cent compared to 6 per cent).
- Since 2008, the number of employed Aboriginal Victorians increased 2.5 percentage points, from 49.5 per cent to 52.7 per cent, while the general Victorian employment rate rose 9 percentage points, from 62.2 per cent to 71.5 per cent.
- Underemployment and lower workforce participation translates to about \$165 less in median income and \$219 less a week in household income. This puts Aboriginal earners and households well below the median income for Victoria.

Income



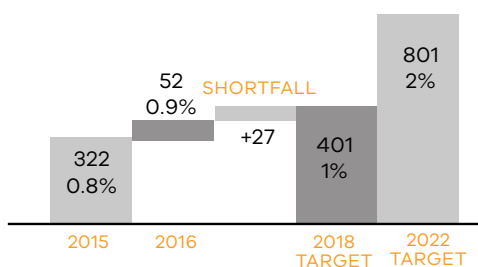
FOR EVERY \$1 VICTORIANS EARN, ABORIGINAL VICTORIANS EARN 74 CENTS

Workforce participation: we are not on track to close the gap.

Headline Indicator 7. Increase workforce participation by Aboriginal people in the public sector

Aboriginal staff in the VPS

At 2016, 374 Aboriginal people were employed in the Victorian Public Service (VPS), representing 0.9 per cent of the VPS workforce.

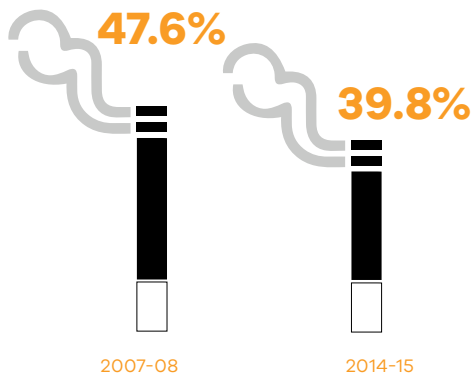


- Aboriginal staffing in the VPS is around 0.9 per cent. Progress towards the 1 per cent Aboriginal public service staff target has been consistent since 2008. However, significant effort is required to meet the new target of 2 per cent by 2022.

Staffing target: the VPS will need to grow by ~400 Aboriginal staff.

Headline Indicator 8. Improve the health status of Aboriginal Victorians

Aboriginal Victorian smoking rates



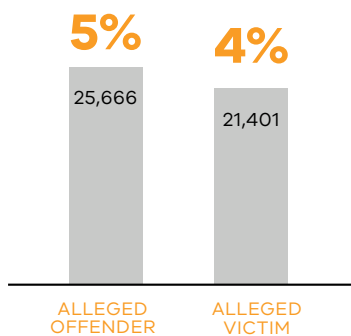
Statistics show disparities in health, housing and disability endure.

- The proportion of Aboriginal Victorians who rated their health as excellent or very good is declining. In 2007–08, about half of all Aboriginal Victorian adults reported excellent or very good health (47 per cent), compared to 40.2 per cent in 2014–15.
- According to latest statistics in 2016, Aboriginal Victorians continued to be at a higher risk than the general Victorian population for psychological distress and presentation at an emergency department with self-harm or alcohol-related injuries.
- Rates of smoking for Aboriginal Victorians are still disproportionately high but have declined from 47.6 per cent in 2007–08 to 39.8 per cent in 2014–15.

Health, housing and disability: we are not on track to close the gap.

Headline Indicator 9. Reduce the incidence of Aboriginal family violence

Family violence incidents between 2007 and 2017 involving an Aboriginal alleged offender or victim



Aboriginal Victorians are over-represented in family violence incident reports by more than four times for affected family members and five times for alleged offenders.

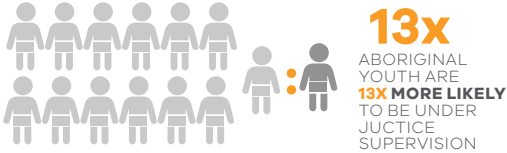
- In the last 10 years, the total number of family violence incident reports in Victoria has increased by one and a half times, from 31,228 in 2007–08 to 77,725 in 2016–17.
- Despite making up less than 1 per cent of the Victorian population, Aboriginal people accounted for 4 per cent of all affected family member reports (21,401) and 5 per cent of all alleged offender reports (25,666) made in the last 10 years.
- Reports show a high rate of reoccurring offending and victimisation: 81 per cent of Aboriginal affected family members had previously reported a family violence incident to police.

Family violence: rates of reporting have increased significantly.

Headline Indicator 10. Reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal people under justice supervision

Justice supervision

Youth



Adults



Aboriginal Victorians are over-represented in the justice system

- Aboriginal youth are significantly over-represented in the justice system at 13 times the rate of non-Aboriginal Victorian youth. Aboriginal adults are over-represented by 11 times the rate of non-Aboriginal Victorian adults.
- Despite Aboriginal people making up less than 1 per cent of Victoria's population, Aboriginal Victorian adults alone account for 8 per cent of the prison population and 6.3 per cent of the community corrections population.

Justice supervision: we are not on track to close the gap.

Headline Indicator 11. Reduce the proportion of Aboriginal people who return to prison within two years of release

Recidivism



Once Aboriginal people enter the prison system, they are 1.3 times more likely to return to prison than non-Aboriginal people.

- More than half of Aboriginal prisoners (55 per cent) released in 2013–14 returned to prison under sentence within two years, compared to 42 per cent of non-Aboriginal prisoners.

Recidivism: we are not on track to close the gap.

Headline Indicator 12. Strengthen Aboriginal culture and support Aboriginal people's engagement with community and society

Racism



Aboriginal Victorians experience a high degree of social support from their local communities and families; however, experiences of racism are too common.

- Over half (57 per cent) of Aboriginal Victorians participated in cultural activities in the last 12 months.
- Ninety-three per cent reported having strong social networks they can draw on in times of crisis.
- Thirty-seven per cent of Aboriginal Victorians felt they had been unfairly treated at least once in the previous 12 months because they were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.



Our key reform areas



VULNERABLE CHILDREN

Strong families and children who are safe, healthy and well



EDUCATION

Every Aboriginal person achieves their potential, succeeds in life, and feels strong in their cultural identity



ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

Opportunity and economic prosperity for all Aboriginal Victorians



SELF-DETERMINATION

Future self-determination reforms must build on local knowledge and community needs and aspirations



EQUITABLE JUSTICE

Minimise Aboriginal over-representation in the criminal justice system by improving accessibility, utilisation and efficacy of justice-related programs and services in partnership with the Aboriginal community



FAMILY VIOLENCE

The Aboriginal community, in partnership with the Victorian Government, is leading the development of a safer Victoria for all Aboriginal families and communities



HEALTH

Within a decade, the length and quality of life of Aboriginal people in Victoria will have improved significantly and measurably



SELF-DETERMINATION

Future self-determination reforms must build on local knowledge and community needs and aspirations

The government's commitment to self-determination and to working in partnership with Aboriginal Victorian communities will enable Aboriginal experiences and voices to be at the centre of decision-making.

Aboriginal Victorians understand the needs and aspirations of their local areas. The involvement of Aboriginal people in the development and delivery of programs, services and policies that impact or concern them can:

- enable culturally appropriate and effective solutions
- promote active community involvement
- promote community accountability
- build the capacity and social capital of the people.

The next 12 months will involve a significant process of collaboration with the Aboriginal community to support a coordinated approach to self-determination reform. Ultimately, this work will endeavour to maximise outcomes for

Victoria's Aboriginal communities and ensure an enduring legacy, embedding self-determination approaches across government and the broader Victorian community.

For wide-reaching reforms to be successful, they must be driven and implemented by the Aboriginal community in partnership with the government. Aboriginal self-determination is a foundational part of the policy design and program delivery to achieve systemic changes across our key reform areas.

Self-determination reforms will be driven and implemented by the Aboriginal community in partnership with the government through:

- the Aboriginal Executive Council (which comprises representatives from statewide organisations)
 - other community consultation and engagement processes.
-



ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

Opportunity and economic prosperity for all Aboriginal Victorians

Aboriginal economic participation is a vital foundation for self-determination. It is also vital to growing Victoria's overall wealth, economic productivity and competitive advantage. The *Victorian Aboriginal Economic Strategy 2013–2020* underpins the government's commitment to increasing the number of Aboriginal people in rewarding jobs. This means more than just investing in job programs, it is also about harnessing the potential of Aboriginal entrepreneurship and nurturing aspiration. Through *Tharamba Bugheen: Victorian Aboriginal Business Strategy 2017–2021*, the Victorian Government is partnering with Aboriginal businesses to support Aboriginal businesses to grow, extend networks and implement landmark projects and industry agreements.

The *Victorian Aboriginal Economic Strategy* and *Tharamba Bugheen* are delivered in partnership with:

- Kinaway – The Aboriginal Chamber of Commerce
 - the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations
 - the Victorian Aboriginal Economic Board
 - Aboriginal business sector and broader private sector.
-



HEALTH

Within a decade, the length and quality of life of Aboriginal people in Victoria will have improved significantly and measurably

Aboriginal people are more likely to experience poorer health and wellbeing. Enduring gaps in health, wellbeing and safety are not experienced singularly but often in combination across the life course. In response, *Korin Korin Balit-Djak: the Aboriginal Health, Wellbeing and Safety Strategic Plan* provides an overarching framework to improve the health, wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal Victorians now and over the next 10 years.

We acknowledge the work of community partners to improve health outcomes and meet the health needs of Aboriginal Victorians including:

- the Victorian Advisory Council for Koori Health
- Aboriginal community organisations.



EDUCATION

Every Aboriginal person achieves their potential, succeeds in life, and feels strong in their cultural identity

Aboriginal kindergarten participation is approaching parity with other children in Victoria and more Aboriginal students are staying in school longer than ever before. However, lower school attendance and NAPLAN achievement rates indicate ongoing challenges to improving education outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians. Through *Marrung: Aboriginal Education Plan 2016–2026* we are investing in both targeted and universal initiatives to improve educational experiences and outcomes

for Aboriginal learners so that they are able to realise their educational aspirations and cultural identity.

Marrung was developed, and is being implemented, in partnership with:

- the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated
- Victorian Aboriginal communities.



EQUITABLE JUSTICE

Minimise Aboriginal over-representation in the criminal justice system by improving accessibility, utilisation and efficacy of justice-related programs and services in partnership with the Aboriginal community

In Victoria, Aboriginal youth remain over-represented in youth justice supervision by more than 13 times that of non-Aboriginal youth. Aboriginal men are vastly over-represented in the justice system and Aboriginal women are one of the fastest growing prison cohorts in Victoria. The *Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement (AJA)* aims to minimise Aboriginal over-representation in the criminal justice system by improving the accessibility, use and effectiveness of justice-related programs and services.

The AJA is delivered via a multi-layered structure of partnerships between the Victorian Government and the Aboriginal community and includes:

- the Aboriginal Justice Forum
- the Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee network
- the Local Aboriginal Justice Action Committee network
- Aboriginal community organisations.



VULNERABLE CHILDREN

Strong families and children who are safe, healthy and well

While child protection reports overall have grown sharply in recent years, Aboriginal children are over-represented in these reports by eight times the rate of non-Aboriginal children. In partnership with the Aboriginal community, strategic plans and reform visions include:

- *Roadmap for Reform*: strong families, safe children

And responses to:

- *Always was, always will be Koori children*: systemic inquiry into services provided to Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care in Victoria
- *In the child's best interests*: inquiry into compliance with the intent of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle in Victoria.

Central to achieving this is the coordination of all government departments, mainstream and Aboriginal agencies and the Aboriginal community working together to change how we deliver support for vulnerable children.

This includes a coordinated, strategic approach to the service system and ensuring culturally responsive policies and programs, which build resilience and foster protective environments. This is possible through making childhood services more accessible and inclusive, and through initiatives such as the trial to transfer legal guardianship for Aboriginal children to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs).

These initiatives are being developed and delivered in partnership between the Victorian Government and the Aboriginal community through:

- the Aboriginal Children's Forum
- the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People
- Aboriginal community organisations.



FAMILY VIOLENCE

The Aboriginal community, in partnership with the Victorian Government, is leading the development of a safer Victoria for all Aboriginal families and communities

Family violence disproportionately affects Aboriginal women and their children.

Mainstream services are often ill-equipped to respond in a culturally appropriate way, which can prevent Aboriginal people from seeking help and perpetuating the cycle of violence. Guided by *Strong Culture, Strong Peoples and Strong Families: Towards a safer future for Indigenous families and communities* and the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence, the Victorian Government is making an unprecedented investment in community-led strategies including culturally appropriate legal and justice services, culturally safe and accessible victim support, and perpetrator and prevention programs.

We acknowledge the unique knowledge, skills and expertise that Aboriginal people bring to service delivery reform, including the work of:

- the Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum
- Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups
- the Aboriginal Justice Forum
- the Aboriginal Children's Forum
- Aboriginal community organisations.

Progressing an ambitious self-determination agenda

This is the first time in the history of Australia that any government, at any level, and of any persuasion, has committed to a process towards treaty. It is a time we cannot waste.

Aboriginal Treaty Working Group

Aboriginal people have long been self-determining and have asked governments to support them in this approach. Yet too often governments have interpreted this as a call for 'consultation' or 'engagement'. Real self-determination means the way forward must be led by Aboriginal Victorians. And for this to happen, it is essential for government to change the old narrative and redefine its relationship to work with the Aboriginal community and support Aboriginal people in their self-determination journey.

The Victorian Government is working in partnership with the Aboriginal community to embed self-determination within policy design and practice. This includes world-leading cultural heritage legislation supported by sustainable funding. This will empower Traditional Owners to manage and protect their cultural heritage and support strong partnership structures to inform policy decision-making.

Pathway to treaty

In February 2016, Aboriginal people in Victoria called on the Andrews Labor Government to enter into treaty discussions as an essential component of advancing self-determination and reconciliation. The Victorian Government accepted the call and is now working in partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal community to build a pathway to treaty. The first critical step in this journey is for Aboriginal Victorians to decide who can and should work with government to progress treaty on their behalf.

Throughout 2016 and 2017, Aboriginal communities have been gathering around the state to discuss and decide on how their Aboriginal Representative Body should be designed and developed. Guided by the Aboriginal Treaty Working Group, up to 7,500 people have been consulted and engaged on treaty—raising their voices on how they wish to be represented.

Legislation is being developed in partnership with the Aboriginal Treaty Working Group to enshrine the relationship between the future Aboriginal Representative Body and government and lay the foundations for how they will work together to advance the treaty process. This legislation is expected to come before Parliament in 2018.

An Aboriginal community-led design process

The Victorian Government knows that while it is the Aboriginal community who leads the way on self-determination, a transformation is required across government to change the way we work together.

While there is positive work underway, we must also acknowledge where government process and practice are hindering Aboriginal self-determination. This requires an ongoing commitment to a fair and equal relationship between the Aboriginal community and government to design and implement reforms.

Throughout 2017, government leaders have been meeting with a range of Aboriginal community members to deepen their understanding of self-determination and get advice on the priority partnership actions required to better support this transformation.

Combined timeline

2017

- SEPT-NOV** ● Community Assembly convened to consider final design elements of the Aboriginal Representative Body
- SEPTEMBER** ● Announcement at the second Ministerial Forum on Aboriginal Affairs of a community-led process to advance Aboriginal self-determination including the establishment of an Aboriginal Executive Council
- APRIL** ● Options for a permanent Aboriginal Representative Body are discussed at the third Victorian Treaty Forum
- MARCH** ● A pilot of the First Mortgages program is announced by the Victorian Government
- Community consultations are held in six locations on elements of contemporary representation, including eligibility and nomination of candidates and potential electoral boundaries

2016

- DECEMBER** ● Findings of consultation about the Aboriginal Representative Body is reported back to community at the second Victorian Treaty Forum
- OCT-DEC** ● Community consultations are held in 10 locations on what design principles, roles and functions they saw as important for their Representative Body
- SEPTEMBER** ● First tranche of public houses transferred to Aboriginal Housing Victoria
- JULY** ● The Aboriginal Treaty Working Group is established to consult with Aboriginal communities to develop options for a representative body and to provide advice to community and government on the next steps in a treaty-making process
- Announcement of government's commitment to develop a coordinated approach for self-determination at the Ministerial Forum on Aboriginal Affairs
- MAY** ● The Victorian Government holds the first Victorian Treaty Forum to bring together Victoria's Aboriginal community and discuss how to advance self-determination, a treaty, and an Aboriginal representative body
- APRIL** ● Four regional forums on self-determination are held
- FEBRUARY** ● Aboriginal Victorians call for treaty

2015

- MARCH** ● Self-determination is announced by the Premier as the new policy framework to guide Aboriginal affairs in Victoria
-

Investing in self-determination

To achieve lasting and transformative change, the Victorian Government acknowledges that it must share power and resources with the Aboriginal community and ensure the community has the capacity to effectively lead self-determination reform. To this end, the Victorian Government's investment in self-determination has so far seen the establishment of a range of initiatives. These include:

- establishment of the Aboriginal Treaty Working Group, who i.e. consults with Aboriginal communities to develop options for an Aboriginal Representative Body and provides advice on the next steps in a treaty-making process
- tranche 2 of the transfer of 1,448 properties from the Director of Housing to Aboriginal Housing Victoria
- amendments to Section 18 of the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (VIC) to support Aboriginal guardianship for vulnerable children
- transfer of government statutory powers to Registered Aboriginal Parties and the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council for the management of cultural heritage and Aboriginal ancestral remains
- the First Mortgage and Community Infrastructure Program, the first stage of which allows for the removal of mortgages, as held by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, from eligible Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) buildings
- the Aboriginal Water Program, a component of the statewide Water for Victoria plan, which identifies Aboriginal values and uses of water across culturally significant locations and helps build the capacity of the sector to ensure the involvement of Traditional Owners
- the *Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement and Strategic Action Plan*, which will build on existing strengths across the government's child and family services system to make further strategic improvements that will lead to measurable and positive change for Aboriginal children and families
- *Korin Korin Balit-Djak: the Aboriginal Health, Wellbeing and Safety Strategic Plan*, which provides an overarching framework to improve the health, wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal Victorians now and over the next 10 years
- *Marrung: Aboriginal Education Plan 2016–2026*, which articulates the vision and strategy for improving Koorie education outcomes
- *Balit Marrup: the Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing Framework* (SEWB), which recognises the fundamental role of culture, community and spirituality to Aboriginal health and wellbeing
- development of the fourth phase of the *Aboriginal Justice Agreement* to strengthen the agreement's self-determination focus and its underpinning programs.

Other initiatives being rolled out include community capacity and co-design grants for which \$8 million is being invested to build the capacity of Aboriginal organisations to meaningfully participate in and lead self-determination reforms.

The government has also allocated \$15 million for a new community infrastructure fund to be used for a range of projects nominated by Aboriginal communities and organisations, including new community facilities or spaces designed to promote culture and heritage. This fund, part of the First Mortgage and Community Infrastructure Program, will enable these properties to be more effectively used for the economic and social benefit of community.

Recent new investment

The 2017/18 Victorian Budget provided **\$134 million** in new funding to work with Aboriginal Victorians on a range of initiatives to build foundations for self-determination, empower communities, support a strong culture, and provide support for health, education, mentoring and more.

Support for Aboriginal self-determination

\$68.2 million over the next four years to support Aboriginal self-determination by funding treaty and ensuring Aboriginal communities remain at the heart of these discussions. It will also be used to create an Aboriginal Community Infrastructure Fund for significant, innovative community infrastructure projects.

Specialist alcohol and drug services

\$14.1 million for 17 Aboriginal alcohol and drug specialist roles to provide services and support for Aboriginal communities, and an additional 17 Aboriginal alcohol and other drug specialist youth workers.

Emotional wellbeing and mental health

\$8.4 million to support Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing and mental health, including establishing 15 full-time mental health trainee positions for Aboriginal people, and 10 Aboriginal-specific clinical and therapeutic positions in Aboriginal Controlled Community Health Organisations.

Aboriginal Youth Mentoring Program

\$1.8 million to extend the Aboriginal Youth Mentoring Program, supporting young people to remain connected to culture, families and friends.

Support for Aboriginal Victorians facing family violence

\$84 million over the next four years to meet the needs of Aboriginal victim survivors and working to prevent family violence from happening in the first place. This includes extending legal services for Aboriginal Victorians; expansion of family violence prevention, early intervention and diversion programs; and funding to trial a new Koorie women's gathering place. It also includes funds to expand crisis accommodation and refuges for Aboriginal women and their children; family violence industry planning; strengthening the Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups; building the capacity of the Aboriginal sector; and supporting Section 18 trials to transfer legal guardianship of Aboriginal children and young people to ACCOs.

Marrung: Aboriginal Education Plan 2016–2026

\$8.0 million over four years to support Aboriginal Victorians in achieving learning aspirations. This includes support for the delivery of Koorie Supported Playgroups and Koorie Families as First Educators; maintaining the Early Years Koorie Literacy and Numeracy Program; and the development and piloting of an accredited Aboriginal languages program for Koorie community members to develop their language teaching skills in order to support the delivery of language programs in schools and kindergartens.

Strategic Action Area 1



Koorie Birthing Unit, The Northern Hospital
Courtesy Star Weekly/Dennis Manktelow.

Maternal and early childhood health and development

When children are connected to community and family they do much better, the evidence suggests.

Professor Muriel Bamblett, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency

National data suggests that the gap in infant survival and health is closing and that Aboriginal kindergarten participation rates are nearing parity with other Victorian children.

Gains are evident in perinatal and infant health, and large strides have been achieved across early childhood and kindergarten participation in Victoria, but we still have some way to go to supporting families.

Delivering enhanced maternal and early childhood services means removing system

barriers, promoting genuine and effective partnerships and supporting Aboriginal families to access culturally safe services. Research has shown that the first five years of a child's life are fundamental to shaping a child's future. Ongoing investment in community-led responses to optimise maternal health and the development of Aboriginal children is an essential platform for self-determination; ensuring that all children have an equal chance to thrive and grow.

Headline Indicator 1. Improve Aboriginal infant survival and health

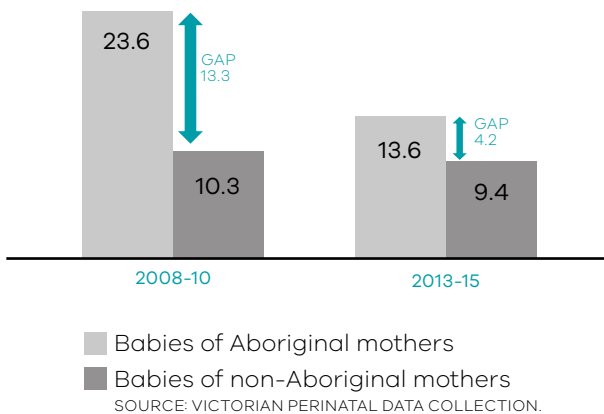
TARGET

Close the gap in the perinatal mortality rate by 2023.

Since 2007–09, the gap in perinatal mortality has been cut by two-thirds.

Perinatal mortality is 1.4 times higher for babies born to Aboriginal mothers compared to non-Aboriginal mothers; however, this gap is closing. While rates can vary significantly from year to year due to the small numbers, recent data shows a decrease in perinatal mortality rates, with a rate of 13.6 per 1,000 babies born to Aboriginal mothers in 2013–15, a decrease from 21.2 per 1,000 in 2007–09.

Perinatal mortality rate per 1,000 births



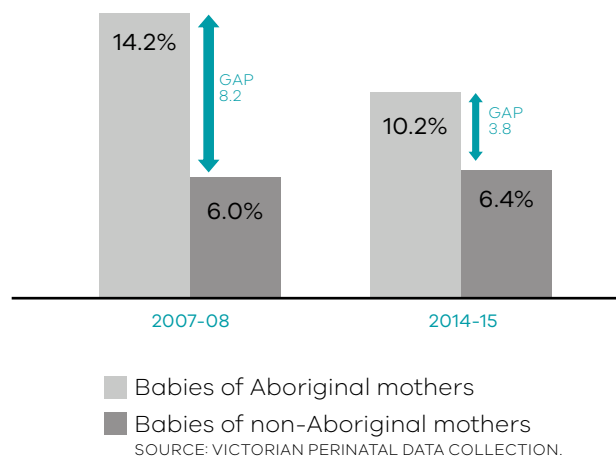
TARGET

Close the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal babies with a birth weight below 2,500 grams by 2023.

Since 2007–08, the gap in low birth weight has been cut by half.

Proportionately, low birth weight affects babies born to Aboriginal mothers at more than 1.5 times the rate for babies born to non-Aboriginal mothers. However, the gap is closing. Since 2007–08, the gap has closed by half, from 8.2 per cent to 3.8 per cent in 2014–15. The health risks of low birth weight in babies are well established and include a greater risk of dying during an infant’s first year of life, poorer health in childhood and the development of chronic disease as adults.

Babies with birth weight below 2,500 grams



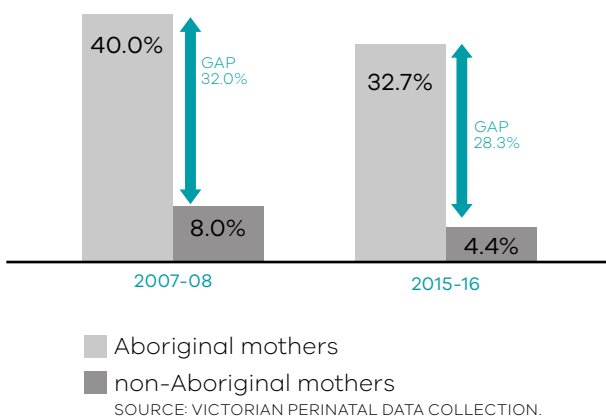
OTHER MEASURE

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

Rates of smoking during pregnancy are resistant to change; rates of smoking during pregnancy are almost five times the rate of non-Aboriginal mothers.

Thirty-eight per cent of Aboriginal women smoke during the first half of pregnancy—almost five times the rate of non-Aboriginal mothers. By the end of pregnancy, 30 per cent of Aboriginal mothers still smoke. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare estimates that in 2009–11, 51 per cent of low birth weight births to Aboriginal mothers were attributable to smoking, compared with 19 per cent for other Australian mothers. Smoking is one of the key determinants of poorer perinatal health for Aboriginal women and infants.

Smoking during second half of pregnancy



OTHER MEASURE

The proportion of Aboriginal children attending Maternal and Child Health Services at key age milestones.

Higher rates of perinatal mortality and low birth weight reflect social factors such as education, nutrition, smoking, alcohol use in pregnancy and socioeconomic disadvantage that disproportionately affect Aboriginal mothers. Early access to care through community-led programs such as Koori Maternity Services (KMS) is associated with better identification and management of maternal and foetal risk factors and reduced preterm births and low birth weights.

The role of KMS in providing flexible, holistic and culturally safe antenatal and postnatal care is critical to improving outcomes and increasing participation in maternity care for Aboriginal women, babies and families. In 2015–16, approximately 75 per cent of women or babies who identified as Aboriginal received antenatal care through KMS, with almost 50 per cent of women accessing KMS at less than 13 weeks gestation.

KMS delivers culturally appropriate care for Aboriginal women or women having Aboriginal babies, and their families, in 14 sites across Victoria, including three in public hospitals. KMS outcomes include:

- more Aboriginal women accessing antenatal care earlier in their pregnancy
- fewer Aboriginal women smoking during pregnancy
- fewer Aboriginal babies born premature
- fewer Aboriginal babies dying during pregnancy or soon after, with a consistent and significant decline in the mortality rate for babies of Aboriginal mothers.



POLICY DIRECTIONS

The circumstances into which we are born can influence our lives right through to adulthood.³ Research shows that children born into a challenging family environment often have poorer health⁴ and education outcomes,⁵ which in turn can negatively impact adult life. Conversely, improving a child's social environment can

reduce entrenched inequalities. In response, Victoria is trialling new culturally responsive models across the state to improve access to Maternal and Child Health Services for Aboriginal families. Community-led efforts are vital to ensuring families and caregivers are supported during the early years of a child's life.

Cradle to Kinder is a targeted antenatal and postnatal support service that provides intensive and long-term parenting support to vulnerable mothers. The target groups for the Aboriginal Cradle to Kinder program are young pregnant Aboriginal women or women under 25 who are pregnant with an Aboriginal child. The program provides support to families from before birth until the child reaches the age of four and targets younger mothers and parents, providing an opportunity to break the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage.

Mallee District Aboriginal Service (MDAS) early years services

MDAS provides specialist services to support local mothers and families through early parenthood. The development of the early years program was based on an identified gap between health and education and learnings from other MDAS programs. This included a strong understanding of local community needs and circumstances, including an understanding of the effects of attachment and trauma. The program has been working alongside families to set their own headline indicators and has seen success, particularly among high-risk cohorts, in areas such as immunisation, regular attendance at check-ups, and home safety.

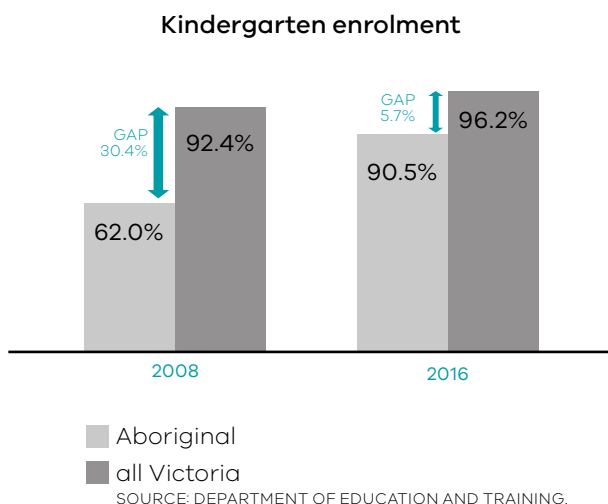
Headline Indicator 2. Increase Aboriginal kindergarten participation

TARGET

The gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal 4-year-old children having access to a high-quality kindergarten program will be closed by 2014.

Since 2008, the gap in kindergarten participation has been cut by 80 per cent. Aboriginal kindergarten participation is approaching parity with other Victorian children.

The number of Aboriginal children enrolled in four-year-old kindergarten continues to grow. In 2016, 1,211 Aboriginal children (90.5 per cent) were enrolled, up from 525 children (62 per cent) in 2008. The Victoria-wide kindergarten participation rate is 96.2 per cent, putting Aboriginal kindergarten participation at near parity with other Victorian children.



POLICY DIRECTIONS

The gains in kindergarten participation have been made, and are made, through community-led early childhood programs and through creating inclusive spaces for Aboriginal children and families in mainstream programs. In the mainstream, **Koorie Education Workforce** and **Koorie Preschool Assistants** work with kindergarten providers and schools to enhance the access, inclusion, participation and attendance of Aboriginal children in kindergarten programs, as well as provide information and support to Aboriginal families and communities to support their engagement in their children's learning.

The **Education State Early Childhood Reform Plan** outlines the Victorian Government's vision for early childhood to create a higher quality, more equitable and inclusive early childhood system. Under this plan, the government will work closely with local government, the early childhood services sector and the Aboriginal community to support higher quality services and reduce disadvantage in early education; provide more support for parenting; and make early childhood services more accessible and inclusive.

Koorie Education Workforce works with kindergarten providers and schools to develop strategies to support improved outcomes for Aboriginal learners, build local partnerships with Aboriginal communities and engage with parents and families. This includes cultural inclusion initiatives and strengthening community partnerships.

I sent my children to kinder because I wanted them to be ready for school. Kinder made them smart, proud, strong and resilient. Now they're sending their children too.

Aunty Esme, President,
Aborigines Advancement League



Courtesy of Riverine Herald

Best Start is a prevention and early intervention initiative to improve the health, development, learning and wellbeing of all Victorian children from conception through to transition to school (usually 0 to 8 years old). It aims to strengthen the capacity of parents, families, communities and early years services to better provide for the needs of children and their families. There are 30 Best Start sites, six of which are Aboriginal Best Start sites. Aboriginal Best Start is community-led and ensures local Aboriginal communities and organisations have every possible opportunity to influence outcomes for their children and families. These projects are designed to empower communities and families and develop broad cross-sectoral partnerships across all early years services.

It is important to highlight work targeting 'mainstream' kinder and early childhood services to create culturally safe places for Aboriginal families and children. Targeting inclusion is important particularly in a Victorian context because of the low concentration of Aboriginal children across kinder and early childhood centres.

Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated

Headline Indicator 3. Reduce the rate of Aboriginal child protection substantiations

TARGET

By 2023, reduce the gap in the rate of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal child protection substantiations by 75%.

Aboriginal children and young people are vastly over-represented in child protection substantiations and out-of-home care.

From 2007–08 to 2015–16, the number of child protection substantiations more than doubled, from 681 to 1,708 children, widening the gap. The number and rate of substantiated child protection notifications also increased for non-Aboriginal children during the same period. Increases in child protection notification are placing enormous burden on services to respond and leading to significant increases in the number and rate of children in out-of-home-care.

While Aboriginal children represent less than 2 per cent of the Victorian population under 18 years of age, they comprise nearly 20 per cent of the children and young people in out-of-home care. In Victoria, 1-in-12 Aboriginal children are in out-of-home care compared to 1-in-200 non-Aboriginal children. Between 2014 and 2016, the rate of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care in Victoria increased from 71.5 to 87.4 per 1,000 children, an increase of 22 per cent—the largest increase of all Australian jurisdictions during that time.

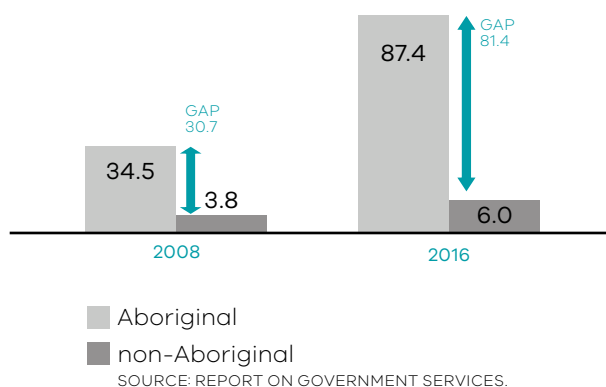
Family violence is a major driver of demand for child protection services in Victoria. Taskforce 1000 findings, which were drawn from a review of the circumstances of 980 Aboriginal children and young people in the out-of-home care system, documented that over 80 per cent of Aboriginal children and young people had experienced family violence. Evidence of the link between Aboriginal women and children’s experiences of family violence and a disproportionate rate of contact with the child protection system is undeniable.

... past government policies have impacted on Aboriginal children, their families and community ... we saw generations of connection with the criminal justice and child protection systems ... and the over-riding impact of the past impacting on the present.

Andrew Jackomos, PSM Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People on the findings of the Taskforce 1000 review

Champion’s Strategy is a localised initiative designed to enhance the cultural competency of the child protection workforce across the service’s East Division. Culturally sensitive and dedicated practitioners receive specialised coaching and mentoring and are assisted to develop strong relationships with local Elders, Aboriginal communities and organisations. These ‘champions’ provide peer support and develop a community of culturally appropriate practice focused on improving the outcomes for Aboriginal children and their families involved with child protection, as well as enhance the cultural safety of the Victorian Child Protection Service.

Children in out-of-home-care per 1,000



Our practice approaches incorporate understandings of the impact of past policies on families today; understanding how intergenerational trauma and racism must be addressed as part of effective responses. We know that providing Aboriginal services for the Aboriginal community is what works.

Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency

POLICY DIRECTIONS

The number of Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care has continued to grow since 2014, the year Taskforce 1000 commenced. Many of the children are witness to intergenerational family violence and have histories of intergenerational child removal.

Victoria is proud to have championed the broad, overarching right of self-determination that underpins approaches to supporting vulnerable families, children and young people, but it is clear that more needs to be done.

The recent systemic inquiries into the child protection system—*Always was always will be Koori children* and *In the child's best interests*—contain 133 recommendations that have, at their core, the principle of self-determination and the belief that Aboriginal organisations are best placed to look after vulnerable Aboriginal children and keep them connected to kin, culture and community.

Many of the recommendations target support for the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle and related cultural connection programs and initiatives within the child protection system.

Implementing these recommendations is further supported by **Roadmap for Reform: strong families, safe children** which has a specific focus on Aboriginal children, including culturally sensitive support; increasing the number of Aboriginal carers; and supporting Aboriginal self-management regarding decisions on vulnerable Aboriginal children, young people and families.

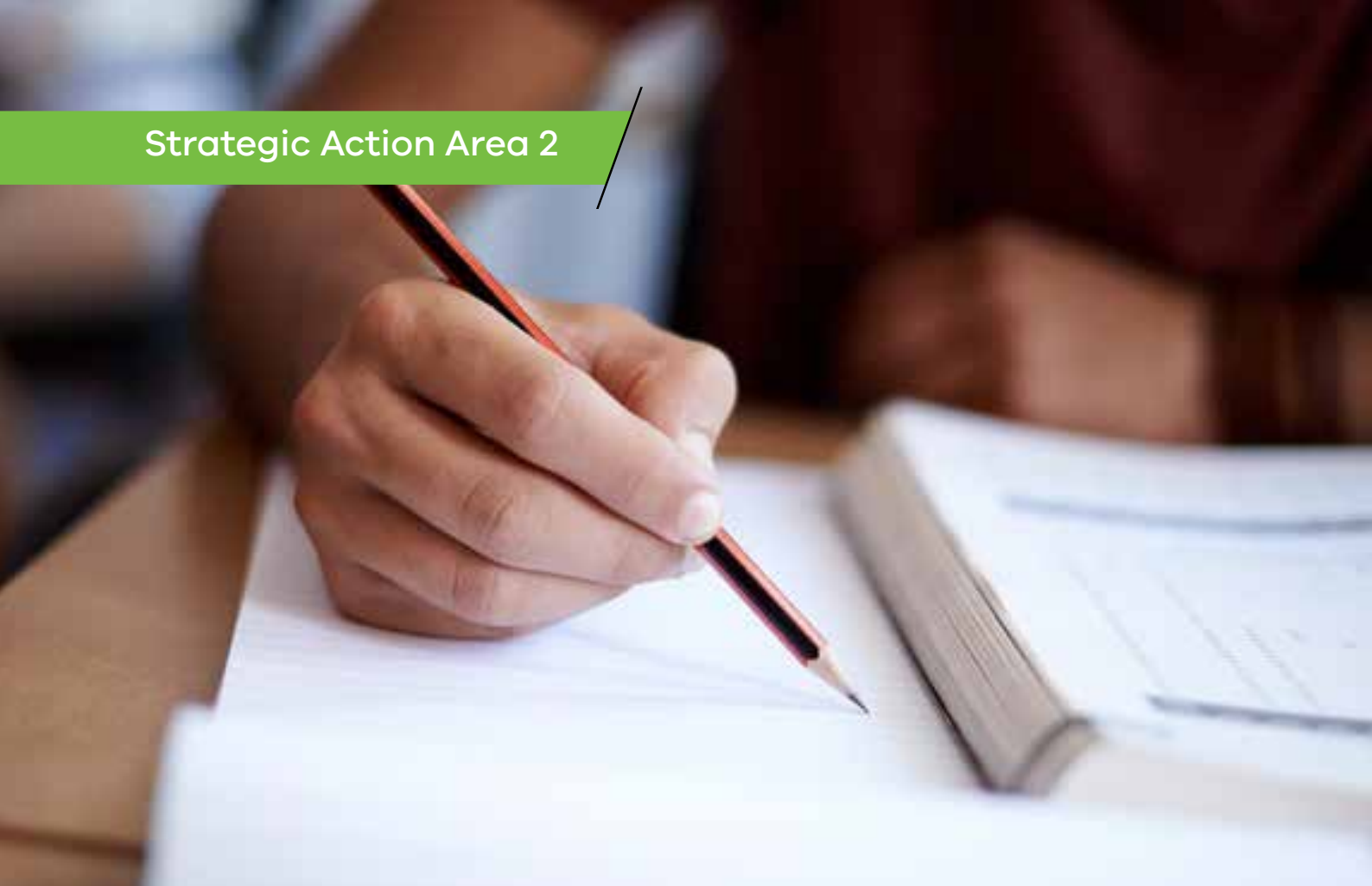
Roadmap for Reform identifies that more must be done to prevent the need for out-of-home care placements and provide intensive home visiting and structured parental support to maximise opportunities for reunification. This goes hand in hand with culturally sensitive training and enhancing Aboriginal carer recruitment and supports, as well as building the capacity of Aboriginal organisations that wish to assume responsibility for contracted case management of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care.

Section 18 of the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* enables the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services to authorise the principal officer of an Aboriginal agency to undertake functions and powers in relation to a protection order for an Aboriginal child. Through authorisation, an Aboriginal agency will hold parental responsibility for children on protection orders rather than the department. The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) is on track to be fully authorised under Section 18 of the 'Children, Youth and Families Act' in November 2017.

Work has also commenced through the Aboriginal Children's Forum, to build the capacity of Aboriginal organisations that wish to assume responsibility for contracted case management of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care.

VACCA has renamed Section 18 of the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* 'Nugel', a Woi wurrung word meaning 'belong'. Built on the learnings of a pilot project that concluded in 2015, Nugel will initially be authorised for 35 children and young people from Melbourne's Northern Metropolitan Region. The evaluation of this pilot showed positive outcomes for all children involved, particularly in relation to cultural connectedness, with several children also returning home. The transfer of responsibility for Aboriginal children to Aboriginal organisations is a key action in progressing self-determination. Addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal children in child protection and out-of-home care can only be achieved through systemic change based on the leadership of the Aboriginal community.

Strategic Action Area 2



Education and training

When they've gone on to complete secondary school ... they've been able to go on to university; they've been able to go into professional positions; they've been able to go into trade positions. They've been able to make choices about what careers and what lives they will lead.

Geraldine Atkinson, President Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated

More Aboriginal students are completing school than ever before. However, lower school attendance and NAPLAN achievement rates indicate on-going challenges to improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians.

The key to improving these outcomes lies in addressing issues of equity, access and inclusiveness throughout the education system.

The ***Marrung: Aboriginal Education Plan 2016–2026***, developed in partnership with the Aboriginal community, envisions Victoria as a place where all Aboriginal people achieve their learning aspirations and realise the full benefits of the Education State reforms across early childhood, schools and further education.

Headline Indicator 4. Improve literacy and numeracy for Aboriginal students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9

TARGET

Halve the gap for Aboriginal students in reading, writing and numeracy by 2018.

Fewer than 90 Aboriginal students for every 100 non-Aboriginal students meet NAPLAN benchmarks on average. This has been resistant to change.

Despite significant gains in school retention, fewer Aboriginal students are meeting NAPLAN benchmarks. NAPLAN takes place every year and assesses Australian school students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 across four domains: reading; writing; language conventions (spelling, grammar and punctuation); and numeracy. Between 78 and 91 Aboriginal students for every 100 non-Aboriginal students met minimum attainment thresholds for literacy and numeracy across years 3, 5, 7 and 9.

The achievement gaps in NAPLAN performance widen across successive years. In 2016, 87.3 per cent of Aboriginal Year 3 students met the minimum standard for literacy compared to 96 per cent for non-Aboriginal Year 3 students. By Year 9, the proportion of Aboriginal students who met the NAPLAN minimum benchmark for literacy dropped 5.7 percentage points (to 81.6 per cent), while the percentage of non-Aboriginal students who met the benchmark at Year 9 was only 2.3 percentage points less than the Year 3 cohort. Since 2008, there have been minor fluctuations in the percentage of Aboriginal students achieving national minimum standards in NAPLAN tests; however, changes do not indicate an ongoing trend of improvement or decline. The key to doing better lies in supporting strong community-led responses to support mainstream schools to provide culturally safe, inclusive and supportive learning environments for Aboriginal students.

The Early Years Koorie Literacy and Numeracy Program provides targeted support for Aboriginal students not meeting the expected level in reading and numeracy in Prep to Year 3.

The Extended Koorie Literacy and Numeracy Program provides targeted support to eligible Aboriginal students in Year 4 not meeting the national minimum standard in reading and/or numeracy. Support will be extended to students in years 4 and 5 in 2018, and in 2019 students in years 4, 5 and 6 will be eligible for support.





Charcoal Lane mural in Fitzroy
by Aboriginal artists Robert Young,
Mike Makatron and Hessco.

The loss of language symbolises the loss of culture. For us young mob and our future generations, the survival and revival of our languages is imperative to our very being.

Bridget Caldwell, writer and artist

OTHER MEASURE

School attendance rates for Aboriginal students.

While more Aboriginal students are staying in school, absenteeism remains a significant issue. By Year 9, the gap in attendance equates to Aboriginal students receiving six months less schooling than their non-Aboriginal peers. This statistic remains unchanged since 2008.

Higher rates of absenteeism of Aboriginal students continue to be a challenge. The lack of improvement in the attendance gap over the last eight years, and importance of school attendance in improving student outcomes,⁶ suggests that increased effort is required to make schools inclusive and safe spaces for Aboriginal students. Community-led programs that promote cultural safety and celebrate Aboriginal cultural identity are vital to reducing absenteeism and improving education outcomes for Aboriginal students.

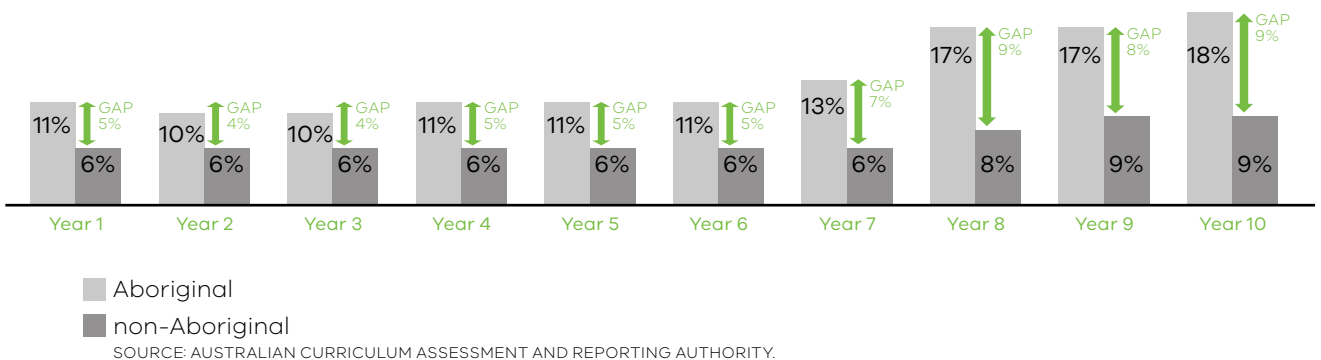
Reclaiming language

Reclaiming and reviving language is one way the Victorian Government and community partners are working to promote and celebrate Aboriginal culture in schools. The 2017/18 Victorian Budget allocated funding for the development and pilot of an accredited Aboriginal languages program to assist Aboriginal community speakers of language to develop their teaching skills. The investment is in line with *Marrung's* vision to increase the number of Aboriginal language programs across Victoria. More than 1,000 students are currently learning an Aboriginal language in a formal school-based languages program. In 2016, six Aboriginal languages were being taught in seven schools across Victoria, to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, from primary school through to Year 12.

This is recognition of language revival and the importance of Aboriginal languages.

Aunty Gail Smith, Wurundjeri Elder

Per cent of school year absentees - 2016 government schools



Headline Indicator 5. Increase the proportion of Aboriginal young people who have completed at least Year 12 or equivalent

TARGET

Halve the gap between the Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal 20–24 year olds by 2020.

From Kindergarten to Year 12, more Aboriginal children and young people are staying in school.

In 2016, 99.8 per cent of Aboriginal young people completed Year 10, putting Aboriginal Year 10 student retention at parity with other Victorian students. Year 12 or equivalent rates suggest a similar trend towards parity. Since 2008, the gap in Year 12 attainment rates narrowed by almost half, from a 24 percentage point gap in 2008 to a 13 percentage point gap in 2014–15.

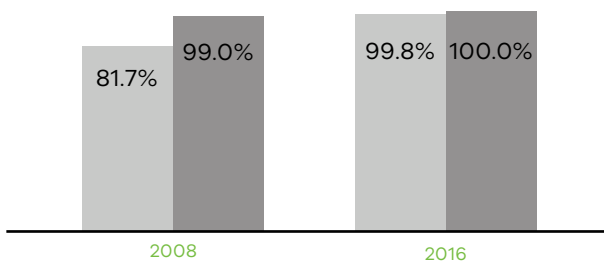
POLICY DIRECTIONS

Research shows equitable education outcomes result in lower income inequality.⁷ Community-led programming is key to maximising education outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians, promoting greater intergenerational mobility and ensuring the Aboriginal community and the wider Victorian community can benefit from the unique potential of the next generation of Aboriginal Victorians.

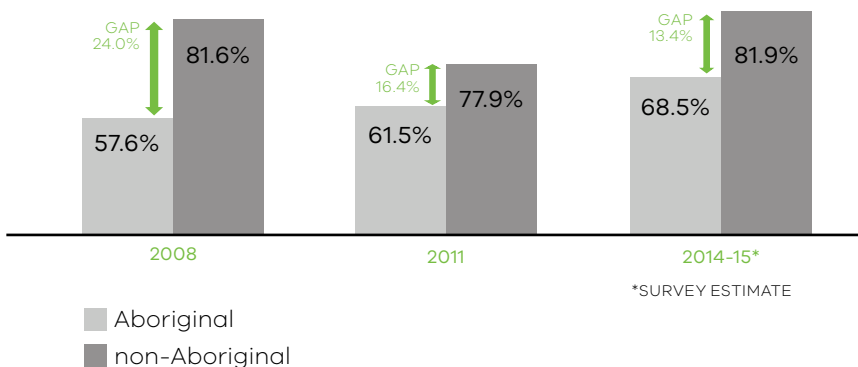
Navigator is a service pilot designed to support young people aged 12–17 years not connected to school or at risk of disengaging. Piloted in eight locations across Victoria, Navigator’s wrap-around support includes tracking and monitoring progress, reporting on outcomes, identifying gaps in local services and supporting planning to address these gaps.

LOOKOUT Education Support Centres support children and young people in out-of-home care to stay at school and do well in their education. LOOKOUT Centres employ Koorie cultural advisors, allied health workers and educators within their multidisciplinary teams to ensure that every child in out-of-home care has an Individual Education Plan, a Student Support Group and a Learning Mentor.

Apparent retention to Year 10



Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates



OTHER MEASURE

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

Right now, Year 12 is seen as the final destination. If we are going to push our students to Year 12, we need to be thinking about how to support them after they leave school.

Lionel Bamblett, General Manager Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated

According to the *On Track* 2016 survey of school leavers, Aboriginal school leavers were more likely to go on to full-time work and less likely to commence further education or training. Those that did go on to further education and training were more likely than non-Aboriginal students to choose vocational education and training over a bachelor's degree at university.

Promoting pathways to further study or training opportunities for Aboriginal school leavers is key to ensuring Aboriginal school leavers are positioned for success when they enter the job market. This includes working with the Aboriginal community, industry groups and schools to embed and support access to further education, training and career advice.

Koorie Liaison Officers are employed in Victorian TAFE institutes to provide support to Aboriginal students and enhance inclusion. **Wurreker Implementation Plans** are a requirement of every Victorian TAFE institute and outline strategies to support improved outcomes for Aboriginal students, improved Aboriginal employment within the institute and a positive learning environment.

Through the **Wurreker Strategy**, the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) supports increased engagement in vocational education and training by facilitating Aboriginal community engagement with training providers and industry.

Toorong Marnong Victorian Higher Education Accord is a partnership initiative between VAEAI and the Victorian Vice Chancellors Committee. Toorong Marnong delivers several initiatives to support the participation and retention of Aboriginal students.

The **Toorong Marnong Hotdesk** is available annually each December, upon release of ATAR results, to provide Aboriginal school leavers access to advice about university enrolment, options and career pathways.

Strategic Action Area 3



Economic participation

Ensuring the value and sustenance of culture and identity in the market is a critical driver in the pursuit of education and economic aspirations.

Paul Briggs, CEO Kaiela Institute Incorporated

Aboriginal people, organisations and businesses have long made valuable contributions to Victoria's economy. Aboriginal economic development and participation is vital to growing Victoria's wealth generally and to increasing overall economic productivity and competitive advantage. It is also a key foundation for self-determination.

In spite of this, Aboriginal people remain under-represented in the workforce. Proportionately, there are 74 Aboriginal people for every 100 non-Aboriginal people in the workforce and the rate of unemployment has been slow to change over the last 10 years.

Central to Aboriginal economic development is the engagement of Aboriginal business leaders, community members and stakeholders to maximise Aboriginal potential and talent. The Victorian Aboriginal Economic Board (VAEB) plays a vital role in championing Victorian Aboriginal economic development. As a platform for public-private cooperation, it assists the government, Aboriginal businesses and mainstream companies to translate the shared aspiration of inclusive growth and workforce participation into collective action.

Image: Indigenous Runway Project supports young Aboriginal Victorians to carve out a career in the fashion industry. In 2017, Creative Victoria funded four Aboriginal Victorian fashion designers to develop a collection and present their work on a professional runway at the Virgin Australia Melbourne Fashion Festival. Photo: Jorge de Araujo.

Headline Indicator 6. Increase Aboriginal labour force participation

TARGET

Halve the gap in employment outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Victorians by 2018.

Aboriginal Victorians continue to be under-represented in the workforce. Data from the 2014–15 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) puts the unemployment rate for Aboriginal Victorians at 16 per cent, almost three times higher than the Victorian average. Employment rates for Aboriginal Victorians have remained static. Since 2008, the percentage of employed Aboriginal Victorians increased just 3 percentage points, from 49.5 per cent to 52.7 per cent, while the proportion of employed non-Aboriginal Victorians rose 9 percentage points during the same period, to 71.5 per cent.

Aboriginal young people, people living in regional areas and women are particularly vulnerable to underemployment, as national statistics show. Nationally, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are about half as likely as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men (18 per cent compared to 38 per cent) to be in full-time employment, and 31.8 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people aged 15–24 years are unemployed—the highest rate of unemployment of all age groups and almost twice the rate for non-Indigenous people at 16.7 per cent.⁸ Further, just under half of Victoria’s Aboriginal population live in regional areas where there may be fewer employment opportunities. These statistics indicate that building work opportunities for young Aboriginal people, women and Aboriginal people living in regional areas is key to inclusive growth.

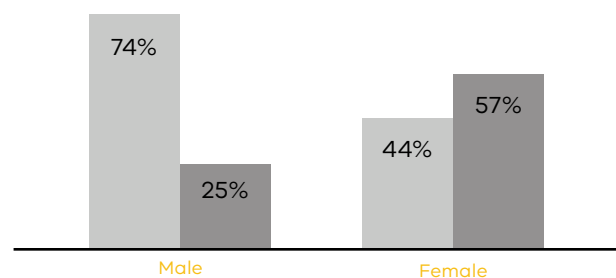
OTHER MEASURE

The proportion of Aboriginal people in various income bands.

Underemployment and lower workforce participation mean Aboriginal Victorians earn less than non-Aboriginal Victorians—around \$165 less a week than the Victorian median income and \$219 less a week in median household income.⁹ Encouragingly, however, the rate of income growth for Aboriginal Victorians in the last five years has outstripped income growth for non-Aboriginal Victorians, rising by 23 per cent from 2011 to 2016 compared to 15 per cent for the Victorian median income.

Household income is about more than just how much money people have in the bank. It affects where they live; how worried they feel day to day about making ends meet; and it can impact access to schools, future employment opportunities and feelings of neighbourhood safety. Hence, raising income is central to equalising access to opportunities and services, and supporting personal and collective agency.

National Indigenous full-time/part-time employment status, by sex – 2014-15



- Employed, working full-time
- Employed, working part-time

SOURCE: NATIONAL ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER SOCIAL SURVEY 2014-15. NB: PROPORTION EXCLUDES REMOTE RESPONDENTS.



Skillinvest and Victoria Police have partnered to provide a school-based traineeship program for Aboriginal youth.

POLICY DIRECTIONS

Investing in jobs

The Victorian Government funds several training and employment linkage programs to support Aboriginal job seekers. In August 2016, funding of \$39.2 million for 38 new employment services through its Jobs Victoria Employment Network (JVEN) were announced. Under the first JVEN funding round, five targeted services for Aboriginal job seekers received a total of \$5.6 million to support 480 job placements and a further 16 multi-target applications received a total of \$17.1 million for programs that included Aboriginal job seekers as a target group.

Skillinvest and Victoria Police have partnered to provide a school-based traineeship program for Aboriginal youth. Thirty-two school-based trainees are currently participating in the program, which aims to boost the number of Aboriginal employees within the Victorian police force as well as provide trainees with the opportunity to gain valuable skills and hands-on work experience while completing a Certificate III in Business Administration.

Metro Tunnel is Victoria's largest major public transport project. To secure a diverse workforce, Metro Tunnel contractors have a number of employment targets including a 2.5 per cent Aboriginal staffing target.

Level Crossing Removal Project is underway across Melbourne, creating jobs and providing skills, qualifications and opportunities for young Aboriginal Victorians. In addition to the 2.5 per cent Aboriginal employment target, classroom training, on-the-job mentoring and ongoing career support will be provided to Aboriginal students to equip them with the skills and qualifications they need to work in the Victorian rail construction industry.

The Algabonyah Employment Partnerships program is a regional development, employment and training program operating in Shepparton and the Goulburn Valley. In August 2016, the Victorian Government invested \$1.4 million over three years to identify and successfully support placement of 75 Aboriginal people in employment. The project has so far registered 49 Aboriginal participants, with 33 successfully placed into work and a further nine gaining sustainable employment.

Creating culturally safe work places

The thing to understand about procurement policy is that it's not just about creating Aboriginal businesses. At its heart, it's about creating jobs. So what is recognised and understood, and it's mentioned in the Forrest review, is that Aboriginal businesses are 100 times more likely to employ Aboriginal people. The corporates are looking for opportunities to bring Aboriginal businesses into their supply chain; diversity matters and we know that diversity actually adds a lot of value for companies.

Jason Eades, Aboriginal entrepreneur

NATSISS indicates that in 2014–15, 37 per cent of Aboriginal Victorians had experienced racism at least once in the previous 12 months. Experiences of racism can occur anywhere and workplaces are no exception. Governments, businesses and community partners have a role to play in promoting culturally safe and inclusive work places to stamp out discrimination, lack of opportunity and other drivers of disadvantage.

Greater effort is needed to empower and promote inclusive social and economic growth and ensure Aboriginal Victorians are better represented in decision-making so that policy and investment solutions can be more effective,

credible and accountable. This means more than just investing in job programs; it is also about inclusive work environments, harnessing the potential of Aboriginal entrepreneurship and investing in a diverse Aboriginal economy that nurtures the aspirations of young people.

In response, the VAEB has been working with mainstream employers to promote the importance of culturally safe workplaces. Under the Geelong Aboriginal Employment Agreement, 11 employers in the Geelong region signed up to improve employment outcomes for Aboriginal people, including increased career progression opportunities; retention rates; education pathways and organisational awareness of Aboriginal culture such as an Acknowledgement of Country protocol.





The board of the First Nations Foundation, which drives action toward Aboriginal financial literacy and access to the financial sector and services. (Gary Hearst, Raylene Beloitte, Michelle Crawford, Karen Milward and Ian Hamm. Absent: Jayde Geia and Phil Usher)

Stimulating demand for Aboriginal businesses

Rates of Aboriginal business ownership in Victoria are increasing. In 2006, there were 702 Aboriginal-owned businesses in Victoria. In 2011, that increased ~30 per cent to 902.¹⁰ However, despite recent growth, many Aboriginal businesses remain small and their potential to provide further job opportunities continues to be underdeveloped.

All new businesses experience barriers to entry. However, research suggests Aboriginal businesses face more barriers than most, including procurement practices that disadvantage Aboriginal enterprises and tenured supplier relationships that are difficult to break.¹¹

In March 2017, the Victorian Government established a 1 per cent procurement target for Aboriginal businesses to be achieved by 2019/20. This target recognises that procurement spend is one of the strongest levers for ensuring that beneficiaries of government business include Aboriginal Victorians.

A number of activities are underway to promote government procurement from Aboriginal service providers and businesses, including reviewing procurement and funding policies and guidelines and practices.

Examples of Aboriginal business procurement that count towards the 1 per cent target include:

- **PricewaterhouseCoopers Indigenous Consulting (PIC)**, a majority Aboriginal-owned, led and staffed operation. PIC has provided professional advice and undertaken comprehensive research on behalf of the VAEB to better understand the Victorian Aboriginal business sector.
- **Kalinya Communications**, an Aboriginal-owned communications consultancy. Kalinya Communications has provided strategic communications advice, professional editing and supported research into media bias in reporting of family violence.
- **Little Rocket**, an Aboriginal-owned communications company that provides branding, web development and communications and social media advice. Little Rocket is currently providing the VAEB with videography services and developing and delivering a detailed communications plan to coincide with National Indigenous Business Month.

Headline Indicator 7. Increase workforce participation by Aboriginal people in the public sector

TARGET

Increase employment of Aboriginal people in the Victorian public service to 1% of total employees by 2018.

Between 2015 and 2016, the Victorian Public Service (VPS) grew by 52 Aboriginal staff, ensuring it is on track to meet the target of 1 per cent Aboriginal staff employed in the VPS by 2018.

The 2017 release of *Barring Djinang*, Victoria's Aboriginal employment strategy, extended the VPS target from 1 per cent to 2 per cent by 2022. To reach the target, the VPS will need to more than double the current number of Aboriginal staff. This will require further work and innovation to continue to improve not only representation, but also the quality of the workplace and career experiences for Aboriginal staff.

The Victorian Public Sector Commission's Aboriginal Employment Unit (AEU) delivers three programs to support recruitment and retention of Aboriginal staff, including an undergraduate cadetship program, Aboriginal Pathway to GRADS program, and an Aboriginal Career Development Program.

The AEU is also working on a number of new initiatives and programs designed to enhance career opportunities for Aboriginal public sector employees and jobseekers, to be delivered as part of the implementation of *Barring Djinang*.

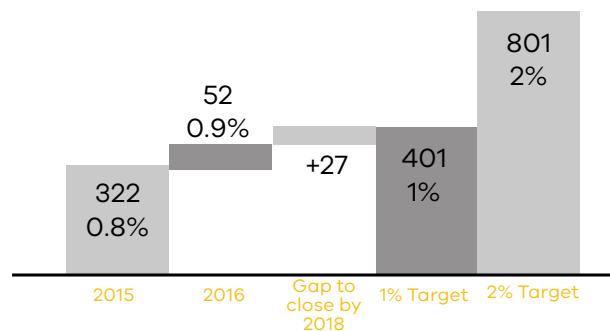
In the important area of child protection, the Department of Health and Human Services has tripled the number of Aboriginal employees since June 2016, increasing the proportion of the workforce from 0.6 per cent to 1.7 per cent through the department's *Aboriginal Employment Strategy 2016–2021*.



Aboriginal Pathways VPS Graduate.

VPS Aboriginal Employee Quota Progress

*Based on a total VPS staff size of 40,076 as per June 2016





Health, housing and disability

There's a lot of evidence that self-determination delivers results for Aboriginal people; that it is actually the best way to improve outcomes for Aboriginal people.

Darren Smith, CEO Aboriginal Housing Victoria

The health of Aboriginal Victorians is improving across a broad range of infant and child development indicators. However, improvements in Aboriginal health have not been demonstrated elsewhere. Statistics show that disparities in health, housing and disability endure, indicating a re-focusing of efforts is required to close the gap.

In partnership with the Aboriginal community, Victoria is working towards positive health outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians through the 10-year Aboriginal health, wellbeing and safety strategic plan, **Korin Korin Balit-Djak** ('growing very strong'), released in October 2017.

Korin Korin Balit-Djak is informed by an extensive consultation process with Aboriginal communities across Victoria and a strong evidence base. The plan contains a clear commitment to support Aboriginal self-determination to improve health, wellbeing and safety for all Aboriginal Victorians, and to provide culturally safe and responsive health and human services.

Headline Indicator 8. Improve the health status of Aboriginal Victorians

TARGET

Close the gap in the proportion of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Victorians that report their health status as 'excellent' or 'very good' by 2031.

The proportion of Aboriginal Victorians who rated their health as 'excellent' or 'very good' is declining. In 2007–08, about half of all Victorian Aboriginal adults reported excellent or very good health, compared to 40.2 per cent in 2014–15.

Overall, fewer Victorians rated their health as 'excellent' or 'very good' in 2014–15 compared to 2007–08; however, the percentage point decline was larger for Aboriginal Victorians. In 2007–08, about half of all Aboriginal Victorians reported 'excellent' or 'very good' health (47 per cent) compared to 40.2 per cent, in 2014–15; a decline of ~7 percentage points in self-rated health status and a widening of the gap of ~4 percentage points between Aboriginal Victorians and the general population.

Balit Marrup: the Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing Framework (SEWB) is one of the top three priorities in Victoria's 10-year mental health plan. It recognises the fundamental role of culture, community and spirituality in Aboriginal wellbeing and has been developed in partnership with Aboriginal organisations, Elders, leaders and communities to support Victorian Aboriginal communities in the areas of promotion, prevention, recovery and healing from trauma and mental illness.

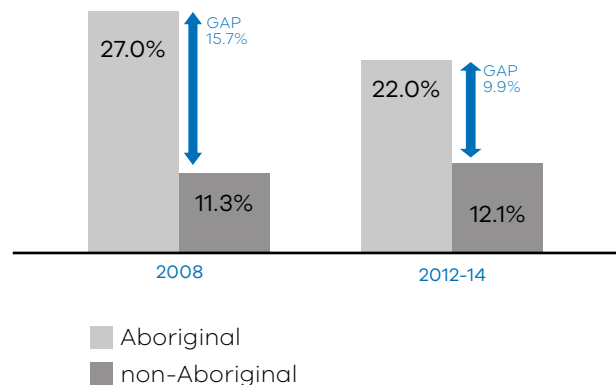
TARGET

Close the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal adults reporting 'high' or 'very high' levels of psychological distress by 2031.

Aboriginal Victorians experience psychological distress at twice the rate of non-Aboriginal Victorians.

High or very high levels of psychological distress are a significant risk factor for depression and anxiety. Aboriginal Victorians experience psychological distress at twice the rate of the general Victorian population. Psychological distress puts individuals at greater risk of chronic disease, as well as self-harm and suicide.

Psychological distress reported as 'high' or 'very high'



SOURCE: VICTORIAN POPULATION HEALTH SURVEY. DUE TO SMALL NUMBERS OF ABORIGINAL RESPONDENTS, THREE SURVEYS WERE COMBINED FOR THE 2012-14 TIME PERIOD.



Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation. Mural artists: Ray Thomas, Kulan Barney, Ruby Hermann and Matt 'Adnate'.

#HerTribe, a 16-week community-designed empowerment program for Aboriginal women, was developed by the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS) and the University of Melbourne. The program demonstrated positive outcomes including reduced psychological distress, increased resilience, stronger personal connections, and increased cardiovascular fitness.

#HisTribe, a modified version for Aboriginal men, will be developed and piloted.

The Jekkora Spear Group, developed and delivered by Njernda Aboriginal Corporation, is a response to a growing rate of suicide in the Echuca Aboriginal community. The program trains community members to identify and support people at risk of suicide. Independent evaluation described the program as a 'unique and promising suicide prevention model'.

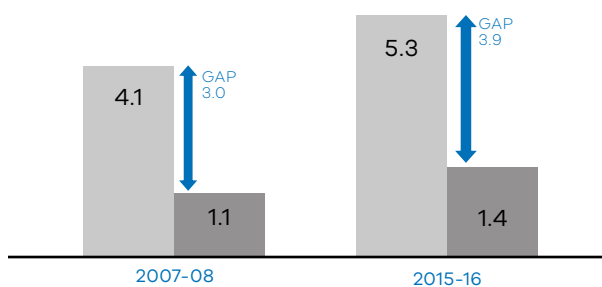
OTHER MEASURE

The rate of self-harm among Aboriginal people.

In 2015–16, Aboriginal Victorians presented with self-harm related injuries at more than four times the rate of non-Aboriginal Victorians.

Emergency presentations for self-harm have fluctuated since 2007–08 from around 4 per 1,000, to as high as 6 per 1,000 in 2014–15. In 2015–16, 5.3 per 1,000 Aboriginal Victorians presented to emergency departments with self-harm related injuries; almost four times the rate of non-Aboriginal Victorians.

Self-harm related emergency department presentations; rate per 1,000



Aboriginal

non-Aboriginal

SOURCE: VICTORIAN EMERGENCY MINIMUM DATASET (VEMD). POPULATION BASED ON PROJECTION FROM CENSUS 2006.

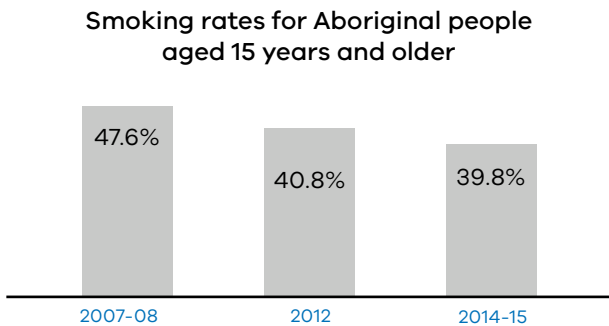
TARGET

Reduce the proportion of Aboriginal adults who are current smokers to 21% by 2023.

Rates of smoking have declined slightly but remain very high at just under three times the rate of the general population.

In 2014–15, almost 40 per cent of Aboriginal Victorians smoked. While this represents a decline in rates of smoking (down from 48 per cent in 2007–08), rates of smoking are still very high at just under three times the rate of the general population. Data from VAHS shows Aboriginal men aged 35–44 represent the highest prevalence group of smokers, at 71 per cent.

Tackling Tobacco, delivered by VAHS, is aimed at cutting the rates of smoking in the Aboriginal community. The program runs health promotion and smoking cessation education initiatives and supports referrals to Aboriginal Quitline counsellors.



SOURCE: NATIONAL ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER SOCIAL SURVEY.

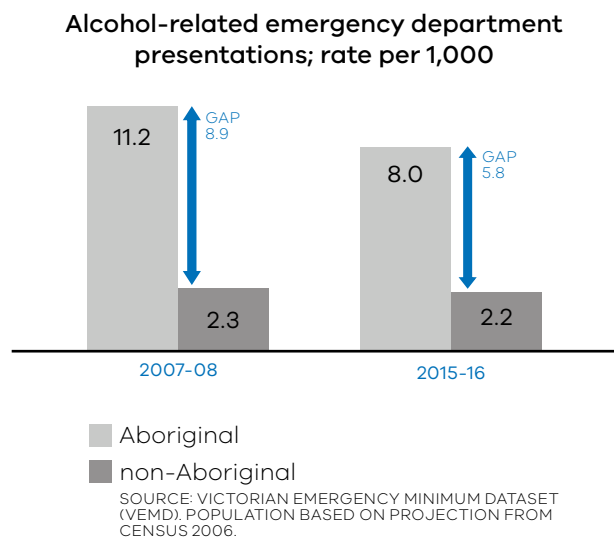
OTHER MEASURE

The rate of harmful alcohol consumption among Aboriginal Victorians.

Aboriginal Victorians presented at emergency departments for alcohol-related causes at more than three and a half times the rate of non-Aboriginal Victorians.

Alcohol abuse is associated with health conditions like liver disease, diabetes, cardiovascular disease and some cancers. It is also related to a higher incidence of accidents and injury, as well as a significant factor in mental and substance use disorders and injury.

In 2015–16, Aboriginal Victorians presented at emergency departments for alcohol-related causes at more than 3.5 times the rate of non-Aboriginal Victorians. While the rate of alcohol-related injuries varies from year to year, fluctuations may indicate a downward trend in the rate of presentations in recent years.



■ Aboriginal
■ non-Aboriginal

SOURCE: VICTORIAN EMERGENCY MINIMUM DATASET (VEMD). POPULATION BASED ON PROJECTION FROM CENSUS 2006.

OTHER MEASURE

The proportion of Aboriginal adults who are obese.

A slightly higher proportion of Aboriginal Victorians are obese. Rates of obesity are increasing across Victoria.

After smoking, being overweight or obese is the most significant health factor contributing to the gap in life expectancy of Aboriginal people. While the increasing rate of obesity and being overweight is an issue impacting the health of all Victorians (66 per cent of all Victorians and 64 per cent of Aboriginal Victorians are either overweight or obese), a slightly higher proportion of Aboriginal Victorians are obese (34 per cent versus 26 per cent).

The Nutrition team at the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation Incorporated leads strategic programs and campaigns to encourage a healthy eating culture in health services, children's settings, workplaces and events across Aboriginal Victorian communities. The team provides accredited nutrition training, support and mentorship opportunities to Aboriginal health workers, Aboriginal children's services staff and population health recruits located in Aboriginal Controlled Community Health Organisations, local councils and other settings. In 2016, the team also collaborated with Diabetes Australia to implement **The Road to Good Health**, the Aboriginal component to Diabetes Australia's **Life! Program**. These initiatives, along with others such as the **Aboriginal Rethink Sugary Drinks** advertisement, **Sports Drinks are Gammin!** social media campaign, the **Caring for The Community with a 5 star BBQ**, and **Yarning About Breastfeeding**, have significantly increased the capacity of the Aboriginal workforce and mainstream health organisations to address Aboriginal nutrition and health.

OTHER MEASURE

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

The number and proportion of Aboriginal people receiving disability services in Victoria declined between 2007–08 and 2011–12 to just under 2 per cent in 2015–16.

Absolutely everyone: state disability plan 2017-2020, includes a commitment to Aboriginal self-determination and the importance of ensuring that Aboriginal people have access to robust, culturally safe disability services and supports through both the mainstream disability sector and Aboriginal organisations.

Balit Narrum is an Aboriginal disability network that supports Aboriginal family and individual needs within the disability service system including helping clients navigate the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Balit Narrum also offers Yarning Circles, which provide an opportunity for community members to learn more about what a disability is, what services are available and to better understand community needs.

OTHER MEASURE

The proportion of Aboriginal Victorians who are homeless.

The housing needs of Aboriginal people aren't just about providing a safety net for the Aboriginal community. It should be a part of how the Aboriginal community can actually move forward and improve their circumstances.

Darren Smith, CEO Aboriginal Housing Victoria

Victoria has one of the highest proportions (37 per cent) of Aboriginal people who have experienced homelessness. During 2015–16, almost 9 per cent of all clients accessing specialist homelessness services in Victoria were Aboriginal.

In Victoria, it is estimated that between 11,000 and 16,000 Aboriginal people reside in social housing at any one time, equating to around 20 per cent of the Victorian Aboriginal population. For many vulnerable Aboriginal households, access to affordable, secure social housing is often the first step to improved life experience, rather than simply a solution to their housing crisis. Without culturally appropriate coordinated housing and support services, these households struggle to maintain their tenancies and are at serious risk of further episodes of housing insecurity and homelessness.

The 2016 decision to transfer housing assets to Aboriginal Housing Victoria (AHV), valued at almost \$500 million, represents one of the most significant acts of self-determination in Victoria's history. Aboriginal-owned and controlled housing are key examples of community-led and community-controlled responses.

In all, over 1,440 properties formerly managed by AHV on behalf of the Director of Housing will be transferred to AHV. The transfer of title to AHV is the largest to any single housing agency in Victorian history and makes AHV the largest Aboriginal community housing owner in Australia.

The move is part of a larger remit to ensure homes are owned and managed by an Aboriginal organisation for the benefit of Aboriginal people, in turn enabling AHV to grow its social housing stock and provide even more affordable homes and related services. The first transfer of 511 public housing properties was delivered in 2016. Tranche 2, delivered on 1 July 2017, saw the transfer of 470 properties, and Tranche 3, the final transfer of more than 460 properties, is scheduled for delivery in 2018–19.

Now, having a home, I have started to work toward and repair the disconnection my mental illness caused with my children.

Wadamba Wilam client

Director of Housing, Nick Foa and Aboriginal Housing Victoria Chair, Tim Chatfield stamping the title transfer document.



Ownership of the social housing properties ... has been a long-held aspiration of AHV. In fact, the original community members and Elders who formed the Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria (the forerunner to AHV) in 1981 strongly advocated for greater self-determination and the restoration of dignity and respect for Aboriginal people in the delivery of housing services. Several decades on, these aspirations have been realised.

Aboriginal Housing Victoria

It wasn't very secure, you didn't know when you had to move out. So we were, you know, kind of on edge all the time there. ... But then when this place came up it was like a sigh of relief. We're happy here.

Aboriginal Housing Victoria tenant

POLICY DIRECTIONS

There has been limited progress in improving and addressing the health, wellbeing and safety outcomes of Aboriginal Victorians. Continuing to approach Aboriginal health, wellbeing and safety in this way maintains a system that is not responsive to the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal communities.

For Aboriginal Victorians and Aboriginal people across Australia, the social determinants of health inequality have their genesis in colonisation, which continues to impact Aboriginal people today. In addition, structural inequalities in income, employment and housing continue to impact the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal Victorians. What is not measured is the impact and importance of culture as a determinant of Aboriginal health. The importance of connection to culture demonstrates the need for Aboriginal community-led responses to support the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal Victorians.

Korin Korin Balit-Djak provides an overarching framework for action to improve the health, wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal Victorians now and over the next 10 years. It sets out the Victorian Government's vision and direction for ensuring positive outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians.

Korin Korin Balit-Djak embraces a cultural determinants approach to Aboriginal health, wellbeing and safety, which aligns with the Aboriginal community's holistic understanding of health. It has been developed alongside two other key initiatives to support the improved health, wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal Victorians: *Balit Murrup: the Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing framework*; and the *Aboriginal governance and accountability framework*.

Strategic Action Area 5



Safe families and communities and equitable justice outcomes

I just hope that in the future our children can see through the eyes of children, and that we all live in this beautiful country together as human beings because there is one race and that is the human race.

Aboriginal victim survivor of family violence

Aboriginal communities and services have long recognised the significant impact of family violence on Aboriginal families and have been at the forefront of family violence policy in Victoria. The Indigenous family violence 10 year plan, ***Strong Culture, Strong Peoples and Strong Families: Towards a safer future for Indigenous families and communities (2008–2018)***

established a policy direction for reducing the impact of family violence on Aboriginal families. The Victorian Government acknowledges the long-term leadership of Aboriginal communities in tackling and preventing family violence in Aboriginal communities.

The ***Royal Commission into Family Violence (RCFV)*** report, released in March 2016, highlighted the complexities of family violence

within an Aboriginal community context, including factors such as gender, colonisation, discrimination and intergenerational trauma. It identified the need to secure sustainable resourcing for culturally safe and specialist support services working with Aboriginal survivors of family violence.

Ending Family Violence: Victoria's Plan for Change is the Victorian Government's response to the Royal Commission's report. In seeking to achieve a Victoria free from family violence, it incorporates all of the Royal Commission's 227 recommendations for family violence reform. These reforms build on the foundations of the work of the Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum (IFVPF).

Headline Indicator 9. Reduce the incidence of Aboriginal family violence

OTHER MEASURE

The rate of family incident reports to police.

Family violence incident reports have risen steeply during the last 10 years in Victoria; increasing by 163 per cent from 1,392 in 2007–08 to 3,655 in 2016–17 for incidents by Aboriginal alleged offenders. Increases in family violence incident reports may not necessarily indicate increased prevalence in family violence. Aboriginal women have historically and continue to face unique barriers to reporting family violence, particularly due to a very real fear of having their children removed by Child Protection Services. To better respond to family violence in the community, concerted efforts of Victoria Police and the state's justice system more broadly, may have led to increased reporting. Even so, the rise in family violence reporting has placed enormous pressure on Aboriginal specialist legal, housing and health services to provide culturally informed and safe responses and support.

Over the last 10 years, Aboriginal people accounted for 4 per cent of reports made by affected family members and 5 per cent of alleged offenders.

During the past 12 months (March 2016 to March 2017), 3,655 family violence incidents involved an Aboriginal alleged offender and 2,964 affected an Aboriginal family member. Even so, both counts are likely to underestimate the number of family violence incident reports involving Aboriginal people due to a high rate of unknown Aboriginal status in police reports and underreporting.

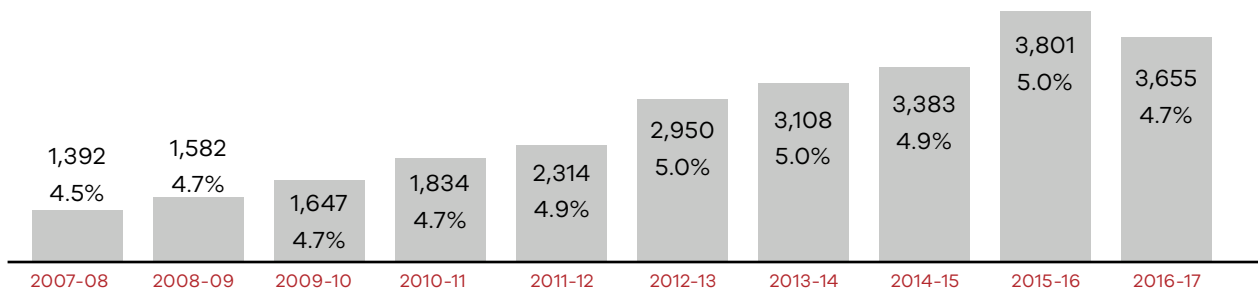
Family violence incidents show a very high rate of repeat offending and victimisation.

Aboriginal women and their children are particularly vulnerable. On measures of prevalence and severity of family violence, Aboriginal women are the most victimised cohort in Victoria. Aboriginal women are 45 times more likely to experience family violence and (nationally) 35 times more likely to be hospitalised than non-Aboriginal women due to family violence-related assaults.¹² Aboriginal children are also disproportionately affected by family violence. Over 80 per cent of Aboriginal children placed in out-of-home care had family violence as a primary or secondary causal factor.¹³ It is important to note that the perpetrators of family violence against Aboriginal women and their children are from all backgrounds.

Aboriginal women face the 'double bind' of gender and racial discrimination and oppression.

Antoinette Braybrook, CEO Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service

Number and proportion of family violence incident reports by an Aboriginal alleged offender



SOURCE: CRIME STATISTICS AGENCY; DATA EXTRACTED FROM VICTORIA POLICE LAW ENFORCEMENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (LEAP) DATABASE APRIL 18, 2017 AND IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE.

POLICY DIRECTIONS

The IFVPPF is the platform for government and Aboriginal communities to address family violence. Established in 2005, it continues to provide a vehicle for connecting Aboriginal community members to key decision makers across government.

The IFVPPF, Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) have continually advocated for adequate and ongoing funding for community-led, holistic and trauma-informed healing approaches and culturally safe specialist support services to address family violence experienced by Aboriginal communities. This fundamental requirement was also outlined in the RCFV report.

In response, the 2017/18 Victorian Budget allocated unprecedented funding for a range of initiatives targeting family violence reform for Aboriginal Victorians such as improved crisis accommodation, implementation of holistic healing approaches, and support for an Aboriginal-led response to family violence reform, as well as enhancing the approach to victim-centred justice for Aboriginal communities. Community-led and community-designed initiatives include **Djirra**, a women's gathering place; **Dilly Bag**, a two-day personal development workshop for women; **Young Luv**, which is focused on promoting healthy relationships for young Aboriginal women between 13 and 18 years old; and a new **Dardi Munwurro Strong Spirit residential program**.

The Victorian Government is also committed to ensuring the cultural competency and responsiveness of its workforce so that fewer family violence incidents go unreported. In response, Victoria Police will continue to support learning, training and resources through the roll-out of the Koori Family Violence Police Protocols and other cultural training packages.

Koori Family Violence Police Protocols aim to improve police response to family violence incidents in Aboriginal communities and ensure that appropriate referrals to family violence services are undertaken. Ongoing cultural awareness training is also provided to police. Koori Family Violence Police Protocols currently operate in Bairnsdale, Darebin, Mildura, Shepparton, Ballarat, Dandenong, Swan Hill and the Wimmera. Warrnambool will launch in October 2017 and Echuca and Morwell later in 2017–18.

The **Victoria Police Aboriginal Family Violence e-learning package** has been designed to educate police about the impact of colonial history on Aboriginal people and how past trauma can relate to violence and police interactions today. Since its launch in May 2017, more than 5,700 police staff have completed this e-learning module.

Sisters Day Out is a one-day workshop that engages with Aboriginal women, and in particular young Aboriginal women, for the purpose of preventing family violence by facilitating community networks to reduce social isolation; raising awareness of family violence and its underlying cause and impacts; and by providing information and tools to promote community safety.

The workshop provides a culturally welcoming and safe space for Aboriginal women to come together and participate in a range of activities including beauty therapies, relaxation therapies and exercise activities. These activities attract community participants and place an emphasis on self-care and well-being. Included within the workshop is an information session about family violence prevention presented by the Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria (FVPLS Victoria) staff.

FVPLS Victoria invites a range of local service providers to participate in the event. FVPLS Victoria lawyers are also available for any participant requiring advice, and a counsellor is also available for participants requiring a personal conversation about their circumstances.

Headline Indicator 10. Reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the justice system - YOUTH

TARGET

Close the gap in the rate of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people under youth justice supervision.

Family violence, involvement with child protection and/or out-of-home care increase the likelihood of a child becoming involved with the justice system. These risks are greater for Aboriginal children, whose first interaction with the justice system may be as victims of violence or abuse. This concerning and intergenerational cycle of disadvantage and trauma is one of the most compelling reasons for prevention, early intervention and diversion for Aboriginal children and young people.

With each subsequent phase of the *Aboriginal Justice Agreement (AJA)*, the focus on prevention and early intervention has increased. Reducing the number of young people involved in the justice system is critical given the increasing numbers of Aboriginal children in child protection and residential care, and a rapidly growing Aboriginal youth population.

OTHER MEASURE

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

Since 2007–08, the rate of unique youth offenders aged 10–17 years processed by police (who receive a caution, arrest, summons or other outcome) has decreased; however, the decline has not been felt equally. While the Aboriginal unique youth offender rate fell by 24 per cent, the non-Aboriginal rate fell by more than half (58 per cent).

I do think we need to have a think about the intersect between child protection, youth justice and adult incarceration, but also the historical context of intergenerational trauma, grief and poverty.

Wayne Muir, CEO
Victorian Aboriginal Legal Services



The **Goolum Goolum Deadly Bikes** program supports at-risk youth to develop valuable skills in planning, teamwork and leadership, which increase their chances of getting a job. Participants are taught the basics of bike mechanics and as a team build and customise bikes, which are then donated back to the community. Through the program, participants are provided opportunities to re-engage in education and develop stronger connections with their local community. Developed as a justice diversion program in late 2015, the project engages 12–22-year-old young people identified as at risk of coming in contact with the justice system.

Goolum Goolum Deadly Bikes is a partnership program with Wimmera Hub and Horsham College, and is funded under the AJA's **Frontline Youth and Community Initiatives Program**. Bikes are donated by the Wimmera Community, Lions Club and Victoria Police.

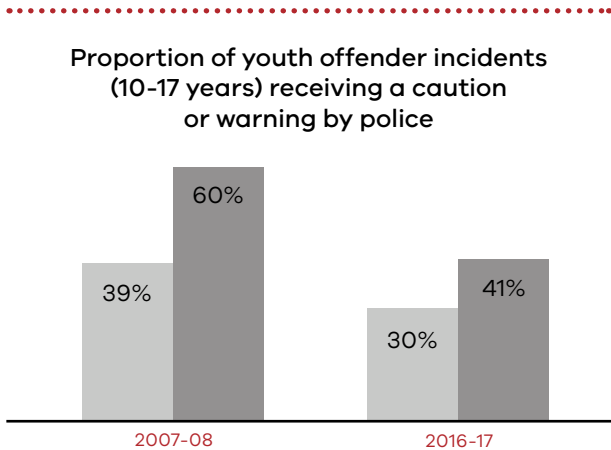
Goolum Goolum Deadly Bikes program.
Photo: Goolum Goolum Aboriginal Cooperative.



OTHER MEASURE

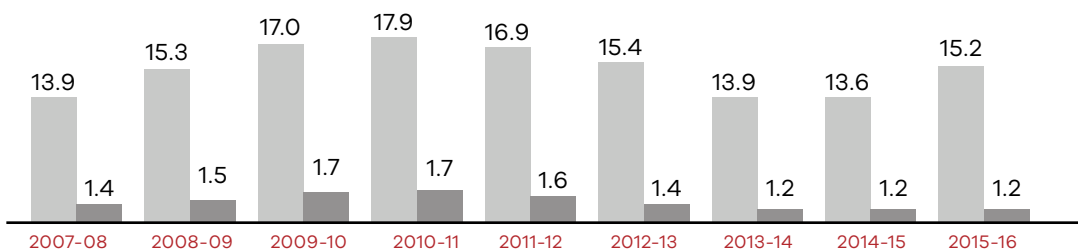
The proportion of Aboriginal young people (aged 10–17 years) cautioned when processed by police.

Police cautioning is typically available to first-time and non-serious offenders. Cautioning of first-time alleged offenders has increased, but the proportion of all youth alleged offenders receiving a caution or warning has decreased since 2007 for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth; and the gap between the two groups has narrowed. This trend is consistent with Crime Statistics Agency research, which found there is a relatively small cohort of young repeat offenders (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) with multiple offending incidents each year.¹⁴



SOURCE: CRIME STATISTICS AGENCY; DATA EXTRACTED FROM LEAP ON 18 APRIL, 2017 AND SUBJECT TO VARIATION.

Young people (10–17 years) under youth justice supervision (community-based and detention) on an average day per 1,000



■ Aboriginal ■ non-Aboriginal

SOURCE: AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF HEALTH AND WELFARE (AIHW) PUBLISHED DATA; TABLE S45A AS AT 2015–16 AND TABLE S83A AS AT 2015–16.

TARGET

Close the gap in the rate of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people under youth justice supervision.

Aboriginal Youth is an area of concern, again about being held on remand as opposed to being bailed... I believe monitoring is far better than remand.

Marion Hansen, Koori Caucus

Aboriginal youth are over-represented in the justice system by more than 13 times that of non-Aboriginal youth.

Victorian rates of Aboriginal young people (10–17 years) under justice supervision are lower than the national rates for both community-based supervision and detention. However, Aboriginal young people are 13 times more likely than non-Aboriginal young people to be under justice supervision on an average day in Victoria. While it is difficult to discern a trend since 2007–08, the rate of Aboriginal young people in the justice system on an average day appears to have peaked in 2010–11 and has since returned to rates observed in 2008–09.



POLICY DIRECTIONS

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody found social and economic disadvantage was a key contributor to the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the justice system. The AJA was developed in partnership with the Aboriginal community in response to the Royal Commission recommendations.

The AJA, in its third phase, targets the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the Victorian criminal justice system to improve Aboriginal justice outcomes and increase the safety of Aboriginal families and communities. In the 17 years since the AJA was established, a diverse range of programs and services have been implemented, and continue.

These include **Koori Courts, Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers** within Victoria Police, **Wulgunggo Ngalu Learning Place**, the **Sherriff's Aboriginal Liaison Officer, Local Justice Worker Program, Koori Women's Diversion Program** and the community-based **Koori Youth Justice Program**. The AJA is delivered via a multi-layered structure of partnerships between the Victorian Government and the Aboriginal community, which includes:

- the Aboriginal Justice Forum (AJF)
- the Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee (RAJAC) network
- the Local Aboriginal Justice Action Committee (LAJAC) network.

The **community-based Koori Youth Justice Program** employs Koori Youth Justice Workers to support young Aboriginal people at risk of offending, as well as clients on community-based and custodial orders. The workers assist in providing access to appropriate role models, culturally sensitive support, advocacy and casework.

The **Koori Early School Leavers and Youth Employment Program** is designed to divert young people from the youth justice system by addressing key risk factors for young offenders, particularly lack of engagement with school or other learning and employment opportunities.

The **Koori Intensive Support Program** works to reduce the number of young Aboriginal offenders who are detained prior to sentencing and provides intensive outreach support to assist young people to comply with bail conditions or conditions placed on deferred sentences. KISP also provides assistance to help Aboriginal young offenders reintegrate into their communities.

Children's Koori Court Liaison Officers support Aboriginal children and young people who appear before the Children's Koori Court and, in agreed locations, the Children's Court. Their role is to encourage these Aboriginal children and young people to remain engaged with education and to broker their enrolment in a suitable education pathway.

In partnership with the AJF and Koori Caucus, the government is developing a **Koori Youth Justice Strategy** and establishing a stronger response to the over-representation of Aboriginal young people in the youth justice system.

The Massive Murray Paddle is a week-long 404km marathon journey along the Murray River, starting in Yarrawonga and ending in Swan Hill, that enhances relationships and builds trust between Aboriginal youth and police. Over 80 young people and members of Victoria Police participated in the Dungulayin Mileka Team in 2016–17.

It is really, really awesome... You see day-to-day in Ballarat the impact of when you have positive relationships with police officers... If anything happens in Ballarat the young people will call the police they know from the marathon, to get advice or for help... If that was run as a continuous thing, even if like a diversion thing, the kids who do it wouldn't think of committing a crime in their wildest dreams.

Dungulayin team member



Headline Indicator 10. Reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the justice system - ADULTS

TARGET

Close the gap in the rate of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people under adult justice supervision by 2031.

Aboriginal adults remain significantly over-represented in the justice system.

Aboriginal adults are over-represented in the justice system in Victoria by 11 times that of non-Aboriginal adults. This is lower than the national rate, and most other jurisdictions. The daily average number and rate of adults in the justice system (community-based and in prison) has increased for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal adults since 2007–08, with most of the increase occurring over the past three years. The increase has been almost twice as large for Aboriginal adult offenders, with the daily average number of non-Aboriginal adults in the justice system increasing by 66 per cent compared with 129 per cent for the Aboriginal population.

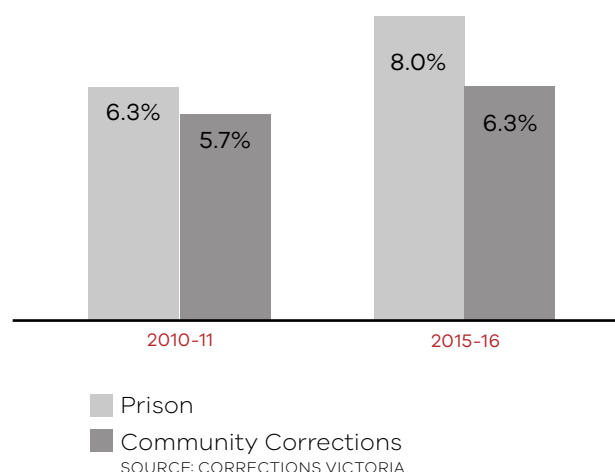
OTHER MEASURE

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

Aboriginal people account for 8 per cent of the prison population and 6.3 per cent of the community corrections population in Victoria.

Despite making up less than 1 per cent of Victoria's population, Aboriginal people account for 8 per cent of the prison population and 6.3 per cent of the community corrections population. The Aboriginal prison population has grown more rapidly than the Aboriginal population under community-based supervision, with Aboriginal women one of the fastest growing cohorts within Victoria's prison population.

Proportion of offenders that are Aboriginal



I have concerns about the number of Aboriginal women on remand for up to 6–12 months. The impact that this has on the families is huge; nine times out of ten the children are placed in care and public housing is lost. It is very difficult to get the children out of care, it could literally take years.

Marion Hansen, Koori Caucus



POLICY DIRECTIONS

Aboriginal women are among the fastest growing prison cohorts both nationally and within Victoria. Imprisonment has a disproportionate impact on social outcomes for women and their families; hence cultural and gender-appropriate diversionary options are vital. Nationally, 80 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in prison are mothers. As a commitment under the **Aboriginal Justice Agreement 3**, the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission documented the experiences of Aboriginal women in the justice system. The report showed that even placing women in short-term remand can lead to serious disruptions to the family unit, with children at greater risk of being placed in the child protection system. The report also

found there was a lack of initiatives to support Aboriginal women coming into contact with the justice system.

In response, the **Koori Women's Diversion Program** was piloted in 2015–16 to reduce Aboriginal women's involvement with the justice system and the impacts of incarceration on their families. Now operating in Mildura and Morwell, and through Odyssey House Victoria, the program provides intensive case management and support for Aboriginal women referred from the Victorian criminal justice system. The program has shown positive outcomes including reduced offending, increased engagement with mental health services, and family reunification.

Headline Indicator 11. Reduce the proportion of Aboriginal people who return to prison within two years of release

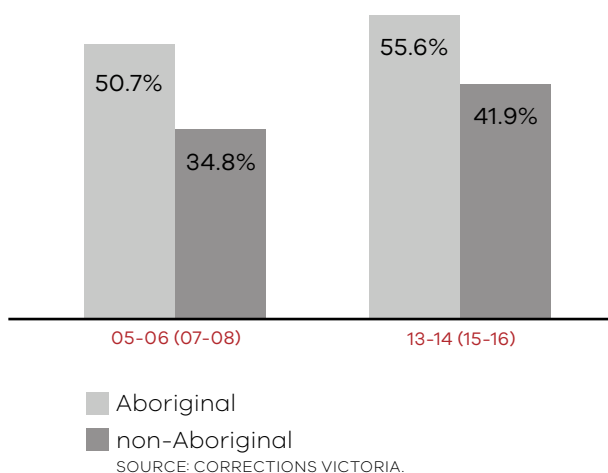
TARGET

Close the gap in the proportion of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who are convicted within two years of their previous conviction by 2031.

Once Aboriginal people enter the prison system, over half return within two years.

Aboriginal people are 1.3 times more likely to return to prison within two years of release than non-Aboriginal people in Victoria. In 2015–16, more than half of Aboriginal prisoners (55 per cent) released from prison in 2013–14 had returned to prison under sentence, compared to 42 per cent of non-Aboriginal prisoners.

Proportion of prisoners released who returned to prison under sentence within two years



POLICY DIRECTIONS

Opportunities for Aboriginal people post-prison release are compounded by several factors including difficulty finding safe and affordable housing, accessing employment or education, and ensuring continuity of healthcare and other supports.

The **Aboriginal Prisoner Transitional Housing Project** aims to reduce reoffending and provide suitable housing for Aboriginal men and women exiting prison who are at risk of homelessness. This joint project between the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, Aboriginal Housing Victoria, Corrections Victoria and the Department of Health and Human Services will improve the successful reintegration of Aboriginal people into the community post-release by providing stable, short-term accommodation as well as culturally appropriate services and support to address the multiple and complex needs of Aboriginal people exiting prison.

The **Corrections Victoria Reintegration Pathway** provides pre-release programs responsive to each prisoner's transitional needs on entry to prison and throughout their prison sentence, as well as assisting with returning to the community. **Re-Connect** provides targeted and intensive reintegration and outreach services for Aboriginal men and women and high-transitional need prisoners. It is designed to provide responsive, tailored and flexible post-release support.

The **Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing Plan** is being implemented by Justice Health and Corrections Victoria across prisons and community corrections to provide a Continuity of Aboriginal Health Care Pilot, enhanced cultural safety and mental health assessment, and the Statewide Indigenous Arts in Prisons and Community program. As part of the plan, **Kaka Wangity, Wangin-Mirrie** grants support ACCOs to provide cultural strengthening, healing, family violence prevention and parenting programs for Aboriginal people in prison and community corrections. The **Local Justice Worker Program** funds ACCOs across Victoria to employ 20 local justice workers to support Aboriginal clients to complete Community Corrections Orders and resolve outstanding fines and warrants. Services were expanded in 2016–17 and the program now also focuses on addressing drivers of re-offending.



Strategic Action Area 6



Strong culture, engaged people and confident communities

Culture has the power to build resilience, strengthen local communities and forge a sense of identity and belonging. Stronger appreciation and awareness of Aboriginal culture can foster confidence and resilience, as well as connections and respect across the Victorian community. That is why it is vital to work in partnership with Aboriginal Victorians, other tiers of government and the private and community sectors to protect and manage Aboriginal cultural heritage, strengthen Aboriginal community organisations, and support strong communities. Here are some of our highlights from the past 12 months.

Key statistics: Aboriginal culture, identity and social networks

- Fifty-seven per cent of Aboriginal Victorians identified with a clan, tribal or language group.
- Of Aboriginal Victorians aged 3 years and over, more than half (57 per cent) participated in cultural activities.
- More than 9 out of 10 (93 per cent) Aboriginal Victorians felt they were able to get support in times of crisis from outside the household.
- Thirty-seven per cent of Aboriginal Victorians felt they had been unfairly treated at least once in the previous 12 months because they were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.¹⁵

Headline Indicator 12. Strengthen Aboriginal culture and support Aboriginal people's engagement with community and society

OTHER MEASURE

Participation by Aboriginal people in community-related arrangements and events.

According to the ABS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (2014–15), over half of Aboriginal Victorians participate in cultural activities, and more than 9 out of 10 report having strong social networks which they can draw on in times of crisis.¹⁶ These indicators suggest Aboriginal Victorians experience a high degree of social support; however, experiences of racism are all too common. Thirty-seven per cent of Aboriginal Victorians felt they had been unfairly treated at least once in the previous 12 months because they were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

Strong communities are about more than where you live. A strong community is a source of resilience in times of stress and offers far-reaching benefits such as improved maternal health,¹⁷ mental health,¹⁸ and feelings of neighbourhood safety and cohesion.

Local Aboriginal Networks (LANs) are community networks that bring Aboriginal people together at the local level to set priorities, develop community plans, and build relationships with Aboriginal Victorian communities.

LANs know and understand their communities better than anyone else. As such, they are well placed to implement local area initiatives and maximise benefits of stronger, more resilient and productive communities. LANs work to strengthen the physical, social, cultural, mental, and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal people, their families, and the whole community.

Being with other blackfellas, catching up, letting off some steam, having a laugh, talking about OUR agenda is what attracts me to the LAN.

Wangaratta LAN Community Forum

There are now 39 LANs across Victoria, with 2,297 Aboriginal Victorians participating. The Local Aboriginal Networks Five Year Plan 2016–2020 identifies six priority areas, developed in partnership with LANs, to help inform and guide government action to ensure LANs' future success and sustainability. They are:

- Strengthening culture
- Economic participation
- Support for young people
- Building a stronger LAN
- Community planning and partnerships
- Working with local government.

The LAN is a great way to be in the loop. It can feel a bit like everything happens in Melbourne sometimes but the Broker keeps us informed about the deadly things we've got happening local. Makes me proud of our local stuff.

Lake Tyers LAN Community Forum



2017 Koorie Youth Summit

OTHER MEASURE

The proportion of Aboriginal people who felt that there are opportunities to have a real say on issues of importance to them.

The voice and leadership of the Aboriginal community in decision-making is a central part of supporting self-determination and ensuring the overall success of policy responses in Aboriginal affairs.

The Victorian Government has, over successive years, worked with key Aboriginal stakeholders to develop and implement strategies to achieve better outcomes for individuals, families and communities. Partnership structures include LANs, the Koori Youth Council, the Victorian Advisory Council for Koori Health, the Aboriginal Justice Forum, the Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum, the Aboriginal Children's Forum, and new structures to support the implementation of *Marrung*.

Over the last 18 months, key engagement structures have been established to deliver wide-reaching self-determination reforms including the Aboriginal Executive Council, the Aboriginal Community Assembly, the Ministerial Forum on Aboriginal Affairs, Aboriginal Victoria Forums and the Premier's Gathering.

Treaty is one vehicle to support the advancement of Aboriginal self-determination, and treaty talks are a fundamental part of the Victorian Government's commitment to self-determination. The Aboriginal Treaty Working

Group is currently providing advice on the process for treaty, guidance on community engagement and examining options for a permanent Victorian Aboriginal representative body.

To be successful, key reforms must be driven and implemented by the Aboriginal community in strong partnership with the government.

A VOICE FOR ABORIGINAL YOUNG PEOPLE

The Koorie Youth Summit is an annual, statewide gathering for and by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to discuss what is important to them, and to share and celebrate their culture. With young people accounting for over half the Victorian Aboriginal population, the summit has become an important avenue for Aboriginal young people to meet, empower and inspire one another. The 2017 Summit brought together 160 young people to address the themes 'our identity, our resilience, our story'.

I think there's been an incredible push for young people to come together, to learn to grow and contribute to the community and how much they want to make a difference. It is really heart-warming.

Koorie Youth Summit delegate



Wurundjeri elders presenting the Yarra River Protection Bill in the Victorian Parliament, marking the first time the area's traditional owners have been invited on to the floor to speak. Image used with permission of Wurundjeri Council. Photo: Jim McFarlane.

A RIVER IS RECOGNISED BY LAW AS A LIVING ENTITY

The Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn) Bill 2017, identifies the Birrarung (Yarra River) and the many hundreds of parcels of public land it flows through as one living, integrated natural entity for protection and improvement.

The requirement to touch the land and waterways lightly, respecting that which provides life, is implicit ... Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn (Keep the Birrarung alive).

Wurundjeri Council

VICTORIA HOSTS FIRST NATIONAL WEEKEND RETREAT FOR TRANS AND GENDER DIVERSE ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE

Australia's Aboriginal population is rich in diversity, and many factors combine to create each individual's identity and experience.

Kunghah: Brotherboys and Sistergirls Retreat was the first nationwide gathering of gender-diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. An outcome of the 2015 Koorie Youth Summit, the aim of the weekend was to create a safe space for trans and gender diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to share their experiences and knowledge and address community issues.

For me, the smoking ceremony was so powerful. It is the first ceremony I have ever taken part in, due to being disconnected from culture...so to have access to this ceremony, where my Sistergirls and Brotherboys and nonbinary/gender-diverse siblings could take part with their real genders respected and celebrated was incredible. I'll remember that ceremony for the rest of my life.

Kunghah participant

THE RATE OF ACCESS BY ABORIGINAL VICTORIANS TO THEIR TRADITIONAL LANDS

Maintaining strong connection to land and culture is central to Aboriginal culture. Amendments to the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* ('TOS Act') came into force in May 2017. The changes are aimed at streamlining Traditional Owners' access to Crown Land and natural resources, so as to offer an attractive alternative to determinations under the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth). There are currently a total of four Traditional Owner groups negotiating new settlements under the 'TOS Act' and another four groups in the threshold stage of negotiations. While no new settlements were reached in 2016–17, progress has been made on settlement negotiations with the Taungurung People, Gunditjmara People, Wotjobaluk People and the Eastern Maar People.

The **Right People for Country program** supports Traditional Owner groups in the process of making agreements about boundaries and extent of Country and around group representation and membership.

Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs) are Victoria's first and foremost authorities on the cultural heritage of their regions and hold decision-making powers under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* for protecting Aboriginal cultural and intangible heritage. There are currently 10 RAPs in Victoria with a collective responsibility for more than 39,000 registered Aboriginal cultural heritage places around the state. The 2016 amendments to the 'Aboriginal Heritage Act' broadened RAP roles and responsibilities to include the power to grant or refuse permits that may harm their cultural heritage. In support, the 2017/18 Victorian Budget allocated \$4.7 million for the employment and training of 10 new RAP compliance officers to ensure better protection for Victoria's Aboriginal cultural heritage, demonstrating the government's commitment to self-determination.

Intangible heritage

In 2016, Victoria became the first state in Australia and one of the first jurisdictions in the world to provide legal protection for Aboriginal

intangible heritage via amendments to the 'Aboriginal Heritage Act'. Aboriginal intangible heritage is elements of living culture passed down across generations such as language, oral traditions, performing arts, stories, rituals, festivals, social practices, craft, visual arts and ecological knowledge. The 2016 amendments recognise the central role that intangible heritage plays in keeping Victorian Aboriginal cultures strong, and gives Traditional Owners more control over the protection, management and potential use of their intangible heritage by third parties. The legal protection for Aboriginal intangible heritage will create further economic opportunities for Traditional Owners. Under the new provisions, Traditional Owners may enter into economic agreements with corporations wishing to benefit from traditional knowledge.

Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Land Management Agreements—introduced in 2016—also have the potential for significant economic benefits for RAPs through future land management activities or ongoing heritage management. Most importantly, land management agreements have the potential to transform the way public land managers work with Aboriginal people in caring for public lands.

Currently, three RAPs are in the process of drafting the first applications to register their intangible heritage on the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register (VAHR). In supporting these and ongoing applications, the government is also seeking to adapt the VAHR to accommodate the unique requirements of intangible heritage, and Traditional Owner interests.

Our intangible heritage is who we are, it defines us. With our way of life being interrupted in the recent past, never has it been more important to come together to protect and share cultural knowledge and skills.

Daniel Clarke, Wotjobaluk/ Gunditjmara/ Ngarrindjeri

Budj Bim

The World Heritage listing will provide significant financial, employment, and social benefits for south west Victorian communities, especially for its Traditional Owners. This will generate increased income for Aboriginal businesses and organisations, increasing our capacity for self-sufficient business models.

Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation

The tourism potential of **Budj Bim** is being explored through a three-year, \$8 million investment to develop infrastructure at Budj Bim's key sites. Regional Development Victoria is working with the Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation to implement plans for key tourism infrastructure with an estimated potential to attract \$13.5 million worth of tourism to the area and provide significant financial, employment and social benefits to the community.





Indigenous Runway Project.
Photo: Jorge de Araujo.



Koorie Art Show.

OPTIONS FOR ALL VICTORIANS TO BE ENGAGED WITH ABORIGINAL CULTURE

Investing in local cultural resources including tangible and intangible heritage, traditional knowledge and skills can open up opportunities and strengthen identity and social cohesion. This includes raising the profile of Victoria’s Aboriginal arts and culture through programs such as the **Koorie Art Show** and **Indigenous Runway Project**, and investment in cultural heritage infrastructure like Budj Bim.

Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Management Certificate IV is a fully-accredited course designed in partnership with Aboriginal Victoria, the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council, RAPs and Latrobe University. Since 2012, 89 students have graduated with cultural heritage management skills, leading to employment across RAPs, government and private consulting.

Budj Bim Cultural Landscape moved a step closer to being named a UNESCO World Heritage site in January 2017 after it was added to Australia’s World Heritage Tentative List. Sacred to the Gunditjmara people, Budj Bim is one of Australia’s earliest and largest aquaculture systems. Dating back thousands of years, Budj Bim shows how a large, settled Aboriginal community systematically farmed and smoked eels to provide food for themselves and as an economic and social base for trade. A formal World Heritage nomination is now being prepared by the Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation and the Victorian Government, with technical support from the Federal Government. If successful, it will become the first Australian World Heritage site listed solely for Indigenous cultural values. Recognition will bring enormous benefits in terms of identity, confidence, wellbeing and tourism to Gunditjmara people, and to the rest of Victoria.

“Gunditjmara people lived a life differently to that imagined—that people generally imagined—of Aboriginal people, We had stone houses, we lived in villages, we manipulated water flows, we altered water flows along the wetland systems to farm eels.”

Denis Rose, Gunditjmara Elder



Forest Fire Management Victoria (Loddon/Mallee) and the Dja Dja Wurrung Traditional Clans Group are working in partnership to implement traditional burning into mainstream fire management practices.

ABORIGINAL FIRE STRATEGY

We don't see fire on Country as a fearful force, we see it as a tool, if it is used right, to heal and care for Country. In fact, some of our people have fire as part of their dreaming.

Mick Bourke, Dja Dja Wurrung District Planner,
Forest Fire Management Victoria

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning is supporting the development of an Aboriginal Fire Strategy and is committed to working with the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations to ensure the strategy reflects the aspirations of Traditional Owners and Victorian Aboriginal communities in caring for Country.

The co-design process will incorporate a robust and representative engagement plan, will be underpinned by research and cultural knowledge and will provide practical outcomes that work towards embedding cultural burning practices into land management in Victoria.

Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMVic) Loddon Mallee and the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation have partnered to bring traditional burning practices into Victoria's existing fuel management program.

Such a strategy will seek to restore thousands of years of land management practice with a focus on reducing bushfire risk and ensuring Aboriginal traditional knowledge is employed into the future. This is a practical example of Aboriginal intangible heritage being used for the benefit of all Victorians.

Next steps

A coordinated approach to advancing self-determination

Over the remainder of 2017 and 2018, the Department of Premier and Cabinet will coordinate a whole-of-government approach to support Aboriginal self-determination.

Work will build on current efforts within the community and across departments to drive self-determination while also providing a strategic approach to removing the barriers and changing the practices that have previously inhibited Aboriginal self-determination.

Next iteration of the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework

The *Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework* (VAAF) was designed to provide a coordinated report on Victorian Government and Aboriginal community commitments and efforts together across six key strategic areas to closing the gap in Aboriginal disadvantage.

With the framework approaching its five-year anniversary and expiry in 2018, it is time to reflect on the successes of the VAAF and what needs to change to take us forward in partnership with the Aboriginal community.

Building on consultations and engagement to date, the development of the next VAAF will continue this strong participatory approach towards a strengths-based narrative underpinned by Aboriginal self-determination and informed by Aboriginal aspirations and expertise.

Driving reform through the Council of Australian Governments

Closing the Gap is due for expiry in 2018. Victoria has been leading the way in advocating for the approach to the Closing the Gap refresh to be based on Aboriginal self-determination, wellbeing and the centrality of culture. Shifting to a more positive national narrative around opportunities and strengths and moving away from a focus on deficits and gaps is what the Aboriginal community has voiced during consultations. Victoria is strongly committed to Aboriginal self-determination and to ensuring effective community engagement in the process of the refresh.

Family violence

Over the next year, the Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum, other Aboriginal engagement and governance mechanisms and the government will work together to strengthen family violence reforms affecting Aboriginal people in Victoria. This will include embedding Aboriginal self-determination in family violence reforms and initiatives and the development of the next Indigenous family violence 10 year plan to address family violence impacting Aboriginal Victorians.

Aboriginal languages used in this report

Word/Phrase	Language	English translation
Algabonyah	Yorta Yorta	coming together
Babaneek	Woi wurrung	mother
Balit Murrup	Woi wurrung	strong spirit
Barring Djinang	Taungurung	the pathway of the feet
Birrarung	Woi wurrung	water running through trees and leaves
Birrarung Mar	Woi wurrung	rivers edge
Boopoop	Woi wurrung	child
Budj Bim	Gunditjmara	high head
Dardi Munwurro	Gunaikurnai	strong spirit
Djirra	Woi wurrung	Name of a local reed, widely used by Wurundjeri women for basket weaving
Dungulayin Mileka	Bangerang/Yorta Yorta and Wemba Wemba	'From the Murray to the Murray', a bilingual phrase that reflects the river's different names of the Countries it flows through. The Massive Murray Paddle begins in Yarrawonga and ends in Swan Hill; or, from Dungula (Bangerang/Yorta Yorta) to Mile (Wemba Wemba). The suffix 'yin' denotes 'from' in Bangerang/Yorta Yorta (Dungalayin - 'from the Murray') while 'ka' is Wemba Wemba for 'to(wards)' (Mileka - 'to the Murray').
Kaka Wangity, Wangin-Mirrie	Dhauwurd-Wurrung	come listen, hear
Koolin Balit	Boonwurrung	healthy people
Koolin Balit Babaneek Booboop	Boonwurrung/Woi wurrung	healthy mother and child
Korin Korin Balit Djak	Woi wurrung	growing very strong
Kunghah	Ngariro	gathering
Marrung	Wemba Wemba	Murray Cypress pine tree
Ngay Nga-Ango	Woi wurrung	first breath
Nugel	Woi wurrung	belong
Tharamba Bugheen	Gunaikurnai	clever makers
Toorong Marnong	Woi wurrung	joined hands
Wadamba Wilam	Woi wurrung	renew shelter
Wulgunggo Ngalu	Gunaikurnai	working together
Wurreker	Wemba Wemba	to speak / message carrier
Wannik	Gunaikurnai	learning together / journey to our future
Yarra	Boonwurrung/Woi wurrung	ever-flowing

Endnotes

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Tanderrum 2016. Courtesy Ilbjerri Theatre Company.
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