



Victorian Government
Aboriginal Affairs Report 2022





Acknowledgment

We acknowledge Victoria's First Peoples and their ongoing strength in practising the world's oldest living culture. We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters on which we live and work and pay our respect to their Elders past and present.

We recognise that from time immemorial, First Peoples in Victoria have practised their law and lore, customs and languages, and nurtured Country through their spiritual, cultural, material and economic connections to land, water and resources.

We acknowledge the long-lasting, far-reaching and intergenerational consequences of the dispossession of First Peoples of their Country are a direct result of colonisation and the establishment of the State of Victoria. The reality of colonisation involved establishing Victoria with the specific intent of excluding Aboriginal people and their laws, cultures, customs and traditions, including through horrific violence perpetuated at individual, societal and systemic levels. This history, and the systems it gave rise to, continue to harm First Peoples today. It is only through true Aboriginal self-determination that we can begin to right the wrongs of the past.

We acknowledge the strength and resilience of First Peoples in the face of historical and ongoing injustices, and the survival of their living cultures, knowledge and traditions.

Language Statement

Language is important and can change over time, and words can have different meanings for different people.

We recognise the diversity of Aboriginal peoples, communities and cultures throughout Victoria. While the terms 'Koorie' or 'Koori' are commonly used to describe Aboriginal people of southeast Australia. Unless otherwise stated, we have used the term 'Aboriginal' to include all people of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent who live in Victoria.

The glossary includes a list of acronyms and other terminology used in the Report.



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Message from the Premier



The foundation for a fairer Victoria starts with a fairer future for First Peoples. And if we are to achieve genuine equality for Aboriginal people, action must be led by Aboriginal people.

Victoria is the first jurisdiction in Australia to action all three elements of the Uluru statement from the Heart: Voice, Treaty, and Truth. Over the course of the last year, Victoria's work to progress Aboriginal self-determination has continued – and we're not slowing down.

The Yoorrook Justice Commission's landmark inquiry into historic and ongoing injustices experienced by First Peoples in Victoria goes on. Many of these truths will be hard to hear. But listening is the foundation of all learning, and if we want to grow – as people, as governments, as states and as a nation – then that's where we have to start.

For without Truth, there can be no Treaty – and without Treaty, there can be no justice.

With all Treaty elements now agreed between the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria and the State, Treaty negotiations will soon commence. And as they do, First Peoples communities and leaders will lead the way – holding, shaping, and building their own future.

At a time of such significant change, the 2022 Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Report focuses our attention on the lived experiences of Aboriginal Victorians. It shows that progress has been made – and that there's much more to do.

As we keep working towards true self-determination, we'll keep putting Aboriginal voices front and centre. First Nations people already know what's best for their families, their communities and their culture. They just need governments to hear them – not to tell them how it's going to be. And nothing less will do.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be 'Dan Andrews'.

The Hon Daniel Andrews MP
Premier of Victoria

Message from the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples



I am pleased to present the Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Report 2022 (Report) in my role as Minister for Treaty and First Peoples.

Last year was momentous for the relationship between the State and First Peoples. Landmark legislation establishing the Treaty Authority passed through Parliament and the Victorian Government and First Peoples Assembly of Victoria (First Peoples' Assembly) jointly established the Treaty Negotiation Framework and Self-Determination Fund. With all Treaty elements now agreed and soon established, Victoria is on track to embark on the next phase of the Treaty process and commence formal negotiations.

As Victoria advances towards Treaty, this Report acknowledges the progress we have made to date against measures in the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018-2023 (VAAF), Victoria's overarching and ambitious framework for Aboriginal affairs, and reflects on where we have fallen short. In addition to tracking the Government's performance against commitments in the VAAF, this Report provides an update on our progress against the Self-Determination Reform Framework and the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

I am pleased by the positive signs shown in this Report, particularly in education and economic measures. The number of Aboriginal business owner-managers has increased significantly and median household incomes for Aboriginal Victorians continue to rise.

While these achievements should be acknowledged, this Report also details outcomes that demonstrate the ongoing impacts of colonisation and systemic racism. The outcomes reported in Domains 1 and 5 of this Report paint a particularly troubling picture of continued overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in the child protection and criminal justice systems, an issue at the center of the Yoorrook Justice Commission's (Commission) recent inquiry. As the Government stated in its evidence before the Commission, we can and must do more to address these ongoing injustices. The 2023/2024 State Budget invests more than \$475 million over five years to directly support Aboriginal Victorians, with \$140 million to reform the children and families system to reduce the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children and young people in child protection and family services.

The Government remains steadfast in its commitment to listening to First Peoples, engaging cooperatively and transparently with the Commission, and continuing to walk with the First Peoples' Assembly on the path to Treaty, so that First Peoples can build a self-determined future. I look forward to continuing this journey.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gabrielle Williams". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Gabrielle Williams MP

Minister for Treaty and First Peoples

About this Report

The purpose of the Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Report (Report) is for the Victorian Government to annually report on progress against the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018 - 2023 (VAAF), the Self-Determination Reform Framework (SDRF) and the Victorian Closing the Gap Implementation Plan 2021-2023 (Victoria's Implementation Plan). The Report is an outcomes measurement and accountability tool that provides valuable information about progress and challenges that still need to be addressed.

The VAAF is the guiding framework in Aboriginal affairs and the Report outlines progress towards achieving the vision of the VAAF:

“that all Aboriginal Victorian people, families and communities are safe, resilient, thriving and living culturally rich lives”.

The Report sets out how government is working to realise the VAAF's 20 goals across six domains:

- Children, family & home
- Learning & skills
- Opportunity & prosperity
- Health & wellbeing
- Justice & safety
- Culture & Country.

The Report also outlines ongoing work across government to progress Aboriginal self-determination in line with the SDRF. Under the SDRF, Victorian Government departments and agencies are continuing to reform internal processes, practices and policies to better enable Aboriginal self-determination. This includes the Victorian Government's journey towards Truth and Treaty, in partnership with the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria (First Peoples' Assembly). Treaty in Victoria is the embodiment of Aboriginal self-determination and provides a path to negotiate the transfer of power and resources for First Peoples to control matters which impact their lives.

Victoria's priorities under the VAAF and the SDRF are complimented by our commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (National Agreement). This is the fourth annual

Report against the VAAF since its release in 2018 and for the second year, the Report embeds dedicated reporting on progress in Victoria to implement the National Agreement through Victoria's Implementation Plan. The Report showcases the most up-to-date available data for the years 2021 and 2022 across the 111 measures in the VAAF. As detailed in the About Data section of the Report, the latest year of available data varies due to the inconsistent frequency of data collection across a range of data sources. Victoria is pursuing more ambitious and comprehensive outcome-focused goals under the VAAF and Victoria's Implementation Plan, over and above targets set under the National Agreement.

The Report was developed through a coordinated and collaborative approach with input from Victorian Government departments and agencies. Many Aboriginal Governance Forums and the Koorie Caucus of the Closing the Gap Partnership Forum also provided input. All feedback has been considered, however, not all feedback was adopted due to timing, scope and the period of reporting the Report covers.

Next year's Report will be the last against the current VAAF, SDRF and Victoria's Implementation Plan, as all expire in 2023. The Government will consult with the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria (First Peoples' Assembly) in relation to the next VAAF and SDRF, and the First Peoples' Assembly and the Koorie Caucus of the Partnership Forum in relation to the next Victorian Implementation Plan, including in relation to strong engagement and accountability processes.

Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs

Our shared vision: 'All Aboriginal Victorian people, families and communities are healthy, safe, resilient, thriving and living culturally rich lives.'

Self-determination enablers: What we'll do

- Prioritise culture
- Address trauma and support healing
- Address racism and promote cultural safety
- Transfer power and resources to communities

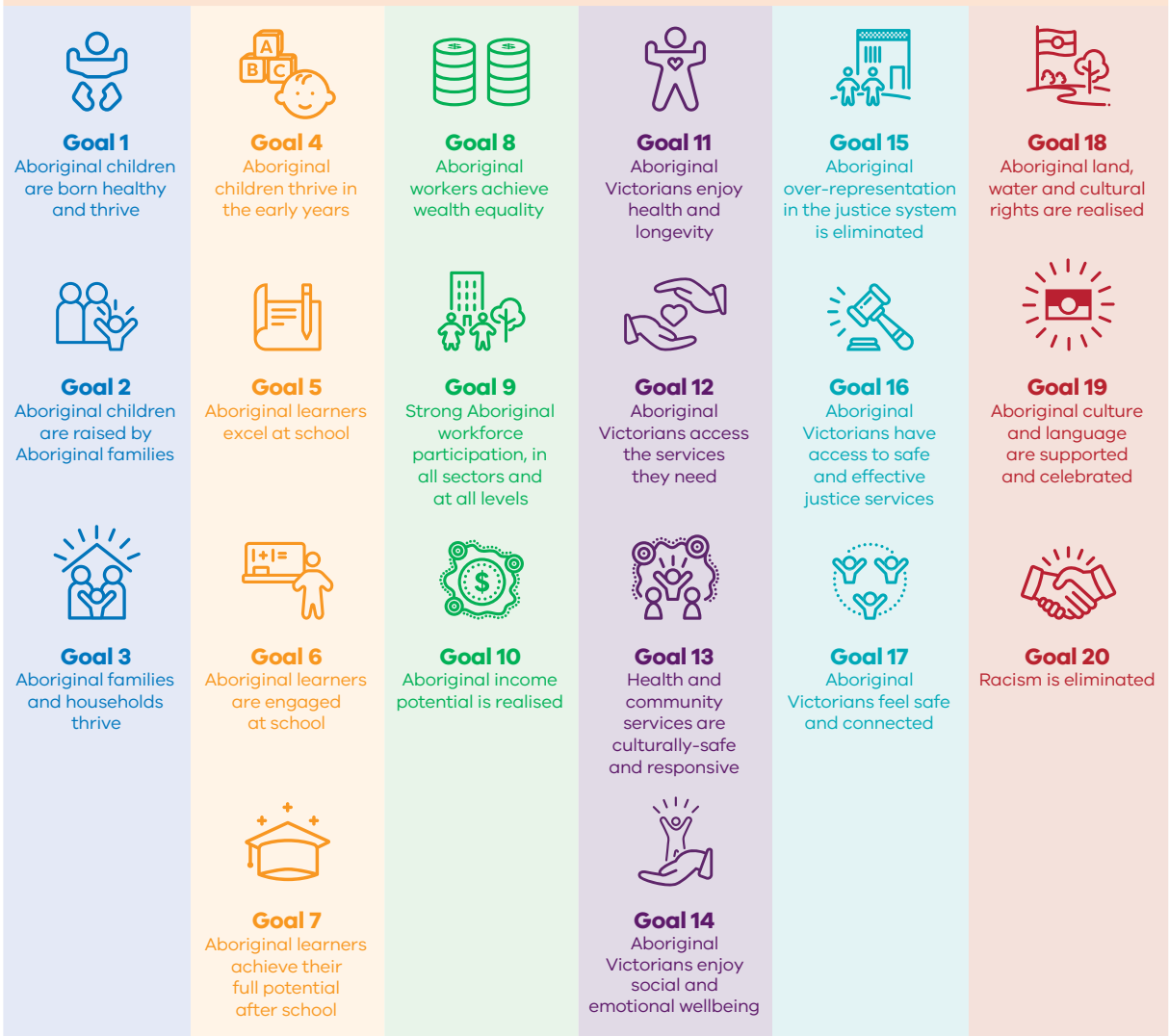
Self-determination guiding principles: How we'll do it

- Human rights
- Cultural integrity
- Commitment
- Aboriginal expertise
- Partnership
- Investment
- Decision-making
- Empowerment
- Cultural safety
- Equity
- Accountability

Domains



Goals



About Data

Machinery of Government changes

The 2022 State election took place during the reporting period. Following the election, several Machinery of Government (MOG) changes came into effect in January 2023. As a result, responsibility for some portfolios and specific actions has shifted between government departments. Depending on the context, reporting may refer to the names of former or current government departments.

Data collection and limitations

This Report provides the latest available information about how the Victorian Government is progressing against the six domains and 111 measures in the VAAF. The data reported provides an assessment of progress for 2022 and previous years based on available data. Historical data may have been updated since the last edition of the Report.

Data has been sourced from a range of State and Commonwealth administrative collections and surveys. The latest year of available data varies across the Report due to the inconsistent frequency of collection of survey data. Several measures do not have updated data available for inclusion in this Report. Updated data for these measures will be included in future reports.

Some of the data reported against the VAAF measures does not directly align with the measure definition due to the limitations of available data.

Crude rates

Due to the large array of data sources used to calculate progress against each measure, the majority of rate calculations used in this Report are crude rates. Where age standardised rates have been used, this has been noted in the Report.

Closing the Gap data

Summaries of how Victoria is tracking nationally for the Closing the Gap targets are included on the overview page for each relevant VAAF goal. Since the 2021 Report, a new year of data has been released for nine targets (across eight socioeconomic outcome areas). Over time, as more

data becomes available, the monitoring of the targets will provide greater insight into what progress is being made.

For some targets (such as Target 1 and Target 14), reporting is only for those jurisdictions which have adequate levels of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identification. Future reporting aims to include additional disaggregation for all states and territories.

As Victoria is pursuing more ambitious and comprehensive goals under the VAAF than the targets set out under the National Agreement, many VAAF goals and measures do not have a counterpoint under the National Agreement for direct comparison.

Data on Victoria's progress towards the 2031 Closing the Gap targets can be found at www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/dashboard.

VAAF Data Dashboard

In line with the Victorian Government's commitment in the VAAF to improve data access, transparency and narration, an interactive VAAF Data Dashboard has been developed.

The VAAF Data Dashboard can be accessed via the First Peoples – State Relations website at www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/report-data-dash-board. It offers a user-friendly platform to access detailed state level data. It also includes disaggregated data at sub-state level where available. While this Report is limited to the data available during the reporting cycle, the VAAF Data Dashboard will be updated to report on measures when new data become available.

COVID-19 pandemic

Changes in performance for some measures between 2020 and 2022 may be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Indigenous Data Sovereignty

The Victorian Government acknowledges the critical importance of Indigenous Data Sovereignty and has committed to this as a potential subject for negotiation in Statewide and Traditional Owner treaties under the Treaty Negotiation Framework.

Victorian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Population 2016-2021

Indigenous Status	Victoria - 2021	%	Victoria - 2016	%
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander total	65,646	1.0%	47,788	0.8%
Aboriginal	61,865	1.0%	44,590	0.8%
Torres Strait Islander	2,083	0.0%	2,027	0.0%
Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	1,692	0.0%	1,169	0.0%
Non-Indigenous	6,148,188	94.5%	5,532,275	93.3%
Not stated	289,665	4.5%	346,563	5.8%

Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing

Victorian Aboriginal Population

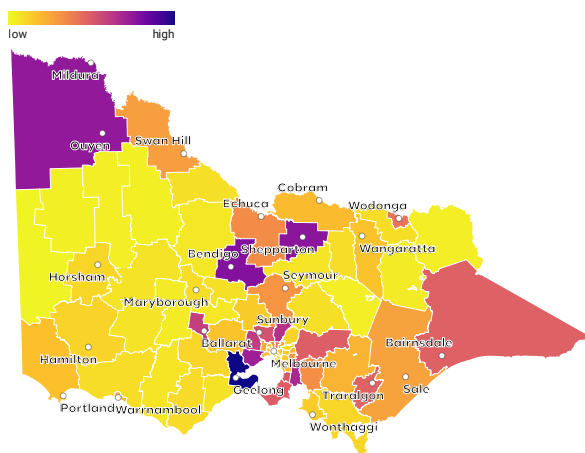
Between the 2016 and 2021 Census of Australian Population and Housing (Census), the number of people who self-identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander in Victoria grew from 47,788 to 65,646 (1.0 per cent of the total Victorian population).

and organisations, including the First Peoples' Assembly, to develop appropriate policies and frameworks in line with its commitment under the VAAF and National Agreement. Many departments are also continuing work to progress data sovereignty principles.

Demographics

Based on the 2021 Census, 50 per cent of Aboriginal Victorians were under the age of 25.

Victorian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Population Heatmap, 2021

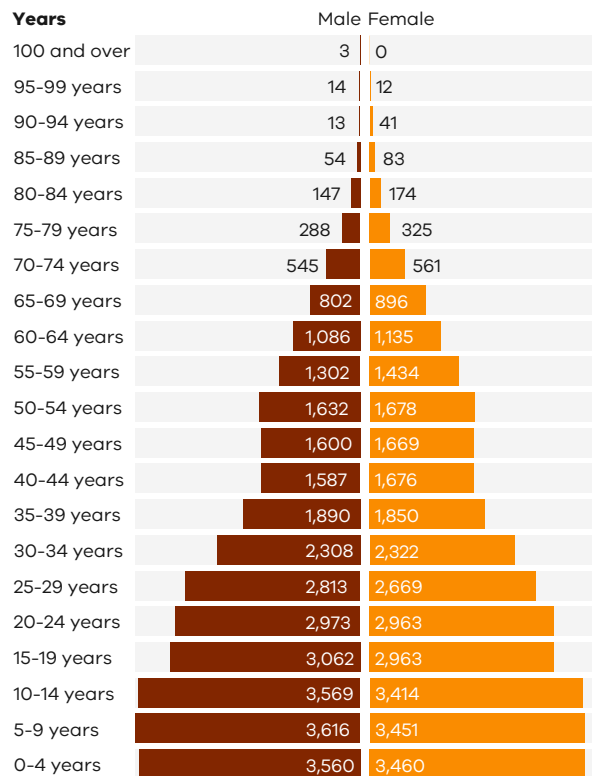


Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing • Map data: ABS

Geography

Based on the 2021 Census, 50.5 per cent of Aboriginal Victorians lived in the greater Melbourne area. The Local Government Areas with the highest density Aboriginal population are located around regional centres, such as Greater Geelong, Greater Bendigo, Greater Shepparton and Mildura.

Victorian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander age and sex population pyramid, 2021



Source : ABS Census of Population and Housing

How government is transforming to enable self-determination

Self-determination is key to improved outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians. It is a human right enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and is a guiding principle under the *Advancing the Treaty Process with Aboriginal Victorians Act 2018*. The SDRF was developed in 2019 to embed government's commitment to self-determination across all areas of government, and to help fulfil the ambitious and forward-looking agenda of the VAAF.

All government departments and agencies are required to report annually on what they are doing to action the VAAF's four self-determination enablers (Figure 1).

Annual reporting aims to measure where on the VAAF self-determination continuum (Figure 2) our

actions are landing and invoke reflection on how to move further along that spectrum. Departments demonstrated good progress towards supporting self-determination in 2022, including through identifying and removing barriers that keep First Peoples from exercising their right to self-determination.



Self-determination enabler (Figure 1)

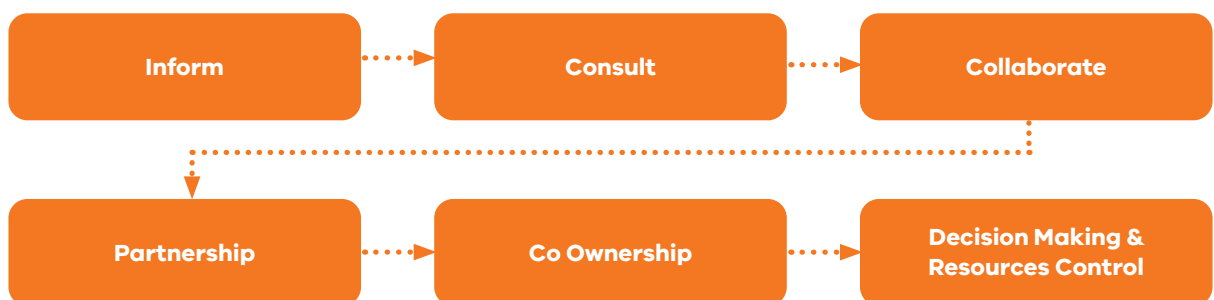
1 Prioritise culture
 We acknowledge that connection to family, community, culture and Country is critical to the wellbeing and positive self-identity of Aboriginal Victorians. Cultural identity is a key enabler of achieving positive outcomes and the full enjoyment of the right to practise culture.

2 Address trauma and support healing
 We acknowledge the long-lasting, far-reaching and intergenerational consequences of colonisation, dispossession, child removal and other discriminatory government policies, including significant intergenerational trauma. Addressing trauma and supporting healing is important because the wellbeing of Aboriginal people, families and communities is fundamental to how they engage with the structures and systems that support them to thrive.

3 Address racism and promote cultural safety
 The structures and systems established during colonisation had the specific intent to exclude Aboriginal people and their laws, customs and traditions, resulting in entrenched systemic and structural racism. Governments as well as Aboriginal and mainstream organisations and services should provide mechanisms and supports for Aboriginal Victorian people, families, communities and organisations to fully participate in policy development. Targeted and universal systems and services must be culturally-safe, relevant, accessible and responsive to communities. This enables Aboriginal Victorians to make decisions on the matters that affect their lives.

4 Transfer power and resources to communities
 Aboriginal people know what is best for themselves, their families and communities. We acknowledge the right of Aboriginal Victorians to have decision-making control over the issues that affect their lives. Community-led, place-based decision-making and resourcing at the state and local level will enable Aboriginal communities to lead the development and implementation of culturally-safe and relevant responses. It will also allow Aboriginal communities to hold government, Aboriginal organisations and mainstream services to account.

VAAF Self-Determination Continuum (Figure 2)



Government action under the four self-determination enablers

Prioritise culture

Colonisation imposed settler laws and policies on Aboriginal people with the deliberate intent of excluding their lore, customs, cultures and traditions. The impacts of these laws and policies are still felt today.

Prioritising culture across government's policies, programs and services ensures Aboriginal people can continue to share pride in their identity. Prioritising culture is also key to creating culturally safe workplaces, policies, programs and services. During 2022, departments demonstrated a strong commitment to making culture a priority in policy, program and service delivery.

Address racism and promote cultural safety

To advance self-determination, government must ensure that its systems and funded services are culturally safe, relevant, accessible and responsive. Government must also acknowledge and act to overcome racism, unconscious bias and discrimination in government laws, policy, practice, systems and institutions. Systemic racism and unconscious bias are primary contributors to social and economic disadvantage, such as the over-representation of Aboriginal Victorians in the criminal justice and child protection systems.

Government organisations have gone some way in transforming services to being culturally safe and responsive. Rolling out cultural awareness training, engaging in collaborative partnerships and workforce development initiatives contribute to creating a culturally safe environment where government engages with Aboriginal Victorians in a respectful and inclusive way.

Address trauma and support healing

Supporting healing is fundamental to the wellbeing of Aboriginal people, families and communities. This begins with acknowledging past and ongoing trauma caused by colonisation, disruption of culture, dispossession of land, forced child removal and other discriminatory policies. Central to this is government's genuine and transparent engagement with the truth-telling process of the Yoorrook Justice Commission (Commission). Domain 5 of this Report highlights some of the progress that has been made by the Commission. Government must also continue to reform discriminatory laws, embed trauma-informed policies and programs, and develop new relationships of trust with Aboriginal communities.

Transfer power and resources to communities

Treaty will be Victoria's primary vehicle to transfer decision making power and resources to communities. As detailed under Domain 6 of this Report, the Treaty process has achieved significant milestones in 2022. Victoria is preparing to embark on the next phase of the landmark Treaty process and commence formal Treaty negotiations in late 2023. More broadly, the Victorian Government is taking action to transfer power and resources back to communities, including strengthening structures that empower Aboriginal people and communities to share decision-making authority, providing funding to Traditional Owner Corporations, progressing agreements with Traditional Owners, and transferring resources to ACCOs to support service delivery.

Specific examples of government actions to enable self-determination reform can be found under the relevant VAAF domain in this Report.

Four self-determination enablers (Figure 3)

For government action to prioritise culture, look for actions with this symbol



Prioritise culture

For government action to address trauma and support healing, look for actions with this symbol



Address trauma and support healing

For government action to address racism and promote cultural safety, look for actions with this symbol:



Address racism and promote cultural safety

For government action to transfer power and resources, look for actions with this symbol



Transfer power and resources to communities

Victoria's approach to implementing the National Agreement on Closing the Gap

Victoria's first Closing the Gap Implementation Plan

The National Agreement, signed in July 2020, was negotiated between the Commonwealth Government, State and Territory Governments, and the Coalition of Peaks, a representative body of over seventy Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled peak organisations and members.

The National Agreement is structured around four priority reform areas that are the mutually reinforcing enablers for achieving better outcomes for Aboriginal people. The priority reforms also broadly align with the four self-determination enablers in the VAAF (see Figure 1), which has guided the Victorian Government's efforts to improve outcomes for and with First Peoples since 2018.

The four priority reforms are:

- Priority Reform One: Formal partnerships and shared decision-making
- Priority Reform Two: Building the community-controlled sector
- Priority Reform Three: Transforming government organisations
- Priority Reform Four: Shared access to data and information at a regional level.

The National Agreement also sets out 17 socioeconomic outcome areas and associated targets to measure progress in the outcomes experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Summaries of how Victoria is progressing against the targets for socioeconomic outcome areas are included on the overview page of each relevant VAAF goal.

Victoria's Implementation Plan outlines the actions Victoria is taking to implement the National Agreement and achieve equity for Aboriginal Victorians. Many of the Victorian actions reported under the priority reforms are progressing as part of Victoria's commitment to broad self-determination reform.

Victoria's Closing the Gap Partnership Forum

In 2022, the Victorian Government established a new Partnership Forum on Closing the Gap (Partnership Forum). The Partnership Forum is Victoria's formal partner for decision-making on Closing the Gap, and ensures implementation is community-led.

The Partnership Forum comprises representatives of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), Aboriginal governance forum delegates (Koorie Caucus of the Partnership Forum) and government representatives. As at June 2023, the full Partnership Forum has met twice. The Koorie Caucus of the Partnership Forum has also met independent of government to consider key foundational and governance arrangements.

The Partnership Forum is currently considering and making decisions on a range of key Closing the Gap priorities for 2023.

Annual reporting and updating Victoria's Implementation Plan

Victoria's Implementation Plan runs until the end of 2023. It will be crucial that Victoria's Implementation Plan continues to be reviewed and updated to ensure it remains relevant, transparent and ambitious. The approach to developing Victoria's next Implementation Plan will be reviewed in the second half of 2023 to ensure alignment with outcomes from Victoria's Treaty process. This will require consultation with the Partnership Forum and the First Peoples' Assembly following their State-wide elections.

Victoria's 2021 annual reporting on the National Agreement, embedded in the 2021 VGAAR, was tabled at Joint Council on Closing the Gap (Joint Council) on 16 December 2022.

Priority Reform One: Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision-Making



Outcome: People are empowered to share decision-making authority with governments to accelerate policy and place-based progress on Closing the Gap through formal partnership arrangements.



Target: There will be formal partnership arrangements to support Closing the Gap in place between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and governments in place in each state and territory enshrining agreed joint decision-making roles and responsibilities and where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have chosen their own representatives.

The Victorian Government is committed to building and strengthening structures that empower Aboriginal people and communities to share decision-making authority, as outlined in the National Agreement.

The Victorian Government has a long history of shared decision-making, which continues to develop and evolve to respond to the changing needs and aspirations of communities, including, a firm commitment to negotiate both State-wide Treaty and Traditional Owner treaties.

Partnership actions

Policy partnerships are created between all governments and the Coalition of Peaks for the purpose of working more effectively across organisations, reducing gaps and duplication, and improving outcomes under Closing the Gap. Under the National Agreement, parties committed to establishing five policy partnerships by the end of 2022:

- Justice
- Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB)
- Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD)
- Housing
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages (Languages).

The Justice Policy Partnership was established in late 2021. The SEWB and the ECCD Policy Partnerships have held their first meetings since establishment in late 2022. The Housing and Languages Policy Partnerships were established in early 2023.

The Victorian Government is committed to actively participating in all policy partnerships, including representation at meetings, to drive community-led outcomes.

Place-based Partnerships are based on a specific region, between government and Aboriginal representatives, and others by agreement, from those specific areas. The purpose of a Place-Based Partnership is to implement the National Agreement through a long-term community development approach that 'responds to local priorities'.

The National Agreement requires that Joint Council consider the locations for six new place-based partnerships across all jurisdictions, to be established by 2024.

At Joint Council in June 2023, Victoria nominated Gippsland as the location for a Victorian Place-based Partnership and an aligned Community Data Project. This followed the Partnership Forum's endorsement of Gippsland at its April meeting. Over the next 12 months, the Partnership Forum will scope and endorse a detailed project proposal, which will form the basis of a 2024/25 State Budget submission.

Victorian actions

Treaty: Victoria's Treaty process seeks to reset the relationship between First Peoples, the State and all Victorians. Treaty and treaties will be the primary mechanism for transferring decision-making power and resources to communities in Victoria. It will provide a new foundation and resource base for Aboriginal Victorians to steer issues and decisions that affect their lives.

The First Peoples' Assembly is the democratically elected and statewide body that represents all First Peoples in Victoria in the Treaty process, as the presumptive First Peoples' Representative Body under the *Advancing the Treaty Process with Aboriginal Victorians Act 2018*.

Treaty-making in Victoria will include the negotiation of both a Statewide Treaty and local Traditional Owner Treaties. This reflects that self-determination can be exercised by all First Peoples in Victoria collectively, and individually by Traditional Owner groups. As detailed under Domain 6 of this Report, the Treaty process has achieved significant milestones and Victoria is preparing to commence formal negotiations.

Victoria is also progressing the strong partnership elements under the National Agreement through the following actions:

- **Closing the Gap Partnership Forum:** In 2022, the Victorian Government facilitated a community-based selection process to establish a new Partnership Forum, Victoria's formal partner for decision-making on Closing the Gap. ACCOs and Traditional Owner groups elected representatives from across 14 sectors to be members of the Partnership Forum, in a process run independently of government. Members of the Partnership Forum regularly engage with their sector to ensure they are representative of, and accountable to, their sectors.
- **Statewide Caring for Country Partnership Forum:** The Forum met three times in 2022, including an in-person meeting on Country, co-chaired and hosted by Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation. The Traditional Owner Corporations Caucus also supported the establishment and delivery of Regional Caring for Country Partnership Forums in 2022. The shape of the Forum is constantly shifting to respond to Traditional Owner decision-making, leadership and self-governance. An Independent Review of the Statewide Caring for Country Partnership Forum was completed in 2022 to measure progress to date, its alignment to *Pupangarli Marnmarnepu* and its strengths and opportunities for improvement. The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) will continue to work with ABSTARR (Traditional Owner Corporation Caucus Secretariat) to explore options for improving the Forum in 2023.
- **Assessment of Aboriginal Governance Forums:** In 2022, departments and their relevant Aboriginal Governance Forum completed an assessment against the partnership elements in the National Agreement. All governance forums have met, to a high degree, the partnership elements. A complete assessment of Aboriginal Governance Forums was included in the 2021 Closing the Gap Data Table B.

The Victorian Government has well-established formal partnerships with Aboriginal Governance Forums across its respective sectors. These forums are resourced to enable shared decision-making with Aboriginal communities and organisations. See table below.

Partnership Forum	Summary	Approximate resourcing to support forums in 2022-23
<p>Aboriginal Children’s Forum (ACF), Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH)</p>	<p>Established in 2015 to drive the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people in, or at risk of entering, out-of-home care. The ACF meets quarterly.</p> <p>Relevant Strategy: <i>Wungurilwil Gaggapduir: Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement</i></p>	<p>DFFH provided funding of \$200,000 to support the ACF in 2022-23.</p>
<p>Aboriginal Justice Forum (AJF), Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS)</p>	<p>Established in 2000 to improve Aboriginal justice outcomes, enhance family and community safety, and reduce Aboriginal over-representation in the Victorian criminal justice system. The AJF meets three times a year.</p> <p>Relevant Strategy: <i>Burra Lotjpa Dunguludja: Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement</i></p>	<p>DJCS provided funding for 1 x VPS5 (1 FTE), 1 x VPS6 (0.2 FTE) and 1 x VPS4 (0.2 FTE) to support policy and secretariat functions.</p> <p>In 2022-23, DJCS provided an estimated \$120,000 to deliver the AJF meetings. DJCS also funded members an estimated \$50,000 in sitting fees to support their participation at approximately 5 in-person and 2 online meetings.</p>
<p>Aboriginal Strategic Governance Forum (ASGF), DFFH</p>	<p>Established in 2017 as an advisory and decision-making forum used to set DFFH’s strategic direction on relevant portfolios.</p> <p>Relevant Strategies: <i>Aboriginal Governance and Accountability Framework, Korin Korin Balit-Djak: Aboriginal Health, Wellbeing and Safety Strategic Plan 2017-2027</i></p>	<p>DFFH provided funding for 1 x VPS6 (1 FTE) and 1 x VPS5 (0.5 FTE) to support policy and secretariat functions (\$300,000 per year). DFFH funded members to lead/participate in 6 meetings: Chair Koorie Caucus: \$10,000; Co-chair Aboriginal Strategic Governance Forum: \$10,000; Deputy Chair Koorie Caucus: \$7,000; and Member Koorie Caucus: \$3,000. DFFH provided \$45-\$60 per hour for out of session contributions of ASGF Koorie Caucus members (nil spent). An extra \$100,000 was transferred to support the secretariat to engage divisional and local governance structures in agreement making conversations.</p>
<p>Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum, Family Safety Victoria / DFFH</p>	<p>Established in 2005 to address issues of Aboriginal family violence. The forum meets three times a year.</p> <p>Relevant Strategy: <i>Dhelk Dja: Safe Our Way - Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families</i></p>	<p>DFFH provided funding to the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Limited (VACSAL) for an Executive Officer and Policy Officer to support engagement.</p> <p>DFFH funded member organisations \$160,000 to participate in meetings and forums. Regional Action Groups received \$80,000 for sitting fees and engagement support.</p>

Partnership Forum	Summary	Approximate resourcing to support forums in 2022-23
<p>Marrung Central Governance Committee (MCGC), Department of Education (DE)</p>	<p>Established in 2016 to ensure all Koorie Victorians achieve their learning aspirations. The MCGC meets three times a year.</p> <p>Relevant Strategy: Marrung: Aboriginal Education Plan 2016-2026</p>	<p>DE supported the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) to participate in Marrung governance mechanisms, including delivery of Koorie Education Roundtables and sitting fees for Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Chairs on Marrung governance mechanisms.</p>
<p>State-wide Caring for Country Partnership Forum (SCfCPF), Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA)</p>	<p>Established in 2020 under <i>Pupangarli Marmarnepu</i>: 'Owning Our Future' Aboriginal Self-Determination Strategy 2020-2025 to monitor and evaluate policies and ensure accountability to Aboriginal communities. The SCfCPF meets three times a year.</p> <p>Relevant Strategy: <i>Pupangarli Marmarnepu</i>: 'Owning Our Future' Aboriginal Self-Determination Strategy 2020-2025</p>	<p>DEECA provided funding for 1x VPS (1 FTE) to provide a secretariat role to the SCfCPF.</p> <p>DEECA provided funding for approximately 1x FTE to the Traditional Owner Corporation Caucus for secretariat support and services to allow for their collective engagement and participation in the SCfCPF.</p>
<p>Yuma Yirramboi Council (Council), Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions: (DJSIR)</p>	<p>Established in 2022 to replace the inaugural Victorian Aboriginal Employment and Economic Council. It provides advice and guidance to government on matters affecting Aboriginal Victorians in business, employment, tourism, culture and broader economic development. The Council meets quarterly.</p> <p>Relevant Strategy: <i>Yuma Yirramboi</i>: Invest in Tomorrow - Aboriginal Employment and Economic Strategy.</p>	<p>The Yuma Yirramboi Council, Koori Caucus and subsidiary delivery areas are supported by 1x VPS6 and 1x VPS4 to provide secretariat duties.</p> <p>Remuneration for Koori Caucus members is fixed at \$17,000 per annum for the Chair and \$10,500 for eligible Caucus members from 3 October 2022.</p> <p>DJSIR is funded for \$274,500 per year for the next two years to hold hybrid meetings and workshops, administer and support Council members.</p>
<p>Victorian Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Partnership Forum (AHWPF), Department of Health (DH)</p>	<p>Established in 2021 to enable strategic collaboration between the Aboriginal community-controlled health sector, the mainstream health sector and government. The AHWPF meets twice per year.</p> <p>Relevant Strategy: Victorian Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Partnership Agreement</p>	<p>DH fund the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) to provide secretariat functions.</p> <p>DH fund the delivery of two meetings, including venue and accommodation support for Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (ACCHO) member representatives.</p> <p>In 2022-23 DH provided additional funding to VACCHO in recognition of the extensive work undertaken to support the development of the Victorian Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Agreement and Action Plan.</p>
<p>Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework Implementation Working Group (VAHWF IWG), Homes Victoria / DFFH</p>	<p>Established in 2021 to support actions that ensure a resourced and capable housing and homelessness system within Victoria. The VAHWF IWG meets quarterly.</p> <p>Relevant Strategy: <i>Mana-na Woorn-Tyeen Maar-Takoort</i>: Every Aboriginal Person has a Home - Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework</p>	<p>Homes Victoria provided funding to Aboriginal Housing Victoria including 2 x VPS5 equivalent (2 FTE) and 1 x VPS6 equivalent (0.5 FTE) to support policy and secretariat functions.</p>

Priority Reform Two: Building the Aboriginal Community-Controlled Sector



Outcome: There is a strong and sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector delivering high quality services to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the country.



Target: Increase the amount of government funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs and services going through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations.

Aboriginal community-controlled services achieve better results, are culturally safe, employ more Aboriginal people and are often preferred over mainstream services. The Victorian Government is committed to building the capacity and capability of ACCOs.

Partnership actions

The National Agreement commits parties to establish national **sector strengthening plans** for the four priority sectors under Priority Reform Two: Health, Early Childhood Care and Development, Disability and Housing. The Health and Early Childhood Care and Development plans were agreed-in-principle by Joint Council in December 2021, and the Housing and Disability plans were agreed-in-principle in August 2022.

The Victorian Government has worked closely with the Coalition of Peaks and the ACCO sector to support the development of these plans, including through our representation in sector strengthening working groups. The finalised plans identify

joint national strengthening efforts. Victoria's implementation approach for these plans will be determined by the Partnership Forum.

Upon signing the National Agreement, Victoria committed \$3.3 million over four years in 2020–21 as part of a **virtual funding pool** to build the capacity of the ACCO sector. Joint Council agreed in April 2021 that this funding be directed towards the priority sectors.

The Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) will continue to work with the Koorie Caucus of the Partnership Forum on allocating funding from Victoria's contribution to the virtual funding pool. This includes identifying and agreeing the projects to be funded.



Victorian actions

Victoria's Aboriginal Expenditure Review:

Victoria is currently reviewing its expenditure on Aboriginal programs and services to identify reprioritisation opportunities.

The Koorie Caucus of the Partnership Forum proposed a two-phased, iterative approach and design principles for Victoria's Expenditure Review in November 2022, based on the model implemented by New South Wales. In 2022, Government members of the Partnership Forum endorsed this scope, approach, and design principles.

Phase One will analyse Aboriginal-specific funding across government and Phase Two will analyse non-targeted funding in three key areas of government. DPC has engaged Supply Nation certified consultants Inside Policy to assist with the project.

DPC has commenced work on Phase One of the Expenditure Review, in collaboration with the Department of Treasury and Finance (DTF) on technical aspects of the project and in consultation with the Koorie Caucus of the Partnership Forum and the First Peoples' Assembly. All Government departments have provided expenditure data on Aboriginal specific programs to inform Phase One of the project.

Victoria tabled an update on Phase One of Victoria's Expenditure Review at Joint Council in June 2023, which provided an overview of results on the investigation into Aboriginal-specific expenditure. A final report is expected in late 2023, which will include analysis of non-targeted funding across three areas of government to be informed by the Koorie Caucus of the Partnership Forum and the First Peoples' Assembly.

The Expenditure Review will enable greater transparency of government spending to support the transfer of resources.

Victoria is progressing other key actions to strengthen the Aboriginal community-controlled sector, including:

- **Funding reform for ACCOs:** DFFH is supporting Djirra to develop a self-determined outcomes framework and defining next steps towards a single funding agreement. Lessons from this pilot will be key in the development of a department-wide funding reform project.
- **Outcomes-based funding:** In 2022, the DH worked with VACCHO to trial an outcomes-based approach. All funding to VACCHO was reviewed, with the aim to provide base core funding and transition fixed term funding to ongoing where possible. VACCHO has developed an implementation plan to be reported on through an annual impact statement. With learnings from the VACCHO trial, DH is continuing to work towards a similar arrangement for all ACCHOs. This includes shifting ACCHOs from 1 to 3-year funding cycles from 1 July 2023.
- **Aboriginal Workforce Fund (AWF):** DFFH and DH continued the implementation and evaluation of the AWF to boost the Aboriginal community, health and family violence workforce as communities recover from the pandemic. The \$40 million AWF was split into two tranches: \$10 million in 2020/2021 and \$30 million across 2021/2022 and 2022/23.
- **Aboriginal Community Infrastructure Program (ACIP):** ACIP is a grants program that invests in Aboriginal community infrastructure to strengthen the Victorian ACCO sector. In July 2022, the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples approved funding of over \$11 million to 21 ACCOs for a mix of repairs and minor works projects; capital works and upgrades projects; and feasibility studies/business cases projects. Alongside ACIP, Aboriginal organisations that own a property where the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples holds a first mortgage can apply to have the first mortgage removed.

For a comprehensive list of actions to strengthen the Aboriginal community-controlled sector, please refer to [Closing the Gap Data Table B](#).

Priority Reform Three: Transforming Government Organisations



Outcome: Improving mainstream institutions: Governments, their organisations and their institutions are accountable for Closing the Gap and are culturally safe and responsive to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including through the services they fund.



Target: Decrease in the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have experiences of racism.

As the provider or funder of services that benefit the entire community, it is crucial that the Victorian Government ensures its systems, institutions, and services are culturally safe and responsive to the needs of Aboriginal people.

Under the VAAF, SDRF, National Agreement and Victoria's Implementation Plan, Victoria has committed to structural transformation of government organisations and mainstream service providers.

Victoria's nation-leading work to implement all elements of the Uluru Statement from the Heart – Voice, Treaty, Truth - are central to the transformation of government and the improvement of outcomes.

Partnership actions

The National Agreement requires that by 2023, governments each identify, develop or strengthen **an independent mechanism** that will support, monitor and report on the transformation of mainstream agencies and institutions. The mechanism must be culturally safe and support mainstream agencies to embed and practice culturally appropriate service offerings.

Victoria's independent mechanism will be progressed through Victoria's Treaty process, under which there is an opportunity for a body comprising representatives elected by Aboriginal Victorians

to lead or oversee engagement with Aboriginal Victorians in relation to any concerns about mainstream institutions and report publicly on the transformation of mainstream agencies.

In addition, Victoria is currently working with all parties to develop a nationally consistent understanding and approach about how to meet its goal of system level transformation. This requires Victoria's input into key **data development work** at the national level to better measure and report on this priority reform, as well as focusing efforts on building shared understanding and evidence of what works in improving mainstream institutions.



Victorian actions

Yoorrook Justice Commission (Commission):

The Commission is continuing its landmark work investigating historic and ongoing injustices. This includes making recommendations for transformational change, including to support Victoria's Treaty making process. In June 2022, it released its interim report, *Yoorrook with Purpose*.

The Commission has heard First Peoples' experiences and evidence of witnesses before the Commission, including on matters related to systemic injustice in the child protection and criminal justice systems.

Government has responded to information requests, provided submissions and given evidence to support the Commission's lines of inquiry. While some delays have impacted the Commission's work, Government remains committed to engaging proactively, genuinely and transparently with the Commission to support its truth-telling objectives.

The Commission is due to deliver a critical issues report into systemic injustice within the child protection and criminal justice systems at the end of August 2023. The Commission will run until June 2025 after being granted a 12-month extension. More information is available at www.yoorrookjusticecommission.org.au.

Victoria is progressing other key actions to improve mainstream organisations, including:

- **Cultural safety:** Roll out of cultural safety training for staff of government departments, development of cultural safety action plans to embed cultural safety in service delivery, and establishment of cultural safety measures and targets across various sectors.
- **Victoria's Anti-Racism Strategy:** Since 2021-22, the development of the Strategy has been guided by expert advice from the Anti-Racism Taskforce, complementing an extensive public community consultation process held in 2021. The Strategy is designed to be a targeted roadmap to oppose and eliminate all forms of racism and discrimination in the Victorian community. Embedding cultural safety is a key principle underpinning many of the initiatives tied to the Strategy. In October 2022, the Taskforce was

reappointed for another 12 months. DFFH and DPC are continuing to develop the Strategy to ensure a whole-of-Victorian Government lens is applied, including ensuring alignment with Commission recommendations and the Treaty process.

- **Statement of Recognition:** Victoria has begun to insert a Statement of Recognition within key pieces of legislation to acknowledge the role of historic and ongoing biases and racism within government service systems. For example, the *Children and Health Legislation Amendment (Statement of Recognition, Aboriginal Self-determination and Other Matters) Bill 2023* was introduced to Parliament in February 2023. The Bill expands the role of Aboriginal agencies delivering children and family services to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal children in care in Victoria.
- **Transport Portfolio Aboriginal Self-Determination Plan 2020-2023:** This plan aims to transform Victorian transport systems and procedures to enable and empower Aboriginal Victorians to share decision-making authority and accelerate progress against National Agreement outcomes.

Examples of how all departments and agencies are transforming to enable self-determination are included throughout this Report under relevant domains.

For a comprehensive list of actions to transform its institutions and systems, please refer to [Closing the Gap Data Table C](#).

Priority Reform Four: Shared Access to Data and Information at a Regional level



Outcome: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to, and the capability to use, locally relevant data and information to set and monitor the implementation of efforts to close the gap, their priorities and drive their own development.



Target: Increase the number of regional data projects to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to make decisions about Closing the Gap and their development.

Victoria is working towards increasing Aboriginal ownership and control of data. This includes shared access to local and disaggregated data and information for Aboriginal communities and organisations.

Resourcing Aboriginal people and organisations to collect, analyse, disseminate and manage data supports self-determination. This is reflected in the work of the Commission, which identified Indigenous Data Sovereignty as one of its strategic priorities in 2022. The Treaty Negotiation Framework also includes Indigenous Data Sovereignty as a potential subject matter for negotiation in Statewide and Traditional Owner treaties.



Partnership actions

The quality and quantity of data to measure progress to improve socioeconomic outcomes varies.

The Victorian Government is working collaboratively with other jurisdictions and the Coalition of Peaks to implement the national Data Development Plan to ensure that each socioeconomic outcome has a richer array of high-quality data sources over the life of the National Agreement.

Victoria is participating in a project under the National Data Sharing Work Program that commenced in early 2023 with a focus on Aboriginal community infrastructure (Target 9b in the National Agreement). The project will seek to increase data sharing in relation to discrete Aboriginal communities' access to essential services (power, water, rubbish removal, wastewater).

Victoria's Community Data Project

The National Agreement commits parties to establish six Community Data Projects across all jurisdictions by 2023. Community Data Projects aim to enable Aboriginal communities and organisations to access and use location specific data that focuses on the priority reforms and Closing the Gap outcomes.

As highlighted under Priority Reform One, the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples nominated Gippsland as the location for a Victorian Community Data Project and an aligned Place-based Partnership at Joint Council in June 2023. This followed the Partnership Forum's endorsement of Gippsland at its April meeting.

Victorian actions

Victoria is committed to shared access to data and information at a regional level. Examples of key actions include:

- **VAAF data dashboard:** DPC has worked with data custodians to develop an online user-friendly data dashboard to increase community access to data across the VAAF's 111 measures. Data is provided and visualised at sub-state level where available.
- **Data to support Aboriginal Governance Forums and ACCOs:** Victorian Government departments have continued to develop data packs and interactive data visualisations to share with the First Peoples' Assembly, Aboriginal governance forums and ACCOs to inform their decision making and priorities.
- **Shared measurement approaches:** Victorian Government departments and Aboriginal Governance Forums have worked together to develop approaches to measuring outcomes including a prototype of a system-level measurement matrix for the *Korin Korin Balit-Djak* system; the *Burra Lotjpa Dunguludja - Aboriginal Justice Agreement Phase 4 Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework*; and the *Dhelk Dja* Monitoring, Evaluation and Accountability Plan.

For a comprehensive list of actions to promote shared access to data and information, please refer to [Closing the Gap Data Table D](#).



Domain 1: Children, Family & Home



Our shared commitment:

All Aboriginal children and young people are safe, resilient, thriving and living in culturally rich, strong Aboriginal families and communities.

Families and Aboriginal child-rearing practices are fundamental to raising strong Aboriginal children and young people. Providing Aboriginal families with safe and effective services enables better outcomes.

Supporting Aboriginal children and families to be strong in culture and proud of their unique identity can ensure that every Aboriginal child has the best start in life.

This means ensuring Aboriginal children and families have access to culturally appropriate services throughout pregnancy and early childhood, and reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal young people in care.



Goal 1: Aboriginal children are born healthy and thrive



Overview

Measures under Goal 1 have varied in performance

Attendance at both Koori Maternity Services increased after three years of declining attendance.

Significant gains have been made in immunisation rates for Aboriginal children over the past decade.

The number of Aboriginal children (0-5 years of age) in both Supported Playgroups and Koorie Supported Playgroups reduced in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions.

Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally

In 2020, 89.0 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies born were of a healthy birthweight across Australia, compared to 89.5 per cent in Victoria.

Nationally, based on progress from the baseline, the target shows improvement but is not on track to be met. In Victoria, there has been some improvement since 2017 (the baseline year).

Goal 1 directly aligns with the following Closing the Gap Outcome and Target

Outcome 2: Aboriginal Children are born healthy and strong

- **Target 2:** By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies with a healthy birthweight.

Data Note



The following measures rely on datasets that are infrequently collected. No new data was available at the time of reporting.

- Measure 1.1.1 Rate of low birth weight
- Measure 1.1.2 Rate of preterm birth
- Measure 1.1.3 Rate of perinatal mortality
- Measure 1.1.4 Smoking during pregnancy
- Measure 1.2.1 Participation rates for Maternal and Child Health Key Ages and Stages Consultations

Objective 1.1 Improve maternal and infant health

Aboriginal Maternal and Child Health program

Established in 2017, the Aboriginal Maternal and Child Health (MCH) program improves access to, and participation in universal MCH services by Aboriginal children, mothers, and families.

The Aboriginal MCH program supports a network of 15 organisations across 17 locations in Victoria.

Aboriginal self-determination is embedded as a core principle of MCH service delivery and

offers families choice and flexibility around how they access MCH services, recognising the importance of Aboriginal organisations in delivering services to meet the health, wellbeing, cultural and safety aspirations of their local Aboriginal communities.

Since 2017, there has been increased engagement with Aboriginal children and families through the universal MCH service. The 2022-23 Victorian State Budget has enabled ongoing funding to sustain the Aboriginal MCH program.



Objective 1.2 Children thrive in their first 1000 days

Measure 1.2.2 Attendance at Koori Maternity Service

The number of women attending Koori Maternity Services (KMS) increased from 405 in 2020-21 to 465 in 2021-22, after declining between 2018-19 and 2020-21.

Work continues with the VACCHO and KMS providers to best support the needs of clients and increase participation rates.

KMS providers deliver flexible, holistic, and culturally safe antenatal and postnatal care which is central to improving outcomes and increasing participation in maternity care for Aboriginal women, women having Aboriginal babies and their families.

Attendance at Koori Maternity Service increasing Measure 1.2.2



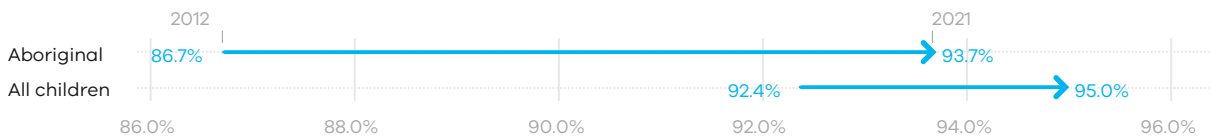
Source: Koori Maternity Services minimum dataset

Measure 1.2.3 Immunisation rates at 12, 24, and 60 months

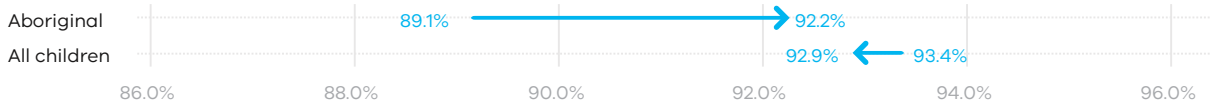
Immunisation rates for Aboriginal Victorian children have slightly decreased in 2021 but are still at historically high levels. From 2012-13 to 2021-22 the proportion of Aboriginal 1 year old children who are fully immunised increased by 7 per cent. When comparing to the total population, Aboriginal Victorian children are behind immunisation rates for both the 1 and 2 year old cohorts but have achieved parity for the rate for all children in the 5 year old cohort at 95 per cent coverage (95.8 per cent for all children in Victoria). When comparing immunisation rates over the decade (2012 to 2021), immunisations rates for all 2 year old children reduced but increased for Aboriginal 2 year old children. The increases in immunisation rates, even through the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, show that child health policy in this area is effective. This momentum needs to be built upon if Victoria is going to reach immunisation coverage parity.

Great gains have been made in immunisation rates for Aboriginal children over the past decade, 2012-2021 Measure 1.2.3

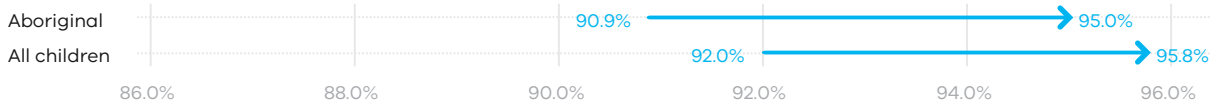
1 year olds (%)



2 year olds (%)



5 year olds (%)



maximum immunisation rate for Aboriginal children is >=95%

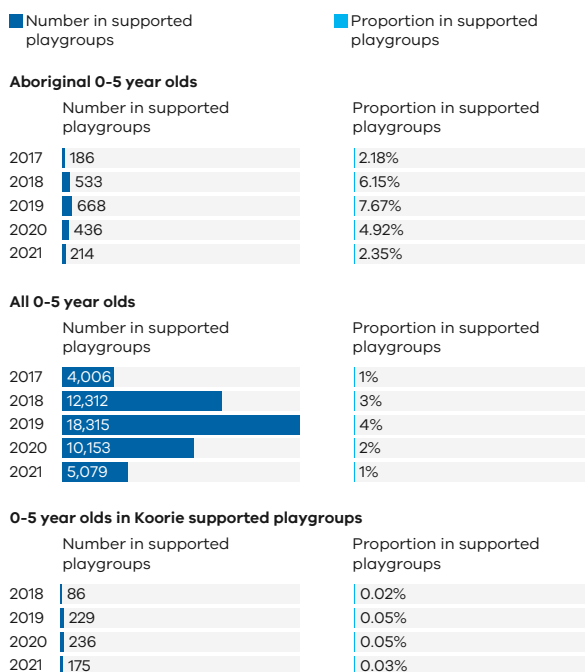
Source: Australian Immunisation Register, Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care

Measure 1.2.4 Participation in facilitated playgroups (0-5 years)

The number of Aboriginal children (0-5 years of age) in both Supported Playgroups and Koorie Supported Playgroups reduced in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions. Supported Playgroups did not operate for most of 2021.

The number of Aboriginal children in supported playgroups

Measure 1.2.4



Source: Kindergarten Information Management System (KIM) and Parenting Support Program (PSP) database; Quarterly reports submitted by the Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs)

Koorie Supported Playgroups

Koorie Supported Playgroups is a prevention and early intervention initiative to improve the wellbeing and developmental outcomes of Aboriginal children by supporting their parents to improve their skills and confidence. Koorie Supported Playgroups are delivered by the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA), Mallee District Aboriginal Services and Rumbalara. The 2021-22 Budget allocated approximately \$480,000 per annum ongoing funding for Koorie Supported Playgroups.

Supported Playgroups

Supported Playgroups use evidence-based strategies to assist parents to develop their skills and confidence to improve the quality of the early home learning environment. This includes improving the quality of everyday interactions between parents and children which promote their wellbeing, cognitive, social and emotional development.

Qualified and trained facilitators deliver *smalldtalk*, an evidence-based curriculum, to parents in a facilitated playgroup setting as well as one-on-one through In Home Support.

Supported Playgroups are a targeted service and families must meet the eligibility criteria that includes:

- a family member in the household holds a Health Care Card or equivalent
- families in which a family member identifies as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- families looking after children in kinship care arrangements (out of home care)
- families referred from Child FIRST/ Child Protection.
- families referred from or participating in Enhanced Maternal and Child Health Services
- Supported Playgroups are available state-wide with local councils as the main providers. Almost \$10 million per annum in ongoing funding is allocated to the delivery of Supported Playgroups, with implementation support provided by the Parenting Research Centre and Playgroup Victoria.

Goal 2: Aboriginal children are raised by Aboriginal families



Overview

Measures under Goal 2 have improved or remained stable

Aboriginal children continue to be removed from their families and placed in the out-of-home care system at rates significantly higher than non-Aboriginal children. Although the number and rate of Aboriginal children in care has remained stable since the last reporting period, in 2021-22 the difference in rate between Aboriginal children and non-Aboriginal children in care increased.

Increasing the proportion of Aboriginal children and young people being placed with Aboriginal carers or relatives is a key focus. Legislation has also been introduced to expand the role of ACCOs in delivering children and family services. More needs to be done to prevent Aboriginal children from being removed from their families in the first place, building on early support for families through maternity services and healthy relationship programs.

Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally

Outcome 12: In 2022, the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0-17 years in out-of-home care was 56.8 per 1,000 children across Australia, compared to 102.2 per 1,000 children in Victoria.

Nationally and in Victoria, these rates are worsening based on the baseline.

Data Note



All measures under this goal are reported on.

Goal 2 directly aligns with the following Closing the Gap Outcome and Target

Outcome 12: Aboriginal children are not overrepresented in the child protection system

- **Target 12:** By 2031, reduce the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 45 per cent.



Objective 2.1 Eliminate the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in care

Measure 2.1.1 Rate and number of children and young people in care

The number and rate of Aboriginal children and young people in care remain at historic highs. In 2021-22, 2,595 Aboriginal children and young people were in out of home care, while the rate per 1,000 population of children has remained stable in 2021-22 at 102.2.

The number and rate of Aboriginal children and young people in care remains high

Measure 2.1.1

Aboriginal

	Number of children in out of home care	Rate of children in out of home care per 1,000 children
2008-09	734	37.7
2019-20	2,450	99.8
2020-21	2,572	103
2021-22	2,595	102.2

Non-Aboriginal

	Number of children in out of home care	Rate of children in out of home care per 1,000 children
2008-09	4,549	3.8
2019-20	6,645	4.7
2020-21	6,574	6.7
2021-22	6,529	4.7

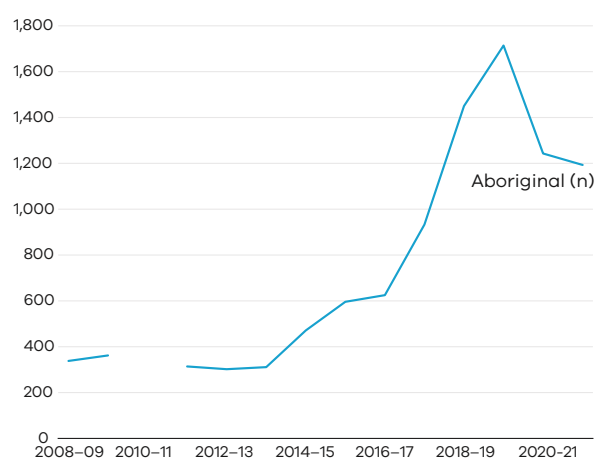
Source: Report on Government Services 2022 - Table 16A.2

Measure 2.1.2 Number of families engaged with intensive family support services

The number of children engaged with intensive family support services has been stable in 2021-22 after large declines in 2020-21. Between 2020-21 and 2021-22 the number of children engaged with intensive family support services decreased by 50 people to 1,193. To keep family support services trending positively, more support for these services is needed. The reliability of this data may be impacted by data collection system issues that DFFH experienced in 2020-21 and 2021-22, resulting in under-reporting of the number of children commencing in intensive family support services.

The number of Aboriginal families engaged with intensive family support services continues to decline in 2020-21

Measure 2.1.2



Source: Report on Government Services 2022 - Table 16A.34

Objective 2.2 Increase Aboriginal care, guardianship and management of Aboriginal children and young people in care

Measure 2.2.1 Number and proportion of Aboriginal children and young people in care placed with i) relatives/kin and ii) other Aboriginal carers

The number and proportion of Aboriginal children in care with Aboriginal relatives or kin has remained stable in 2021-22. Promisingly, the vast majority of Aboriginal children in care are placed with relatives or kin. Over the longer term, there has been an increase in the number of Aboriginal children in non-Aboriginal residential care. An Aboriginal specific Keep Embracing Your Success model of residential care, operated by VACCA, has been developed to support children with mental health and complex needs to transition back home or to independent living. It is vital that Aboriginal children remain connected to their community and culture whilst in the care system. More needs to be done to ensure that Aboriginal children are in the care of their relatives and kin. *The Children and Health Legislation Amendment (Statement of Recognition, Aboriginal Self-determination and Other Matters) Bill 2023* will facilitate this by expanding the circumstances in which authorised Aboriginal agencies deliver child and families services.

Measure 2.2.2 Number and proportion of Aboriginal children and young people in care with a cultural plan

The proportion of Aboriginal children and young people in care with a cultural plan has remained steady over a five year period (2017-18 to 2021-22) at 68-70 per cent. Cultural plans are a vital enabler for Aboriginal children in care to maintain and strengthen their Aboriginal identity and encourage their connection to their Aboriginal culture and community.

The proportion of Aboriginal children in care under the guardianship of Aboriginal relatives/kin remains stable

Measure 2.2.1

Aboriginal Relatives/Kin	
Count (n)	Proportion (%)
2008-09	181 (25%)
2019-20	929 (38%)
2020-21	1,018 (39.7%)
2021-22	1,027 (39.6%)

Non-Aboriginal Relatives/kin	
Count (n)	Proportion (%)
2008-09	162 (22.4%)
2019-20	975 (39.9%)
2020-21	1,010 (39.4%)
2021-22	1,014 (39.1%)

Other Aboriginal carer	
Count (n)	Proportion (%)
2008-09	75 (10.4%)
2019-20	34 (1.4%)
2020-21	35 (1.4%)
2021-22	42 (1.6%)

Aboriginal residential care	
Count (n)	Proportion (%)
2008-09	13 (1.8%)
2019-20	9 (0.4%)
2020-21	17 (0.7%)
2021-22	7 (0.3%)

Other Non-Aboriginal carer	
Count (n)	Proportion (%)
2008-09	233 (32.2%)
2019-20	412 (16.9%)
2020-21	412 (16.1%)
2021-22	391 (15.1%)

In Non-Aboriginal residential care	
Count (n)	Proportion (%)
2008-09	60 (8.3%)
2019-20	83 (3.4%)
2020-21	69 (2.7%)
2021-22	98 (4.4%)

Source: Report on Government Services 2023 - Table 16A.22

Cultural Planning for Aboriginal Children

A cultural plan is one part of a holistic approach to planning for vulnerable children and young people in care.

The case plan for an Aboriginal child in out-of-home care is required to address the child’s cultural support needs and reflect and be consistent with those needs. It contains significant decisions relating to the child. The child’s cultural plan includes various elements to promote and maintain cultural support for the child while they are in out-of-home care.

The new approach to cultural support planning for Aboriginal children now has ACCOs overseeing this process and endorsing

the plans. This planning is supported by the cultural portal auspiced by VACCA and the recently funded Aboriginal kinship finding service.

ACCOs, funded by DFFH for the provision of cultural planning, are responsible for supporting care teams to develop cultural plans as well as checking and endorsing plans.

Aboriginal Cultural Support and Awareness Advisor Positions were established in early 2022 to work alongside child protection practitioners and senior managers. They provide advice and capacity building to improve outcomes and cultural connections for Aboriginal children.

Prioritise culture

Measure 2.2.3 Number and proportion of Aboriginal children and young people in care on contractible orders managed by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs)

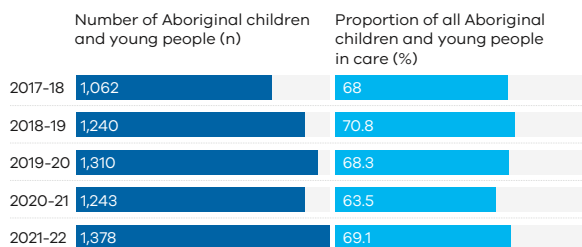
The Aboriginal Children’s Forum set a target for the progressive increase in the proportion of

Aboriginal children and young people in the care system on contractible orders to be case managed by an ACCO.

In 2021-22, the proportion was 40.1 per cent, a decline from 42.6 per cent in 2020-21.

Aboriginal children and young people are far more likely to be placed on a contractible order managed by ACCOs

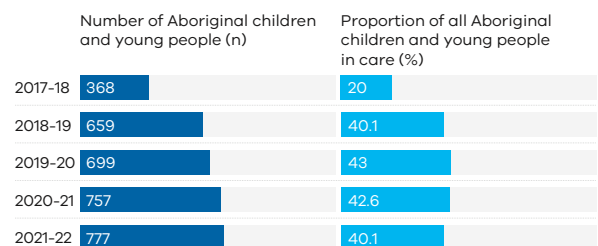
Measure 2.2.2 - Aboriginal children and young people in care with a cultural plan



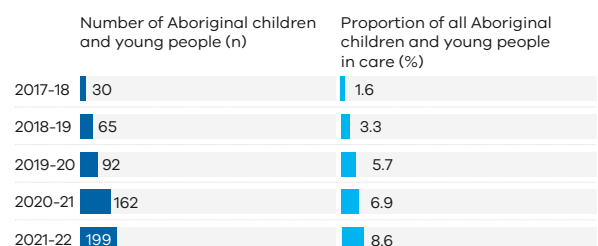
Measure 2.2.4 Number and proportion of Aboriginal children and young people on protection orders under the direct authority of an ACCO (Section 18)

The proportion of Aboriginal children and young people authorised to an Aboriginal agency has increased from 1.6 per cent of all Aboriginal children and young people in care to 8.6 per cent from 2017-18 to 2021-22. While it is positive to see the increase, there is still a significant amount of work required to transition the care system to a self-determined model.

Measure 2.2.3 - Aboriginal children and young people in care on contractible orders managed by ACCOs



Measure 2.2.4 - Aboriginal children and young people on protection orders under the direct authority of an ACCO (Section 18)



Source: Department of Families, Fairness and Housing Internal Data – Client Relationship Information System

Objective 2.3 Increase family reunifications for Aboriginal children and young people in care

Measure 2.3.1 Number of children and young people reunified with parent(s) within 12 months of admission to care as a proportion of all Aboriginal children and young people admitted to care

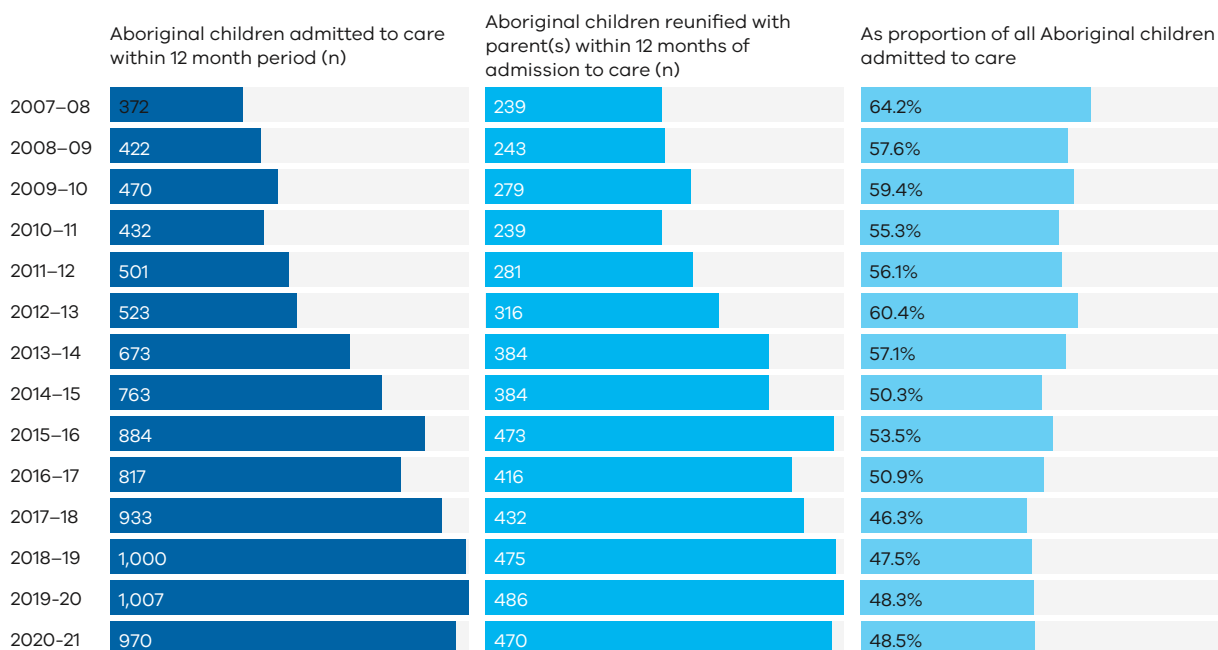
The number of Aboriginal children and young people reunified with parent(s) within 12 months of admission to care has increased steadily from 239 in 2008 to 470 in 2021. However, during that time the number of Aboriginal children and young people in care has almost tripled, and the

reunification rate has not kept pace. In 2008, 64.2 per cent of Aboriginal children and young people were reunified with parent(s) within 12 months of admission to care. In 2021, the rate stood at 48.5 per cent.

Reforms to the child protection system to give ACCOs a greater role in the out-of-home care of Aboriginal children should make a difference to this rate over the next few years. For example, see case study on the Family Preservation and Reunification Response.

Proportion of Aboriginal children and young people reunified with parent(s) within 12 months of admission to care

Measure 2.3.1



Source : Department of Families, Fairness and Housing Internal Data – Client Relationship Information System

Family Preservation and Reunification Response

DFFH has implemented the Family Preservation and Reunification Response across the state. The Response is an evidence-based service model that aims to keep vulnerable children and families together safely where possible, and to support children in care to return home safely.

The initiative has enabled the earlier identification of children and families most at risk. The program is supporting strong engagement with families and providing the basis to build increased stability and parenting confidence.

The model has been implemented in all 17 DFFH Areas. The Response is delivered by 34 providers including 12 ACCOs, in partnership with Child Protection.

Uniquely, this practice approach embeds Aboriginal cultural practices known to support Aboriginal children and families. Development of this approach has been led by ACCOs and will ensure that services are culturally safe and inclusive for Aboriginal children and families.

Aboriginal-led design of Cultural Practice Elements for strengths based programs

Cultural Practice Elements that capture best practice for working with Aboriginal children and families have been developed in an Aboriginal-led design process. These are used to guide practitioners in their delivery of the Family Preservation and Reunification Response (FPR Response) and Putting Families First (PFF) to Aboriginal families. These are two strengths-based programs that support families to stay together.

Practice Modules enable practitioners to deliver strengths-based, client centred practice in a flexible way that meets the needs of families requiring intensive and sustained support. During early consultations on culturally safe evidence-based approaches, ACCOs identified a need for cultural practice to be embedded in Practice Modules to support Aboriginal families.

VACCA was funded to develop Cultural Practice Elements with other ACCOs across Victoria and deliver a training and coaching model for implementation. Seven Cultural Practice Elements (including a standalone Aboriginal Healing Module) have now been fully integrated into the FPR Response and PFF service models. Three Cultural Practice Leads are funded to work directly with ACCOs to strengthen their coaching capability in these practices. Each ACCO tailors the approach to their context.

 Address trauma and support healing

Measure 2.3.2 Number of Aboriginal children and young people who exit care and do not return to care within 12 months as a proportion of all Aboriginal children and young people who exit care

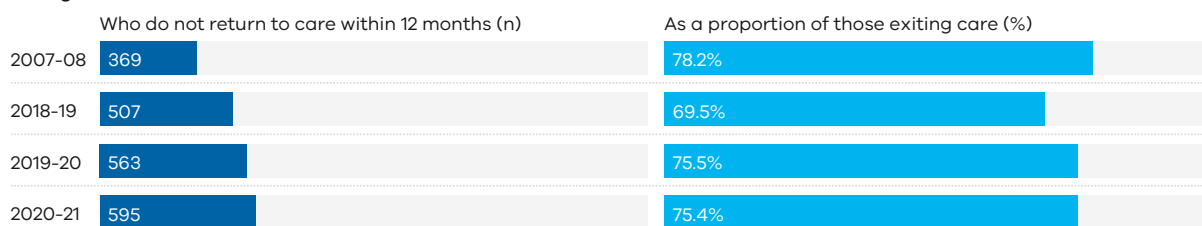
The proportion of Aboriginal children exiting care and not returning within 12 months has grown over recent years from 69.5 per cent in 2018-19 to 75.4 per cent in 2020-21. Over the same time,

there have been small fluctuations in the rate for non-Aboriginal children. While the rate for non-Aboriginal children remains higher than that for Aboriginal children, the difference in the rate is very small and the trajectory for Aboriginal children is positive. It is clear that policies aimed towards ending repeat entrances to the care system have been effective, although more work is needed to further increase the proportion of Aboriginal children who do not return to care.

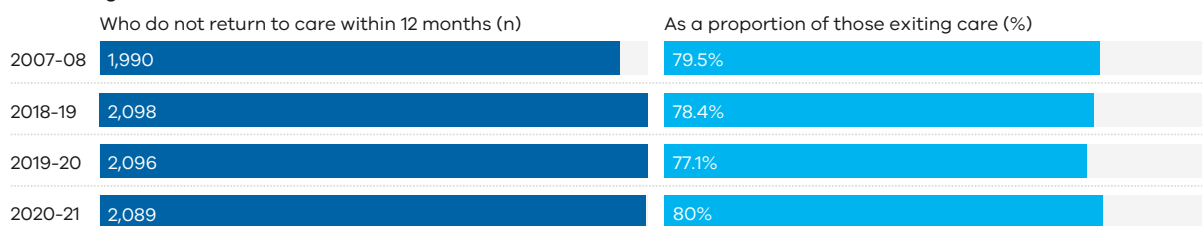
The number of Aboriginal children who exit care and do not return within 12 months has increased

Measure 2.3.2

Aboriginal children



Non-Aboriginal children



Source: Department of Families, Fairness and Housing Internal Data – Client Relationship Information System



Goal 3: Aboriginal families and households thrive



Overview

Measures under Goal 3 varied in performance

Family violence has a disproportionate impact on Aboriginal people in Victoria. Concerningly, reports of family violence incidents involving Aboriginal people have increased considerably in recent years.

The increase in family violence incident reports may not solely indicate increased prevalence of family violence and may in part reflect policy and practice changes as well as improved reporting and recording.

More promisingly, in 2021 the number of family violence child protection notifications involving Aboriginal children decreased.

In 2021, income disparity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal households was at its lowest point since 2006. Aboriginal household poverty is also at its lowest since 2006.

However, Aboriginal Victorians were far more likely than non-Aboriginal Victorians to access homelessness services in 2021-22.

Goal 3 directly aligns with the following Closing the Gap Outcomes and Targets

Outcome 9: Aboriginal people secure appropriate, affordable housing that is aligned with their priorities and needs.

- **Target 9:** By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in appropriately sized (not overcrowded) housing to 88 per cent.

Outcome 13: Aboriginal families and households are safe

- **Target 13:** By 2031, the rate of all forms of family violence and abuse against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children is reduced at least by 50 per cent, as progress towards zero.

Data Note



All measures under this goal are reported on.

Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally

Target 9: In 2021, 81.4 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were living in appropriately sized (not overcrowded) housing across Australia, compared to 88.8 per cent in Victoria.

Nationally, based on progress from the baseline, target 9A shows improvement but is not on track to be met. In Victoria, there has been some improvement since 2016 (the baseline year).

Target 9B is not able to be reported against as there is no data source currently available which includes all required data elements.

Target 13: In 2018-19, 8.4 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females aged 15 years and over experienced domestic physical or threatened physical harm across Australia, compared to 7.5 per cent in Victoria.

This target relies on National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey data. No new data is available since the baseline year of 2018-19.

Objective 3.1 Reduce the incidence and impact of family violence affecting Aboriginal families¹

The 2016 Royal Commission into Family Violence report acknowledged the disproportionate impact of family violence on Aboriginal people and the lack of culturally appropriate service responses. The long-standing leadership of Aboriginal communities, Elders and ACCOs in Victoria in preventing and responding to family violence should be recognised. For example, Djirra delivers holistic, self-determined and culturally safe specialist family violence services and early intervention and prevention programs.

Measure 3.1.1 Number and proportion of family violence incident reports involving an Aboriginal other party²; and proportion of those who were the subject of a previous family incident report

The number of family violence incidents involving an Aboriginal other party continued to grow in 2021 with 6,107 reports, representing 7.2 per cent of all incidents reported. 86.9 per cent of those were repeat incidents. The proportion of those incidents where charges were laid has remained stable at 37.6 per cent.

Measure 3.1.2 Number and proportion of family violence incident reports involving an Aboriginal affected family member; and proportion of those who were the subject of a previous family incident report

The number of affected family members in family violence incidents continues to increase with 4,966 reports in 2021. 83 per cent of incidents where there was an affected family member were repeat incidents. Similar to family violence incidents with other parties, incidents with affected family members are much higher than the proportion of the population that are Aboriginal with 5.45 per cent of family violence incidents with an affected family member.

Measure 3.1.3 Number and proportion of notifications to child protection for children and young people where family violence is identified

The number of notifications to Child Protection for children and young people where family violence is identified has reduced for 2021-22 to 4,639. This represents 41.1 per cent of all notifications involving Aboriginal Victorians.

The number of family incident reports involving Aboriginal people continues to grow

Measure 3.1.1, 3.1.2

Other Parties

	Number of reports (n)	Proportion of repeat incidents (%)	Proportion of all incident reports (%)	Proportion of incidence where charges laid (%)
2007	1,484	60.51%	4.86%	17.39%
2019	5,494	85.42%	6.5%	39.08%
2020	5,931	86.09%	6.41%	38.14%
2021	6,107	86.88%	6.7%	37.65%

Affected Family Members

	Number of reports (n)	Proportion of repeat incidents (%)	Proportion of all incident reports (%)	Proportion of incidence where charges laid (%)
2007	1,293	58.55%	4.21%	15.39%
2019	4,560	81.03%	5.39%	34.69%
2020	4,759	82.2%	5.14%	35.51%
2021	4,966	83%	5.45%	33.95%

Source: Crime Statistics Agency (CSA)

Medium-term Perpetrator Accommodation Service

The Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Limited (VACSAL) has piloted a service for people who use family violence, in partnership with local service Haven Home Safe. People who use violence are excluded from the family home and provided with accommodation for up to six months whilst they are focusing on behavioural and attitudinal change.

Clients are supported through VACSAL's case work and cultural programs to strengthen the family and bring responsibility to the individual using violence.

Provision of medium-term housing removes housing instability as a barrier to behaviour change. Partnership with a housing provider enables VACSAL to plan housing needs and reduces the risk to victim survivors. All rent paid by the tenant is provided back on exit of tenancy to assist with private rental.

The pilot is showing signs of success, with clients engaging in the program. This engagement supports long lasting behaviour change and victim survivor safety. An independent evaluation is due in 2023.

Strengthening cultural safety in The Orange Door

The Orange Door network provides a visible and accessible entry point for family violence services, child and family services and men's/perpetrator services. Aboriginal people seeking support have the option to access an Aboriginal led service. Aboriginal Practice Leaders and Aboriginal Practitioners have been funded and recruited in each area.

Family Safety Victoria has been working with VACCA and local ACCOs to deliver the Strengthening Cultural Safety in The Orange Door project. Lead ACCOs in each area employ Cultural Safety Project Leaders to facilitate implementation of:

- Foundational cultural awareness training for staff in The Orange Door network
- Consistent cultural safety assessment process across The Orange Door network and development of local action plans
- Learning processes to support both individual worker and organisational cultural safety learning and development.

1. The overall increase in the number of recorded family incidents over time has in part been due to improved recording of incidents. Since 2011, initiatives such as the Family Violence Code of Practice have been put in place by Victoria Police to improve the recording of family incidents, the individuals involved and the offences committed. Comparisons over time should be interpreted with caution.

2. The 'other party' refers to the alleged perpetrator involved in a family incident. The other party could be a current partner, former partner or a family member.

Objective 3.2 Increase income and housing security for Aboriginal households

Measure 3.2.1 Proportion of adults who ran out of food in the previous 12 months and couldn't afford to buy more

The proportion of Aboriginal Victorians who ran out of food in the past 12 months has remained stable between 2017 and 2020 at 15.1 per cent. As the Victorian Population Health Survey (VPHS) has not asked this question regularly and the historical methodology of the survey has changed it is difficult to determine trend over time from this data. When comparing Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal respondents; Aboriginal people were two and half times more likely to run out of food. This shows the need to have consistent and accurate data relating to food insecurity for Aboriginal Victorians.

Measure 3.2.2 Median weekly gross household income and proportion of households with less than 50 per cent median equivalised income

In 2021, income disparity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal households was at its lowest point since 2006. The median weekly gross household income of Aboriginal Victorians has increased by \$407.74 between 2011 and 2021, to \$1,565.00 per week³. Aboriginal household poverty was also at its lowest since 2006. 22.1 per cent of Victorian Aboriginal households earned less than 50 per cent of the median income compared with 20.9 per cent of non-Aboriginal households. It is promising to see consistent increases in Aboriginal income. However, financial stress and hardship continue to affect many households, demonstrating the continuing unmet consumer, credit and debt needs of Victorian Aboriginal communities.⁴

3. This measure uses self-reported gross household income (pre-tax) and it may be inconsistent with other measures of household poverty.

4. 'Consumer Issues in Victorian Aboriginal Communities during 2020' (Consumer Action Law Centre and Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, 2021).

5. For more information on tenure types see www.abs.gov.au/statistics/standards/housing-variables/latest-release

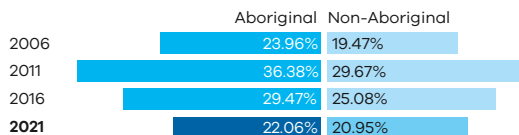
Measure 3.2.3 Proportion of Aboriginal people in rental or mortgage stress

In 2021, the proportion of Aboriginal households in Victoria experiencing rental or mortgage stress were at their lowest since 2006. Only 14.7 per cent and 33.9 per cent of Aboriginal households were experiencing mortgage or rental stress respectively. This is either at parity or below the proportion of non-Aboriginal households. When analysing this against the tenure type of Aboriginal homes, the low level of mortgage stress can be partially explained through the increase in tenure types other than rented or owned.⁵

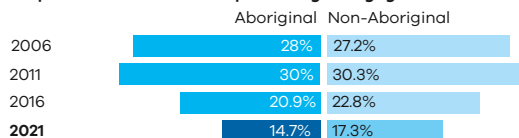
Household income, rental and mortgage stress, and reliable access to food

Measure 3.2.1, 3.2.2, 3.2.3

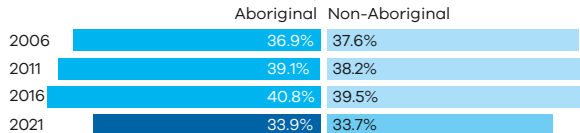
Proportion of households with less than 50 per cent median income



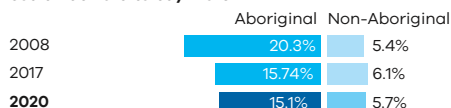
Proportion of households experiencing mortgage stress



Proportion of households experiencing rental stress



Proportion of adults who ran out of food in the previous 12 months and couldn't afford to buy more



Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing; Victorian Population Health Survey

Measure 3.2.4 Proportion of Victorians accessing homelessness services

The number of Aboriginal Victorians accessing homelessness services has continued to increase. In 2021-22, over 11,000 Aboriginal Victorians accessed homelessness services, a 38 per cent increase since 2015-16. The proportion of all Aboriginal Victorians accessing homelessness services was 16.9 per cent compared to 1.2 per cent for non-Aboriginal Victorians. In 2021-22,

of the 665 current and former Victorian-based Australian Defence Force members seeking assistance from specialist homelessness services in Victoria, 72 of those were Indigenous clients. This was up from 48 Indigenous clients in 2020-21.

Colonial dispossession of land continues to have repercussions today despite the positive economic outlook for Aboriginal Victorians analysed in Domain 3 of this report.

The number and proportion of Aboriginal Victorians accessing homelessness services continued to increase in 2021-22

Measure 3.2.4

	Aboriginal (n)	Non-Aboriginal (n)	Aboriginal status not stated (n)	Aboriginal (%)	Non-Aboriginal (%)
2011-12	5,481	62,763	17,905	10.2%	1.1%
2015-16	8,077	82,082	15,128	14%	1.3%
2021-22	11,168	80,772	9,735	16.9%	1.2%

Source: Specialist homelessness services annual report 2021-22, Specialist-homelessness-services-Historical-data-2011-12-to-2021-22, AIHW

Building Works Package – maintenance and refurbishment program

As part of the Building Works package, the Victorian Government is investing \$35 million for upgrades and maintenance of properties for Victorian Aboriginal communities. This stream of funding is led by Aboriginal Housing Victoria working in partnership with 19 ACCOs. The program will look to deliver over 2,000 property upgrades including 28 new Kids Under Cover modular

homes, Aboriginal hostel upgrades, energy efficiency upgrades and major property refurbishments. The Building Works package will also support the development of new community housing and funding upgrades for Aboriginal Housing Victoria properties as part of the Community Housing program delivery stream. This is an example of Aboriginal communities taking the lead role in delivering a housing stimulus program on behalf of the Victorian Government.

 Transfer power & resources

Measure 3.2.5 Proportion of Aboriginal Victorians living in over-crowded dwellings.

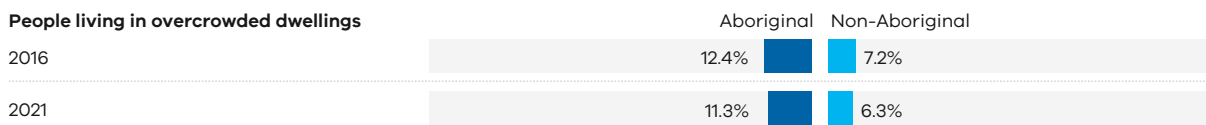
The proportion of Aboriginal households that are overcrowded has reduced in 2021 to 11.3 per cent. This is significantly higher than for non-Aboriginal households where 6.3 per cent of them are considered overcrowded. When analysing by person, 7.3 per cent of Aboriginal

Victorians live in overcrowded households. There are many reasons why a household is overcrowded from short term financial instability, at home caring of family and kin, and preference for larger family groups under a single roof. Housing must be adequate to meet the needs of Aboriginal people and households. Investment in infrastructure is key to meet these needs.

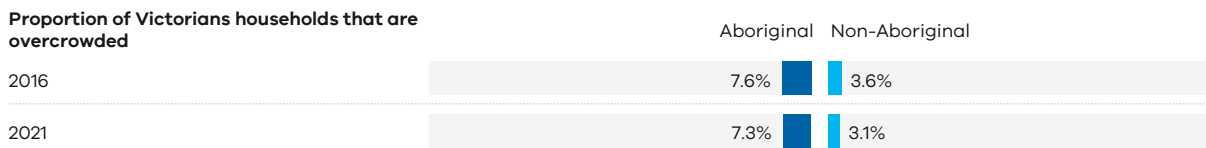
Overcrowding in Aboriginal homes continues to improve

Measure 3.2.5

People living in overcrowded dwellings



Proportion of Victorians households that are overcrowded



Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing



Domain 1 – Victorian Government Investment and Action

The Victorian Government is working to drive improved outcomes for children and families.

The key Aboriginal Governance Forums for realising outcomes in this Domain are: the Aboriginal Children’s Forum, Aboriginal Strategic Governance Forum, Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum, Victorian Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Partnership Forum, and Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework Implementation Working Group.

Maternal Child Health and Early Parenting

The Department of Health is committed to delivering early intervention and prevention support to Aboriginal children and families. It funds initiatives that support Aboriginal self-determination in decision making to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for communities.

Early years health service for Aboriginal communities

In 2022-23, an Aboriginal-led design and participation process will shape a holistic early years health service for Aboriginal communities from pregnancy to starting school. This is supported by \$0.7 million in the 2022-23 State Budget. An Aboriginal Advisory Group will inform the Department of Health on how an integrated approach across antenatal, maternal and child health, and early parenting services can best support Aboriginal children and families to thrive. ACCOs that work with Aboriginal children and their families understand, and already undertake, vital work in Aboriginal parenting approaches to achieve better health and wellbeing outcomes for the whole family. Some existing programs have proven successful for Aboriginal children and families.

Family Violence

Dhelk Dja - Safe Our Way: Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families ('Dhelk Dja')

Dhelk Dja is a 10-year Aboriginal-led Victorian Agreement that commits the signatories – Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal services

and government – to work together and be accountable for ensuring that Aboriginal people, families and communities are stronger, safer, thriving and living free from family violence. Dhelk Dja is built upon the foundation of Aboriginal self-determination.

The Dhelk Dja Second Three Year Action Plan (2023-2025) was endorsed at the October 2022 Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum. It sets an expectation that departments will work with the Dhelk Dja Koori Caucus and the Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum members to commit to departmental plans to support implementation. The action plan also aligns strongly to Victoria’s commitment to deliver on Target 13 of the National Agreement.

The Victorian Government has boosted funding to ACCOs for family violence and sexual assault service delivery from approximately \$5.2 million in 2017-18 to approximately \$52.5 million in 2022-23. This includes new service delivery functions arising from reforms such as The Orange Door.

In line with the Aboriginal Funding Policy, at least 10 per cent of the family violence and sexual assault funding provided in the 2023/24 Budget will also be allocated to ACCOs.

Dhelk Dja Aboriginal Family Violence Fund (The Fund)

The Fund is a flexible pool of funding (\$18.2 million over 2021-22 and 2022-23) for eligible Aboriginal organisations and community groups to enable a range of Aboriginal-led tailored responses for victim survivors and people who use violence.

Support includes regionally based healing and change camps, weekly yarning sessions, financial counselling support, and therapeutic services and programs to support Aboriginal children. The fund provides Aboriginal organisations with funding over two years, giving them greater certainty in planning how they deliver family violence services.

Other family violence initiatives

The Victorian Aboriginal Community Initiatives Fund, was boosted from \$1.1 million in 2021-22 to \$2.2 million in 2022-23. 42 culturally appropriate, place-based community-led projects dedicated to preventing and responding to family violence in Victorian Aboriginal communities will be delivered by more than 30 Aboriginal organisations and community groups across the state.

\$3 million in scholarships have been administered through direct allocation to ACCOs to increase specialisation of Aboriginal workforce and support the implementation of Royal Commission into Family Violence Recommendation 209 under the Aboriginal Family Violence Industry Strategy.

Aboriginal Access Points are being established as a complementary service model to work alongside The Orange Door, providing a culturally safe referral pathway for Aboriginal people impacted by family violence. Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative and VACCA were the successful ACCO service delivery partners appointed in early 2022 to establish the service in Barwon and Bayside/Peninsula Area. A third AAP will be established in Mildura during 2023.

The Medium-term Perpetrator Accommodation Service (MPAS) is an accommodation-based case management response for people using violence. The 2022-23 budget provided \$2.733 million to continue the MPAS initiative in 2022-23.

The Aboriginal Sexual Assault Trials deliver culturally sensitive support to Aboriginal victim survivors of sexual assault based on holistic healing principles and building on the Nargneit Birrang Framework. The trials are working with adult and child victim survivors of recent and/or historical sexual abuse and their families to provide holistic wrap around support for recovery.

Children and family services

Evidence to the Yoorrook Justice Commission

The Government made a submission in response to the Commission's Issues Paper on systemic injustice experienced by First Peoples in the child protection system. The submission offered a government perspective on historic and current systemic injustice in the Child Protection system; the steps taken to date that seek to address systemic injustice; and the current approaches being undertaken to change the system in order to reduce over-representation. The Minister for Child Protection and senior Government executives also gave evidence.

Funding

The Government funds a range of family services, these include services specifically for Aboriginal people. Programs include:

- Early Help family services – embedding family services practitioners in universal settings for families experiencing disadvantage and with emerging needs. These services improve children's wellbeing and developmental outcomes by supporting their parents to develop their skills and confidence.
- Integrated family services – providing case management support to families experiencing cumulative harm, or who have multiple, complex needs, to support child wellbeing and safety and build family resilience. Additionally, these services seek to connect families with the supports they require, for example mental health or family violence support.
- Intensive family services – maintaining children safely at home through holistic, strength-based, joined-up intensive case management supports, delivered in partnership, as appropriate, with Child Protection and other agencies.
- Family Preservation and Reunification Response – delivering evidence-based and intensive support to families where children are at risk of entering care or where children are in care and the aim is to safely reunify with their family.

Aboriginal Child Protection Diversion Trials

The Aboriginal Children and Families Innovation and Learning Fund is supporting a consortium consisting of VACCA, Bendigo and District Aboriginal Co-operative, Njernda Aboriginal Corporation and Goolum Goolum Aboriginal Co-Operative to deliver child protection diversion trials.

Three different approaches are being trialled to test the hypothesis that by having an Aboriginal organisation involved in decision making will improve outcomes for children and families. An evaluation of the three approaches found that Aboriginal Led Case Conferencing had a 78 percent diversion success rate, and Unborn Reports (Garinga Bupup) had a 63 percent diversion success rate.

Transitioning Aboriginal Children to ACCOs

DFFH is working in partnership with ACCOs and Community Service Organisations to support the gradual transfer of case management and care of all Aboriginal children and young people on contractible protection orders to ACCOs.

The 'Transition of Aboriginal Children to ACCOs: Rights and Aspirations' project is being undertaken to identify the barriers and opportunities to transitioning Aboriginal children including a strategic plan to implement the aspirations of ACCOs in respect to services that support the transition.

Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care (ACAC)

Section 18 of the *Children, Youth, Families Act 2005* enables the Secretary of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing to authorise the Principal Officer of an Aboriginal agency to perform specified functions and powers in relation to an Aboriginal child or young person subject to a protection order.

By placing the responsibility for the protection and care of Aboriginal children with Aboriginal agencies, including case planning and decision making ACAC allows ACCOs to do things differently and in culturally attuned ways to make a difference in the lives of Aboriginal children and families. VACCA and the Bendigo and District Aboriginal Co-operative are fully authorised ACAC providers and ACCOs are in the pre-authorisation phase.

Housing

Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort, Every Aboriginal Person Has a Home

The Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework (VAHFF) provides a 20-year plan to guide policy reform in responding to specific housing needs for Aboriginal Victorians.

Aboriginal Housing Victoria drafted a 20-year vision to articulate the role of the Aboriginal housing and homelessness sector in implementing the VAHFF. This will be guided by the 5-year implementation plan for the VAHFF which is currently being developed by the sector. The delivery of the VAHFF is monitored through the VAHFF Annual Report Card.

The VAHFF is the blueprint for government and the sector to work together. It provides the vehicle for government to deliver on Aboriginal self-determination by transitioning power and responsibility over to community to determine the approach required to address their own needs.



Transfer power & resources

The Big Housing Build

Under the Big Housing Build, there is a target for 10 per cent of all the net growth of homes built to be for Aboriginal Victorians. This growth in housing for Aboriginal Victorians will be delivered by a combination of ACCOs and mainstream housing providers.

DTF, with Homes Victoria, is delivering the Homes for Aboriginal Victorians Round (HfAVR) of the Social Housing Growth Fund for new social housing located across Victoria. The HfAVR adopts a long-term procurement approach to support the development of an Aboriginal Housing sector and enables ACCOs to seek funding. Proposals must adhere to the Big Housing Build First Order Principles, using self-determination as the guiding principle. All social housing dwellings funded through this round will be owned (or the subject of a long-term lease to) and operated by ACCOs, or Community Housing Agencies in partnership with an ACCO and allocated to Aboriginal Victorians on the Victorian Housing Register.

The HfAVR will seek to deliver approximately 400 social housing dwellings supported by approximately \$150 million of grant funding. ACCOs can submit proposals on their own or in partnership with a Registered Housing Association or Agency. The first round of the fund opened on 21 December 2021, with two further rounds over 2022. Additional rounds are planned for 2023 to support achievement of the target.



Transfer power & resources

Victorian Public Tenancy Association, Aboriginal Advocacy roles

In 2022, two new Aboriginal Advocacy roles were created at the Victorian Public Tenancy Association (VPTA) to provide advice, assistance, and referrals for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants. The roles provide advocacy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including those who are homeless, or otherwise in significant distress. The positions are responsible for advocating for the provision of a viable public housing system for those who need it, including the broad community.

Aboriginal Private Rental Access

Aboriginal Housing Victoria and the Commissioner for Residential Tenancies established a project group to examine discrimination and other access barriers affecting Aboriginal Victorians in the private rental market. The project partnership team included representatives of the Commissioner for Residential Tenancies, Aboriginal Housing Victoria (AHV), Victoria Legal Aid and the Consumer Policy Research Centre.

The project partnership produced two reports that were officially launched by the Minister for Consumer Affairs in October 2022. Currently, five of the fourteen recommendations are underway with further actions planned for 2023.

Aboriginal Tenants at Risk Program

Aboriginal Housing Victoria delivers the Aboriginal Tenants at Risk program to help Aboriginal Victorians to keep and maintain their rented properties, including advocacy support.

Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program

ACCOs deliver the Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program in five areas across Victoria, including regional Victoria, which is being expanded to additional areas in 2023. The program provides private rental brokerage and holistic support to prevent or end homelessness, by rapidly rehousing people and supporting households to sustain affordable and appropriate housing in the private rental market.

Victorian Homebuyer Fund

The Victorian Homebuyer Fund is a shared equity scheme, making it easier for Victorians to enter homeownership. The Victorian Government contributes to the purchase price in exchange for an equivalent share in the property. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants only require a 3.5 per cent deposit and are eligible for a 35 per cent shared equity contribution. Homebuyers benefit from lower ongoing mortgage costs, making the loan more affordable.

Improving Aboriginal Cultural Safety

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Safety Framework delivery plan aims to increase Homes Victoria's ability to deliver culturally safe and responsive approaches to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The Community Housing Industry Association Victoria and the Council to Homeless Persons have each developed a Cultural Safety Framework to support the housing and homelessness sectors in delivering responsive, culturally safe services.

More than a Landlord Program

The More than a Landlord program delivered by Aboriginal Housing Victoria (AHV) and funded by Homes Victoria, assists vulnerable Aboriginal tenants in northern metropolitan Melbourne to maintain stable housing. It also helps to achieve personal goals and improve overall wellbeing through life-coaching and pathways into education and employment. Homes Victoria commissioned the Centre for Evaluation and Research Evidence to undertake a rapid evaluation of the program. The evaluation analysed the program model, activity levels, outputs, and outcomes. It found that clients felt the program had a significant and enduring impact on their lives, with benefits extending to their children and family members.

Key investments include

- \$1.16 million for three years to support the VAHMF implementation.
- \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build investment with 10 per cent net of all new social housing allocated for Aboriginal Victorians. This includes 10 per cent (\$1.38 billion) from the Social Housing Growth Fund which includes the Rapid Grants Round, Homes for Aboriginal Victorians Round, Mental Health Round and Regional Round.
- \$75 million to transform services for Victorians experiencing or at risk of homelessness. This includes:
 - » funding for an Aboriginal-specific entry point to provide culturally appropriate responses to needs
 - » multidisciplinary support to maintain housing
 - » funding for Aboriginal Housing Victoria to lead work on the Blueprint for an Aboriginal-specific homelessness service system in Victoria.
- \$528 million under Building Works package for maintenance, upgrades and new housing including:
 - » \$5.8 million for Aboriginal Housing Victoria properties as part of the Community Housing Stream.
 - » \$35 million for upgrades and maintenance of properties for Victorian Aboriginal communities.
 - » \$3.3 million for the development of a new facility to support Aboriginal men exiting corrections facilities.
 - » \$4.29 million to develop and deliver 12 new homes including two townhouses in Hampton and 10 low-rise apartments in Dandenong.
- \$110 million to the Private Rental Assistance Program, including funding to expand the Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program to an additional four areas.
- \$811,000 for the Community Housing Sector Development Fund to support the ACCO Feasibility Study and the partnerships brokerage supports for ACCOs and community housing providers.
- \$510,000 to support the internal implementation of Aboriginal cultural safety initiatives across Homes Victoria.
- \$425,000 for the Aboriginal Home Connect project to enable welfare and education checks on over 4,000 Aboriginal families in social housing.
- \$300,000 for the More Than a Landlord program.
- \$240,000 to implement the Victorian Public Tenants Association Aboriginal Advocacy Program.

Domain 2: Learning & skills



Our shared commitment:

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

A quality education includes a place of learning that is responsive, welcoming and supportive. Creating culturally inclusive learning environments is vital to ensuring Aboriginal students feel safe and supported to achieve their learning aspirations.



Goal 4: Aboriginal children thrive in the early years



Overview

Measures under Goal 4 have varied in performance

High quality early education is key to developing lifelong skills. Children should have the opportunity to have the best start in life possible.

Enrolments in funded 4-year-old kindergarten programs have fallen for the first time since program inception although continue to be at parity with non-Aboriginal enrolments. Continuing the historical trend, participation in early-start kindergarten continues to grow.

Goal 4 directly aligns with the following Closing the Gap Outcomes and Targets

Outcome 3: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are engaged in high quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education in their early years.

- **Target 3:** By 2025, 95 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are enrolled in preschool in the year before full time schooling.

Outcome 4: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children thrive in their early years.

- **Target 4:** By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children assessed as developmentally on track in all five domains of the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) to 55 per cent.

Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally

Outcome 3: Nationally in 2022, 99.2 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the Year Before Full time Schooling (YBFS) age cohort were enrolled in a preschool program.

Nationally, based on progress from the baseline, the target shows good improvement and is on track to be met. Victoria is now focused on improving preschool attendance rates.

Outcome 4: In 2021, 34.3 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children across Australia commencing school were assessed as being developmentally on track in all five Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) domains, compared to 35.6 per cent in Victoria.

Nationally, based on progress from the baseline, the target is worsening. In Victoria, based on progress from the baseline, this target shows improvement.

Data Note



Measure 5.2.6 Number of Schools teaching an Aboriginal language

Data has not been collected this year for this measure. Considering the on-going impact of COVID-19 in 2020 and 2021, and changes to data collection methods, the Department of Education is currently exploring how it will collect languages data to report on Aboriginal language programs in Victorian government schools.

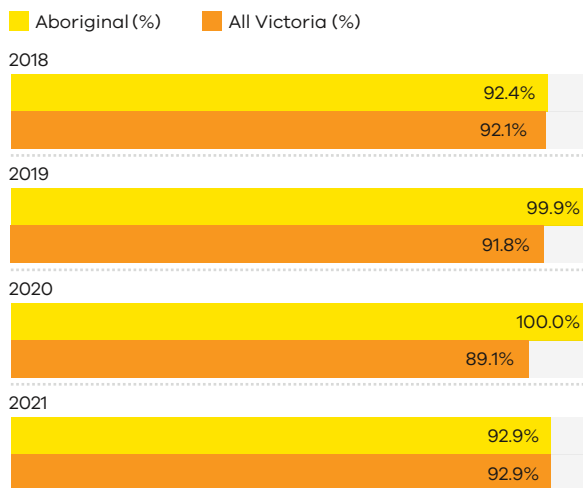
Objective 4.1 Optimise early childhood development and participation in kinder

Measure 4.1.1 Number and proportion of eligible children enrolled in a funded four-year-old kindergarten program in the year before school

The number and proportion of eligible Aboriginal children enrolled in four-year-old kindergarten is strong. In the last four years, a greater proportion of eligible Aboriginal children were enrolled in kindergarten than all eligible Victorian children. In 2020, an estimated 100 per cent of eligible Aboriginal children were enrolled in kindergarten the year before school. This has fallen to 92.9 per cent in 2021, which is the same proportion as all Victorian children. The drop might be explained by the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated lockdowns. Under the banner of Koorie Kids Shine, there is a comprehensive engagement strategy to increase enrolments led by the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated, Aboriginal community services, local government, and the Department of Education.

Aboriginal enrolments in 4 year old funded kindergarten program have fallen

Measure 4.1.1



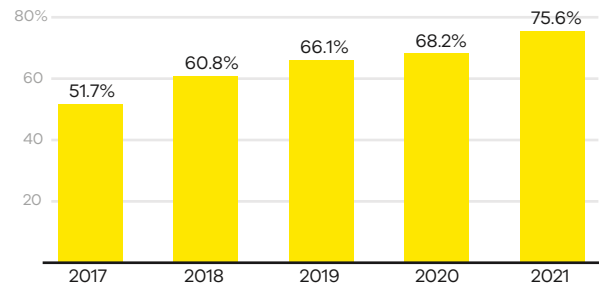
Source: Source: Department of Education and Training, Victoria

Measure 4.1.2 Number of children funded to participate in Early Start Kindergarten

The percentage and number of children funded to participate in Early Start Kindergarten continues to grow year by year with 1101 Aboriginal children participating in 2021. There was also a much higher percentage increase between 2020 and 2021 than in previous years. This is encouraging as it means more Aboriginal children are starting school earlier and making connections in the classroom and to learning, setting them up well to excel in other school-related measures in the future.

Aboriginal participation in early-start kindergarten continues to rise

Measure 4.1.2



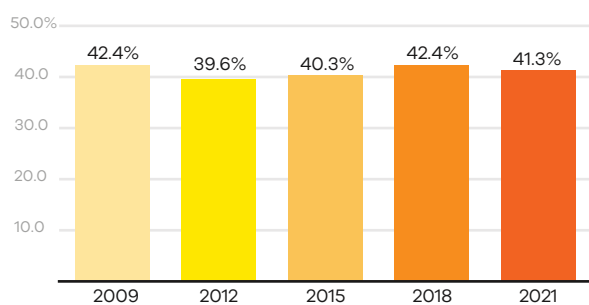
Source: Department of Education and Training, Victoria

Measure 4.1.3 Proportion of children vulnerable on one or more domain of the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC)

The five domains of the AEDC are: physical health and wellbeing, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills (school-based), and communication skills and general knowledge. Aboriginal children are more than two times more likely to be vulnerable on one or more domain. The latest reporting period occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic and the move to home learning. It is encouraging that during this time the proportion of Aboriginal children assessed as vulnerable decreased but more needs to be done to address the discrepancy between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children.

Proportion of Aboriginal children assessed as vulnerable has not changed over the last decade

Measure 4.1.3



Source: Australian Early Developmental Census (Victoria only)

An early intervention approach to parenting support for families with young Aboriginal children

Under Balert Gerrbik: Koorie Families as First Educators (KFFE), nine ACCOs across 11 locations are funded to deliver KFFE, which uses an early intervention and prevention approach to deliver culturally safe, evidence-based parenting support programs.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, two KFFE-funded ACCOs adapted their service delivery models to support families to remain connected to culture and community, while also supporting their ongoing participation in the Indigenous Triple P parenting support program.

These adaptations included online sessions, telephone delivery using program resources such as the Indigenous Triple P Parent Workbook, and bringing resources to families' homes in a COVID-safe way. In line with ACCOs' wrap-around model of family support services, one of these ACCOs also continued to provide support through an online playgroup, giving parents a range of ways to access support under difficult circumstances.

KFFE's intended outcome is improved parenting capacity to support a strong home learning environment. Shorter-term benefits include higher levels of participation in early childhood education and care and positive transition to school.

Goal 5: Aboriginal learners excel at school



Overview

Measures under Goal 5 have worsened

School over the past 2 years has been challenging for students. With the impacts of remote learning and disjointed school years, results have worsened for a number of measures with some exceptions.

While NAPLAN testing has shown all year groups (except year 9) improving in literacy, numeracy scores have continued to decline in recent years.

Victorian Aboriginal children are less likely to feel connected to their school or attend school than in the recent past. Aboriginal students in 2021 were also more likely to experience bullying than they were a year ago.

Closing the Gap – Relevant Outcomes and Targets for Goal 5

The National Agreement does not contain outcomes and targets that align with this VAAF goal. Victoria is pursuing more ambitious and comprehensive goals under the VAAF, which are reported on in this chapter and the Data Dashboard.

Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally

Not applicable.

Data Note



Measure 5.2.6 Number of schools teaching an Aboriginal language

Data has not been collected this year for this measure. In light of the on-going impact of COVID-19 in 2020 and 2021, and changes to data collection methods, the Department of Education is currently exploring how it will collect languages data to report on Aboriginal language programs in Victorian government schools.

Objective 5.1 Bring Aboriginal achievement at school in line with learners' aspirations

Measure 5.1.1 Percentage of students in top three bands – Reading and Numeracy (NAPLAN) in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9

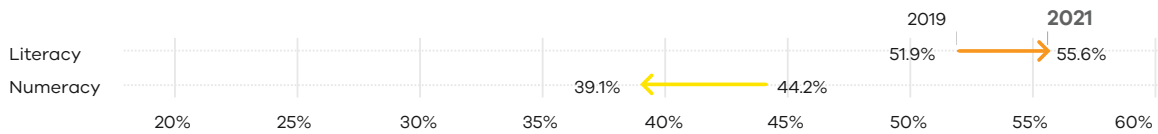
For Aboriginal Victorian students the 2021 NAPLAN results paint a picture of the difficulties faced during an unusual school year due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the introduction of home learning. There was an increase in the proportion of Aboriginal students in the top three bands

across both literacy and numeracy in all year levels (except year 9) between 2019 and 2021. The proportion of Aboriginal students in the top three bands for literacy in year 3, 5, and 7 increased to 55.6 per cent, 45.9 per cent, and 29.9 per cent respectively. This trend was not present in numeracy with reductions in the proportion of Aboriginal students in the top three bands. Only year 5 students have not declined in measures of numeracy.

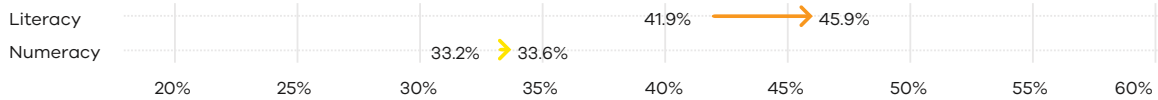
Aboriginal students numeracy results have worsened over the past 2 years of NAPLAN testing

Measure 5.1.1

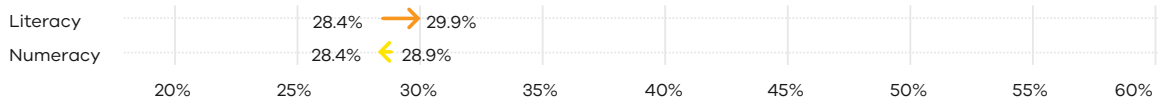
Year 3



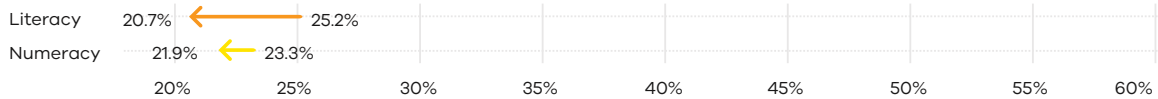
Year 5



Year 7



Year 9



Source: National Assessment Program, Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), Achievement in Reading, Writing, Language Conventions and Numeracy, National Report, Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA)

Objective 5.2 Increase the proportion of Aboriginal students who feel safe and connected at school

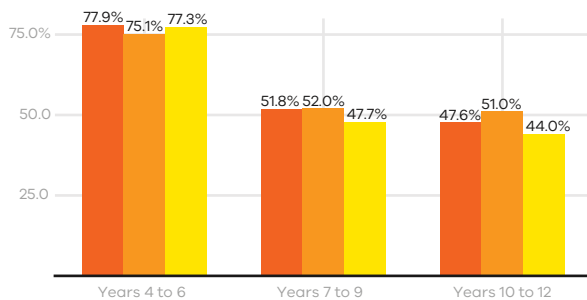
Measure 5.2.1 Proportion of students who feel connected to their school

Aboriginal children feel less connected to their school than their non-Aboriginal peers. The proportion of Aboriginal children who feel connected to school has dropped between primary and secondary school. During the period of home learning (2020-21) due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the proportion of Years 7 to 9 and 10 to 12 who felt connected to their school fell by approximately 4 and 7 percentage points respectively. This trend is not present in primary age Aboriginal students. There may be a multitude of reasons for this. Home learning creates different barriers to connectedness to school beyond existing barriers associated with traditional classroom learning.

Remote learning has negatively impacted Aboriginal high school students' connectedness to school

Measure 5.2.1

- 2019 Aboriginal students (%)
- 2020 Aboriginal students (%)
- 2021 Aboriginal students (%)



Source: Department of Education and Training, Victoria (Attitudes to School survey)

Koorie education at Reservoir East Primary School

Reservoir East Primary School was recognised for Outstanding Koorie Education in the 2022 Victorian Education Excellence Awards. The school is committed to encouraging a strong sense of belonging and identity for their First Nations students and provides a culturally competent, responsive and inclusive learning space reflective of Aboriginal culture and peoples.

Initiatives to improve the educational outcomes of Koorie students place a strong emphasis on First Nations representation in decision-making, and are guided by the Marrung Education Plan. The appointment of the school's own Indigenous workforce, including education support staff, teaching staff and an Indigenous Liaison Officer, facilitates a strong connection to the Koorie community. This was also demonstrated through their hosting of a Campfire Conversation as part of the Self-determination in Education Reform state-wide consultation.

The school is well-known as culturally safe for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families. This is evident in the increase in the number of First Nations students enrolled over the last 5 years, increasing from less than 10 students 5 years ago, to the 65 First Nations students enrolled in 2022.

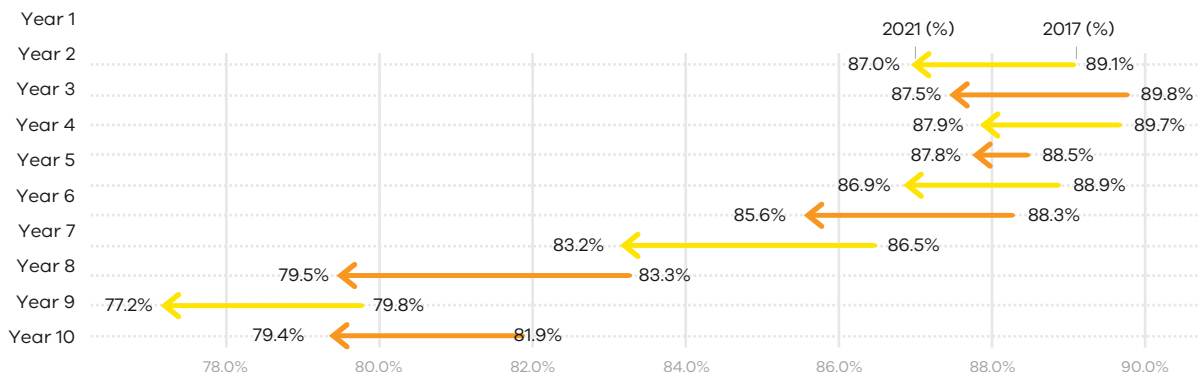
Measure 5.2.2 Student attendance rates in government schools

Attendance rates for Aboriginal students are lower than their non-Aboriginal peers. Aboriginal student attendance rates have been gradually decreasing across all year levels over the last 5 years of reporting. The largest decreases in attendance are in the later year levels with the largest drop in year 9 students attendance decreasing 5.6 percentage points over the past 5 reporting years. Historical

analysis shows if attendance rates fall below 90 per cent, then students are less connected to the school and at higher risk of disengaging. There are many internal (inside of school) and external (outside of school) factors that influence school attendance, including cultural and economic barriers. More needs to be done to arrest this trend of decreasing attendance rates so that the next generation of Aboriginal Victorians have the best foundation to succeed.

Attendance rates for Aboriginal students have dropped across all year levels, 2017-2021

Measure 5.2.2



Source: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) National Student Attendance Data Collection

Side by Side Partnership Addressing Disadvantage Program (Side by Side Program)

The Side by Side Program involves a partnership between Berry Street, VACCA, DE, DTF and Social Ventures Australia. The program aims to improve the attendance, engagement and educational outcomes for children facing disadvantage in the early years of primary school, with a priority on working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

The key staff groups implementing the Side by Side Program are: teaching staff who are integrated into each school; family and education support workers who work closely with each enrolled family; and trainers who deliver whole-school professional development. All three groups are aligned in order to provide coordinated, wrap-around supports to both families and their schools.

Over the first two years of delivery, the program has supported 63 students, of which 40 per cent identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. The full complement of nine partnering schools has been established across three regions in Victoria for 2023.

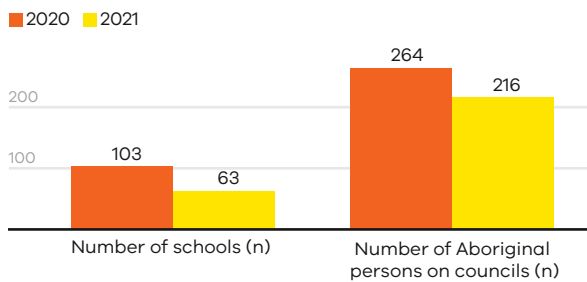
VACCA informed a significant component of the model that ensures the supports provided to families, teachers and schools are culturally inclusive and trauma-informed.

Measure 5.2.3 Number of Aboriginal people on school councils

Between 2020 and 2021, both the number of schools with Aboriginal persons on their school council and the number of Aboriginal persons on council have fallen. This trend is concerning because high student participation is shown to have a positive impact on academic and social development. The number of schools participating in data collection has dropped significantly between 2019 and 2020, and 2020 and 2021; consideration of the reduced population in this measure means that this measure must be used with caution when creating policy.

Both the number of schools with Aboriginal persons on their school council and the number of Aboriginal persons on council have dropped between 2020 and 2021

Measure 5.2.3



Source: Department of Education and Training, Victoria (2021 Term 3 Principal Survey, formerly known as the Supplementary School Census)

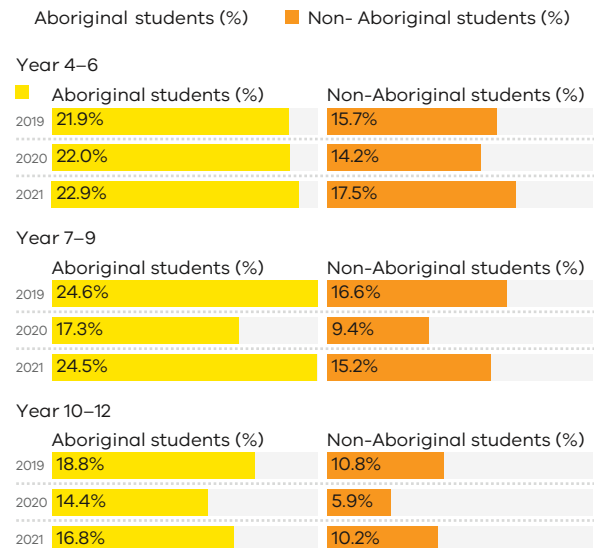
Measure 5.2.4 Proportion of students who report bullying at school

Bullying is one of the key precipitants for reduced school attendance and consequent disengagement. Between 2019 and 2020, there was a significant drop in the proportion of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students who reported bullying at school. In 2021, the levels of bullying reported rose back to 2019 levels.

In 2021, Aboriginal students were, on average, 1.5 times as likely to report bullying than their non-Aboriginal peers. Aboriginal students in years 7-9 and 10-12 reported rates of bullying 1.6 times higher than their non-Aboriginal peers and students in years 4-6 reported rates 1.3 times higher.

Aboriginal students experience bullying at a higher rate

Measure 5.2.4



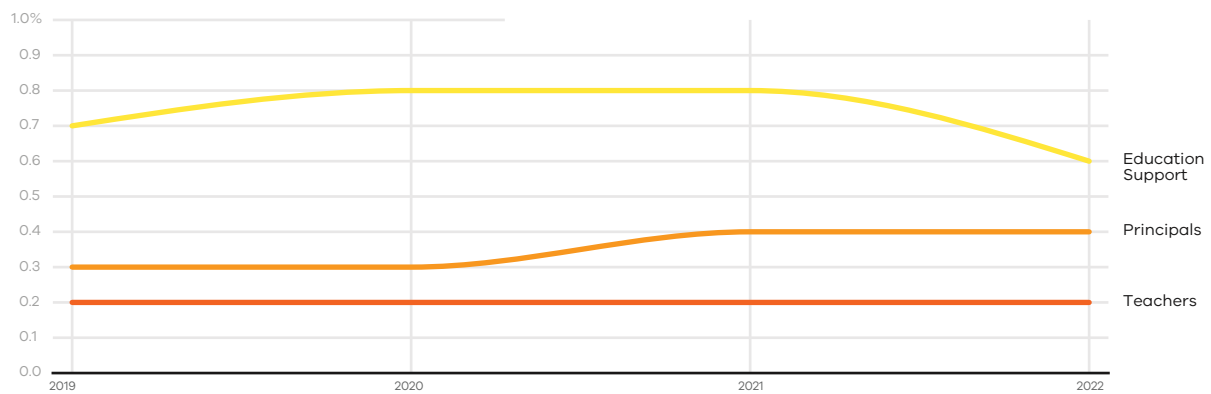
Source: Department of Education and Training data (Attitudes to School Survey)

Measure 5.2.5 Number and proportion of school-based Aboriginal education workers across all schools

The number of education workers who identify as Aboriginal has fallen from 247 to 209 between 2021 and 2022. This may be explained by worker burnout as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the total is still higher than it was pre-pandemic.

Slight decrease in proportion of Aboriginal Education Support

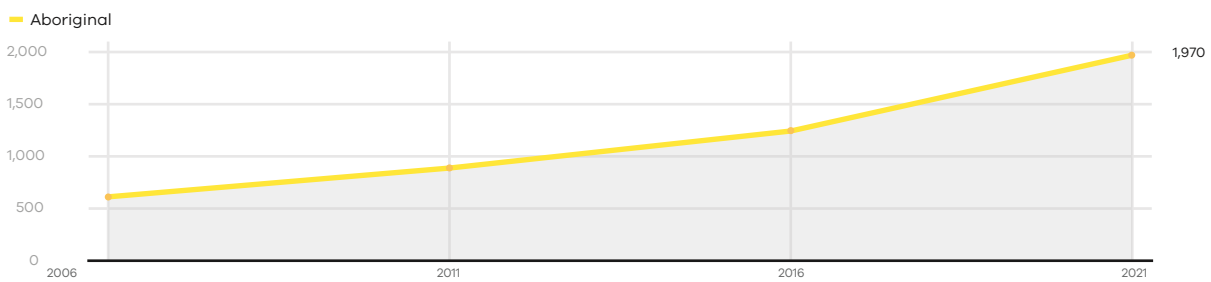
Measure 5.2.5a



Source: Department of Education and Training, Victoria

Aboriginal employment in the education and training sector continues to steadily rise

Measure 5.2.5b



Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing

Gunditjmara Culture and Language in Schools program

Eight schools in far southwest Victoria have embedded Aboriginal culture and language into their schools through a local language curriculum, the Gunditjmara Culture and Language in Schools program.

Principals at the 8 participating schools began work to start the culture and language initiative in 2019. The participating schools are Bundarra Primary, Bolwarra Primary, Dartmoor Primary, Heywood Consolidated, Narrawong District Primary, Portland Primary, Portland North Primary and Portland South Primary.

In 2020, the schools set their sights on developing a comprehensive curriculum program with professional development for school staff. To do this, they worked with Koorie Engagement Support Officers, Aboriginal staff, Elders from the Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation and the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority.

Now, the program includes 'On Country' community understanding and safety training (formerly known as cultural understanding and safety training) from Gunditjmara Traditional Owners at the world heritage listed Budj Bim National Park. Additionally, DE has funded a language support officer for the program.

From Term 1, 2021, the language support officer delivered the curriculum for the school, while helping schools integrate the Dhauwurd Wurrung language and culture into their broader programs. The Dhauwurd Wurrung language is used in daily greetings and farewells, formal instruction, word walls, charts, mathematics tasks and teacher instructions. Many students incorporate Dhauwurd Wurrung words into their written work to show their respect for Aboriginal culture and language.

Prioritise culture

Design and naming of new schools

In 2021 and 2022, the Victorian Schools Building Authority (VSBA) conducted a comprehensive new engagement process to involve Traditional Owners (TOs) in the design phase for new school builds. The approach was designed in consultation with VAEAI and applied to 16 new schools planned to open in 2024 on the traditional lands of the Bunurong, Wadawurrung and Wurundjeri people. Through the engagement process, Koorie cultural knowledge and perspectives informed

the design of buildings and landscapes, with the aim of establishing respectful and ongoing relationships. This process is now also being applied to consultations for the 2025 Proposed Future Schools program.

DE has also updated its School and Campus Naming Policy to deliver more widespread use of First Nations languages when selecting school and campus names. The changes will ensure that only Traditional Owner groups will propose Aboriginal language names.

Prioritise culture

Measure 5.2.7 Number and proportion of government schools having undertaken Community Understanding and Safety Training (CUST)⁶

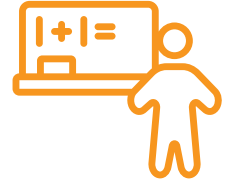
Between 2020 and 2021, the proportion of schools that undertook Community Understanding and Safety Training has doubled to 280 school campuses in 2021. CUST continued to be delivered virtually during 2020 but face-to-face delivery of CUST is considered the best model to achieve the program aims. Although delivery of the CUST

program (both number and proportion) is low comparative to 2018 and 2019, there is significant recovery after the ending of at home learning.

CUST builds the capacity of Victorian Government school staff to better support Aboriginal students, including through developing more culturally inclusive practices. Refresher training is critical to the ongoing cultural safety of Aboriginal students and strengthening a culturally inclusive school environment.

6. Formerly 'Cultural' Understanding and Safety Training.

Goal 6: Aboriginal learners are engaged at school



Overview

Measures under Goal 6 have worsened

Secondary education can provide pathways to fulfilling career and life aspirations.

Concerningly apparent retention rates for Aboriginal students in year 10 to 12 and the number of Aboriginal students completing their school certificate have declined in the short term while the proportion of Aboriginal young people with year 12 or equivalent has increased.

This can partially be explained through the disruption of two years of COVID-19 and the changes to school delivery.

Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally

Outcome 5: In 2021, 68.1 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 20–24 years had attained Year 12 or equivalent qualification across Australia, compared to 72.6 per cent in Victoria.

Nationally, based on progress from the baseline, the target shows improvement but is not on track to be met. In Victoria, there has been some improvement since 2016 (the baseline year).

Data Note



All measures under this goal are reported on.

Goal 6 directly aligns with the following Closing the Gap Outcome and Target

Outcome 5: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students achieve their full learning potential.

- **Target 5:** By 2031, 96 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (aged 20–24) attain a Year 12 or equivalent qualification.

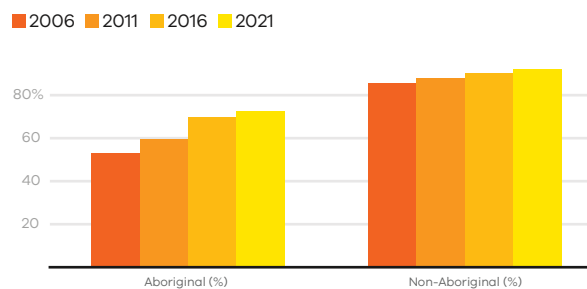
Objective 6.1 Increase Year 12 or equivalent attainment

Measure 6.1.1 Proportion of young people aged 20-24 with Year 12 or equivalent

Year 12 and equivalent certificates are vital pathways to further education and greater participation in the economy. The proportion of Aboriginal people aged 20-24 who have a year 12 or equivalent certificate has increased by 3.0 per cent in the past five years.

The number of Aboriginal young people with a Year 12 or equivalent qualification has increased slightly

Measure 6.1.1



Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing

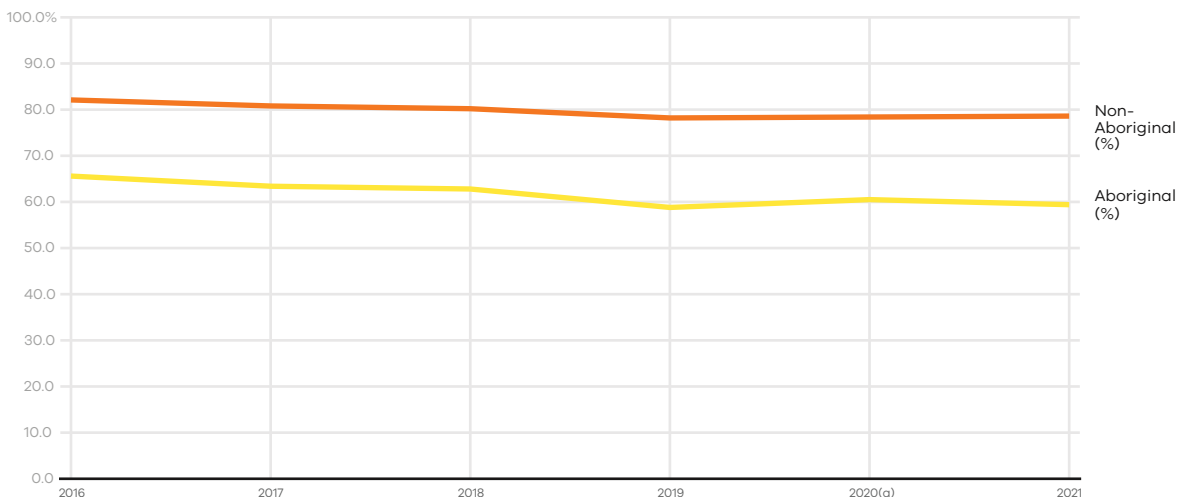
Measure 6.1.2 Apparent retention rates for students in Years 10 to 12

Between 2010 and 2021 the retention rates for Aboriginal students grew by 16.7 per cent reaching 59.4 per cent in 2021. While this is an improvement in the long term, since 2015 retention rates for years 10-12 have been slowly declining from a high point of 65.7 per cent of students in 2015. In the same time period,

non-Aboriginal student retention rates remained relatively stable with a 3.6 percent decrease in retention rates to 78.6 per cent in 2021. In order to reach parity with non-Aboriginal students, retention rates for Aboriginal students needs to change trajectory and grow by 24 per cent. This is important as the final years of high school provide entry into higher education and many apprenticeships and traineeships.

Apparent retention rates for Aboriginal students in Years 10 to 12 have decreased in the last 5 years

Measure 6.1.2



Source: Department of Education and Training, Victoria Australian Bureau of Statistics Schools Australia

Measure 6.1.3 Number of Aboriginal students who complete the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) or VET (Vocational Education Training) in Schools Certificate

Between 2012 and 2021, there was a 77.4 per cent increase in the number of Aboriginal students who completed the VCE, VCAL or VET in Schools Certificate. COVID-19, however, seems to have a significant negative impact on completion rates with a 49 student drop between 2020 and 2021. This suggests an increased need for support in the later years of school post-pandemic.

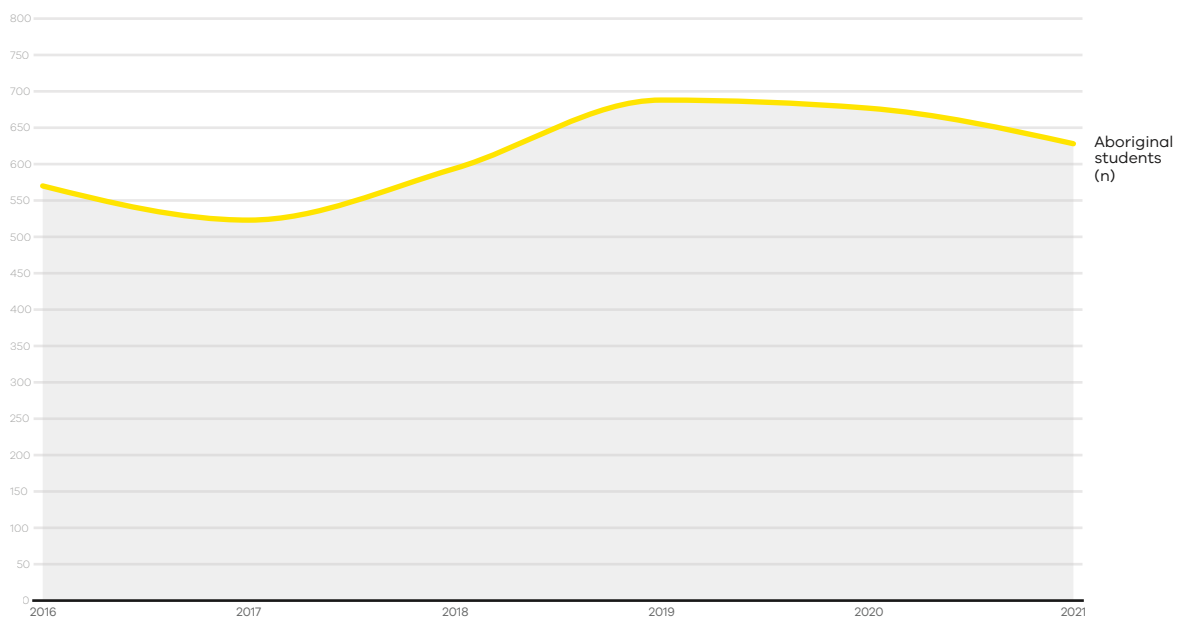
Victoria is moving to a new integrated senior secondary certificate, which will be fully integrated by 2025. In 2023, this commenced with the introduction of the VCE Vocational Major,

which replaces VCAL and includes improvements to VET Delivered to Secondary Students for students across Victoria. From 2025, a fully integrated single senior secondary certificate will be introduced across all Victorian schools and senior secondary providers, offering students genuine and identifiable vocational pathways.

Due to the on-going impact of COVID-19 in 2020 and 2021, the VCAA and DET provided additional support to VCAL students. However, anecdotal evidence suggests a higher than usual proportion of the students enrolled in the VCAL Intermediate levels found 2021 challenging and were unable to complete learning outcomes for units. These students can re-enrol in 2022 to complete the number of units required to qualify for their VCAL certificates.

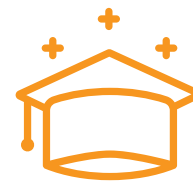
Completions of VCE, VCAL, and VET remain steady in 2021 for Aboriginal Students

Measure 6.1.3



Source: Aboriginal VCE students and their completion programs, 2011-2019, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA)

Goal 7: School leavers achieve their potential



Overview

Measures under Goal 7 varied in performance

Engagement after compulsory education is key to starting meaningful careers and gaining experience and knowledge. Too often in the recent past Aboriginal young people have been locked out of their potential through structural racism and a failure of government to provide access to further learning, training, and employment opportunities.

Aboriginal school leavers are more likely to be looking for work or engaged in apprenticeships and/or traineeships than in previous years. They are also more likely to be fully engaged in education, training, or employment than not. While VET enrolments are down completions as a proportion of those enrolments are increasing.

Goal 7 directly aligns with the following Closing the Gap Outcomes and Targets

Outcome 6: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students reach their full potential through further education pathways.

- **Target 6:** By 2031, 70 per cent of Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander people aged 25-34 years have completed a tertiary qualification (Certificate III and above).

Outcome 7: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth are engaged in employment or education.

- **Target 7:** By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth (15-24 years) who are in employment, education, or training to 67 percent.

Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally

Outcome 6: In 2021, 47.0 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25–34 years had completed non-school qualifications of Certificate III or above across Australia, compared to 58.5 per cent in Victoria.

Nationally, based on progress from the baseline, the target shows improvement but is not on track to be met. In Victoria, there has been some improvement since 2016 (the baseline year).

Outcome 7: In 2021, 58.0 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15–24 years were fully engaged in employment, education or training across Australia, compared to 65.5 per cent in Victoria.

Nationally, based on progress from the baseline, the target shows improvement but is not on track to be met. In Victoria, there has been some improvement since 2016 (the baseline year).

Data Note



All measures under this goal are reported on.

Objective 7.1 Increase the proportion of Aboriginal young people in work or further education

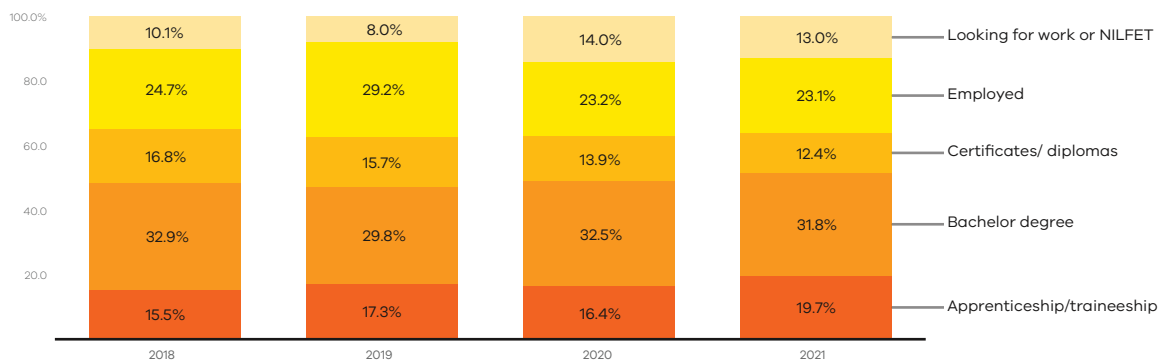
Measure 7.1.1 Destinations of Year 12 completers

The proportion of Aboriginal Year 12 completers employed six months after leaving school declined from 29.2 per cent in 2019 to 23.1 per cent 2021. Over the same period, the proportion of Year 12 completers undertaking bachelor degrees, apprenticeships and traineeships increased. The proportion of Aboriginal Year 12 completers looking for work or Not in Labour

Force, Education, or Training (NILFET) was considerably higher in 2021 than before the COVID-19 pandemic, although there was a slight decrease between 2020 and 2021. More Aboriginal students entering further education is a good sign that investing in education is working for Aboriginal students. More needs to be done for school leavers who are NILFET to support them to achieve their goals.

There are significant increases in the number of school leavers looking for work and in apprenticeships/traineeships

Measure 7.1.1



NILFET: Not in Labour Force Education or Training.
Source: Department of Education and Training, Victoria (On Track survey).

Measure 7.1.2 Proportion of 17-24-year-old school leavers participating in full-time education and training and/or employment

The majority (54.6 per cent) of Aboriginal Victorians aged 17-24 years old are fully engaged in full-time education and training, and/or employment. When comparing with the non-Aboriginal population, Aboriginal Victorians are less likely to be fully engaged in education or the workforce after they leave school in 2021, with 75.0 per cent of non-Aboriginal Victorians fully engaged. This is a result of numerous barriers that Aboriginal Victorians face when leaving secondary school, including systemic racism and geographic disparity for further education and jobs. A challenging trend is the high proportion of Aboriginal 17-24-year-olds who are not engaged in any full-time education, training or employment, which was at 24.3 per cent for 2021.

Aboriginal people are less likely to be engaged in full-time education or training than their non-Aboriginal peers

Measure 7.1.2

Level of engagement in education, training and/or employment	Aboriginal (n)	Non-Aboriginal (n)	Aboriginal (%)	Non-Aboriginal (%)
Fully engaged	5,188	441,488	54.6%	75.0%
Partially engaged(a)	1,692	87,577	17.8%	14.9%
Not Engaged	2,309	53,714	24.3%	9.1%
Engagement status undetermined/Not Stated	319	5,764	3.4%	1.0%

Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing

Measure 7.1.3 Proportion of 18–24-year olds participating and completing tertiary education

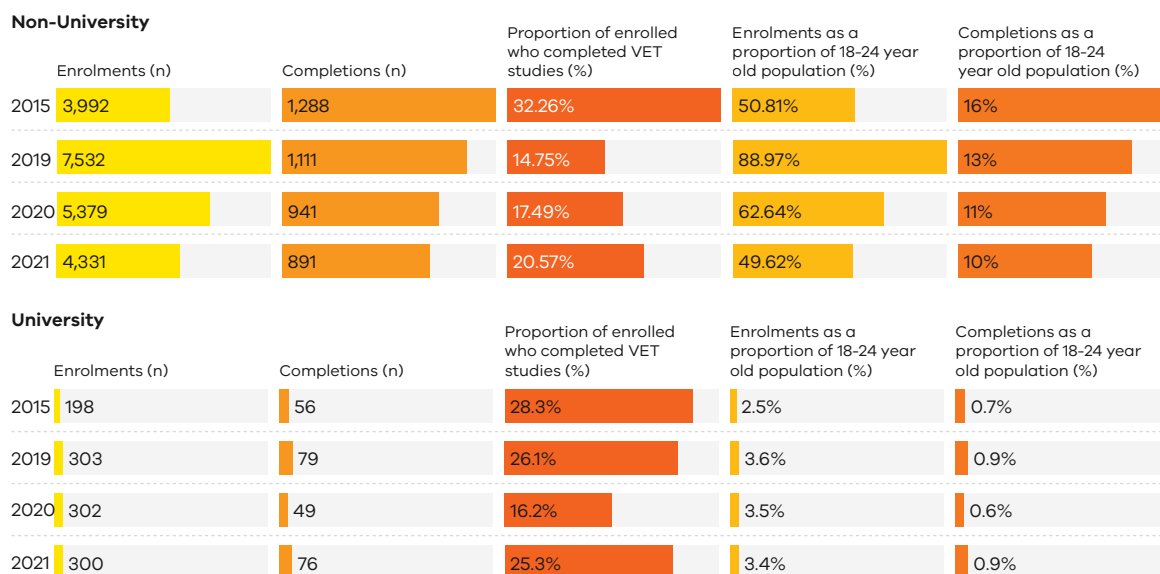
Aboriginal students' VET enrolments are at their lowest since 2019. Between 2019 and 2021 the number of VET enrolments has decreased 3,201 (7,532 to 4,331). This contrasts with the proportion of enrolments to completions being the highest since 2016 at 20.6 per cent in non-University settings. Enrolments and completions of VET studies as a proportion of 18–24 year-olds are also comparatively low to previous years. VET studies are a significant part of the education mix as they provide alternative pathways to higher skilled work and therefore a greater share

of the economy through labour. More needs to be invested in VET and other alternative education pathways to meet the education needs of the widest variety of students.

It is encouraging to see that university access, participation, and attainment rates are either holding steady or increasing throughout 2020–21 and the challenge that COVID-19 presented. More Aboriginal students are choosing to enter tertiary education. This will help to provide greater economic gains and improved life outcomes with university level degrees leading to higher wages and greater economic security.

Enrolments in VET are declining but completions as a proportion of enrollees are increasing

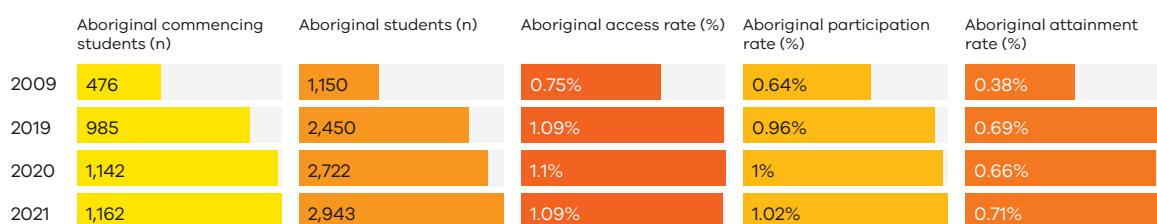
Measure 7.1.3a



Source: National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) VOCSTATS (unpublished)

University access, participation, and attainment rates remain steady

Measure 7.1.3b



Source: Department of Education (Commonwealth), Higher Education Statistics: Section 1 Commencing students, Section 2 All students, Section 6 Indigenous students, Section 14 Award course completion

Measure 7.1.4 Proportion of 20–64-year-olds with qualifications at Certificate III level or above

The proportion of Aboriginal Victorians with qualifications at Certificate II level or above has risen dramatically since the last Census. 52.6 per cent of respondents said that they have those qualifications; a 20 per cent increase.

Measure 7.1.5 Proportion of 20–64-year-old government-funded and total VET graduates employed and/or in further study after training

In 2021 the majority of Aboriginal 20–64 year old VET graduates are in employment and/or further study at 80.1 per cent. When analysing this trend over time we see that there has been a steady decrease in the proportion of Aboriginal VET graduates employed and/or in further study. The largest declines in post VET outcomes are around further study after training for both VET and Government-funded VET graduates with a 9 per cent and 20 per cent reduction from 2020 to 2021 respectively. Gains in participation in study and employment in the latter half of the 2010’s has been reduced through 2020 and 2021. This may be due to insecurity around the COVID-19 pandemic and education. It will be important to analyse VET graduate pathways as we transition out of COVID-19 lockdown.

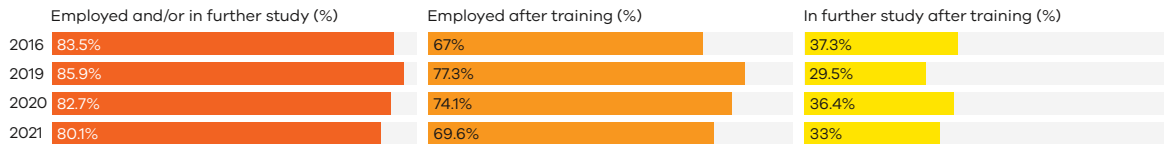
Measure 7.1.6 Proportion of graduates and cadets employed in VPS; retention, progression and satisfaction

The Victorian Public Service (VPS) continues to provide a key employment pathway for Aboriginal Victorians. However, the intake numbers for internship, graduate and trainee programs dropped between 2021 and 2022. The patterns of participation and choices of community members are being influenced by broader trends in the Victorian labour market (see analysis under Goal 9 of Domain 3). There is an increasingly competitive market for Aboriginal employees across the private sector, public sector and community-controlled sector. In response to this, VPSC is looking at offering alternative pathways for members of the community without formal qualifications as well as strengthening the promotion and engagement associated with graduate and other career pathway programs into the VPS.

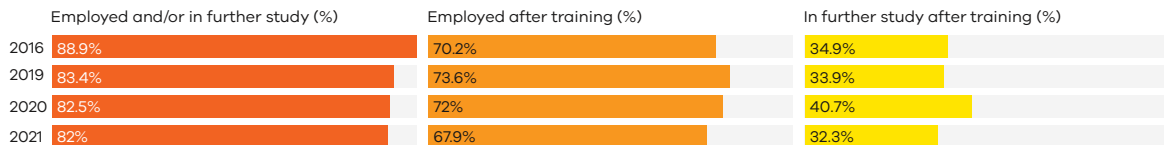
Aboriginal VET graduate employment and training has declined over the past 5 years

Measure 7.1.5

Total VET Graduates



Government funded VET Graduates



Source: ROGS 2023; Total VET graduates from Table 5A.17 [NCVER unpublished, Australian vocational education and training statistics: VET student outcomes]

Domain 2 - Victorian Government Investment and Action

The Victorian Government is driving action through Marrung: Aboriginal Education Plan 2016-2026 (Marrung) to ensure that all Aboriginal Victorians achieve their learning aspirations.

The key Aboriginal Governance Forum for realising outcomes in this Domain is the Marrung Central Governance Committee.

Education

DE partnership with VAEAI

DE and the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) have worked in formal partnership for over 30 years. This partnership also includes statutory authorities such as the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority. The partnership continues through the shared development and delivery of Marrung, and operates at statewide, regional and local levels. DE funds VAEAI to support the provision of education and training that reinforces the Koorie community's cultural identity and increases awareness in the wider community of Koorie culture and aspirations in education and training.

Prioritise culture

Preparing the education system for self-determination

\$5.8 million new investment was provided in the 2022-23 Victorian State Budget to improve the preparedness of the education system for the forthcoming self-determination in education reform. This funding builds upon the state-wide consultation and co-design process funded through the 2021-22 State budget.

Throughout 2022, a series of Campfire Conversations were held throughout Victoria, bringing together Aboriginal communities and schools to listen, share and connect about the possibilities and opportunities for strengthening self-determination in education.

More than 2,800 people participated in over 160 Campfire Conversations. These created a safe space for conversation that respected the stories of pain and trauma that arose. They provided a forum for schools to hear first-hand the human impact of issues such as racism, trauma and cultural load, how these exist in their schools, and the negative impact they have on enacting self-determination.

Address trauma and support healing

Koorie young people, their families and the wider community emphasised the importance of keeping children and young people at the centre of the reforms and strengthening their core connections of family, community, culture, identity and their sense of belonging. Overwhelmingly, discussions and suggestions for change align to one or more of the following priority areas: culturally safe and responsive school system, accountability, partnerships, truth-telling, voice and capacity building.

2022-23 initiatives include strengthening of professional capability of principals and school leadership in Koorie education; capacity building in schools and students to prevent and respond to racism and to proactively increase the inclusivity of learning environments; and exploring options to expand the teaching of Victorian Aboriginal language programs in schools.

Other initiatives funded in 2022-23 that contributed to improved educational outcomes and experiences for Aboriginal Victorians included:

- 'Building equity and excellence for rural and regional students', which included support to establish partnerships between clusters of rural and regional schools and local Aboriginal communities to strengthen the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and perspectives.
- 'Lifting student literacy and numeracy outcomes' which assisted the Koorie English professional development program to continue to support Koorie students' literacy and numeracy.

Dhelk Wukang: Aboriginal Inclusion Plan 2022-26

In September 2022, DE launched Dhelk Wukang 2022-26, the department's fourth Aboriginal Inclusion plan. The plan sets out a public commitment to strengthen Koorie inclusion, self-determination and cultural safety at all levels within the department, including for the Victorian Public Service and the Government Teaching Service.

The Plan promotes Koorie voice across the department, seeks to improve Koorie representation, and prioritises career development and retention of Koorie staff. Two existing initiatives are gaining deeper traction under Dhelk Wukang and contributing strongly to the cultural safety of department workplaces:

- The Koorie Staff Network (KSN) continues to connect and support Koorie employees across DE, contributing to creating a culturally safe work environment. The KSN has grown to around 200 in 2022.
- The Yan Ngitj ambassadors program continues with 55 Koorie and non-Koorie staff across DE volunteering to support culturally safe and inclusive workplaces. This includes promoting responsibility for Koorie cultural safety and respect for Koorie history, culture and perspectives within their work area through regular communications and activities.

Marrung: Teaching Aboriginal Languages (Aboriginal Languages Training Initiative)

\$2.8 million over four years has been provided for the Aboriginal Languages Training Initiative. This will support the delivery of a Certificate IV in Teaching an Australian First Nations Language to increase the number of Aboriginal language teachers in Victorian kindergartens, schools and adult education settings.

This Certificate provides further learning for participants from the two previously funded nationally accredited courses, Certificates II and III in Learning an Australian First Nations Language. It allows graduates to apply for Permission to Teach through the Victorian Institute of Teaching.

Other education reforms and initiatives

A number of important system-wide reforms and initiatives are underway and are designed to provide support for all students, including strengthened supports for Aboriginal learners.

Under the Senior Secondary Pathways Reform, the new VCE Vocational Major will enable students to successfully transition into apprenticeships or traineeships, further education, employment, or university via a non-ATAR pathway. The new Victorian Pathways Certificate (VPC) will include a flexible learning approach to support students who have additional needs or have missed periods of school.

The Victorian Curriculum F-10 embeds Aboriginal perspectives across all learning areas. The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority process to adopt and adapt the revised Australian Curriculum into the next generation of the Victorian Curriculum F-10 is expected to conclude in July 2023.

The Disability Inclusion Reform will provide a strengths-based profiling process to help students and families identify the strengths, needs and educational adjustments schools can make to assist students with disability. The profile will be completed with the support of key people who understand the student's education and support needs, and an independent facilitator

role helps schools and families work together. The reform also introduces a tiered funding model with additional investment to provide schools with more resourcing to support inclusive practices.

The Schools Mental Health Fund invests around \$200m into the Victorian Government school system over four years and \$86m ongoing. Schools use this new funding to purchase evidence-based programs, staffing and resources from the Menu to meet the mental health and wellbeing needs of their students, including from ACCOs.

The Tutor Learning Initiative was introduced in 2021 to support students whose learning had been disrupted because of the COVID-19 pandemic. It provides government and low-fee non-government schools with funding to employ tutors to deliver targeted small group learning support to students who need it most.

The Middle Years Literacy and Numeracy Support initiative provides funding to government secondary schools to improve outcomes for students who are at risk of leaving school without the literacy or numeracy skills they need for future work, education, and training.

LOOKOUT Education Support Centres are designed to boost the capability of early childhood services, schools, carers, child protection practitioners and out-of-home care services to improve educational outcomes for children and young people living in out-of-home care.

Training Skills and Higher Education

Vocational Education and Training workforce

Victoria's Koorie Vocational Education and Training (VET) workforce has been redesigned to better support Koorie learners. 17 Koorie Liaison Officers, 32 Koorie Student Support Officers, eight Wurreker Brokers and one Wurreker Manager are now all embedded within Victoria's TAFE Network and remain crucial to supporting cultural inclusivity, advancing self-determination, providing advice, and opportunities for Koorie learners to succeed.

Supporting Koorie Self-Determination in Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE)

VAEAI has been contracted to deliver the Supporting Koorie Self-Determination in Pre-accredited Training and ACFE Programs Project.

The project's objectives are to increase the capacity of providers to better meet the needs of Koorie learners and improve learner participation and outcomes.

VAEAI have led stakeholder consultation workshops across Victoria through the Wurreker Brokers and the Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups.

VAEAI presented a Discussion Paper to the ACFE Board in December 2022 which outlined their findings to date and recommendations for draft self-determination principles and protocols.

Youth

Marram Nganyin – Aboriginal Youth Mentoring Program

The Marram Nganyin – Aboriginal Youth Mentoring Program was first established in 2016-17 to provide a tailored and responsive program to Aboriginal young people and their communities.

In 2021-22, five Aboriginal organisations delivered mentoring activities that support Aboriginal young people and their local communities, with the Koorie Youth Council funded to provide capacity building and coordination support. Over 90 young Aboriginal young people engaged with Marram Nganyin during 2022, exceeding total targets.

The 2021-22 State Budget committed more than \$1.4 million to continue the Marram Nganyin Program for two years until June 2023.

The Victorian Government's Youth Strategy – Our Promise, Your Future – released in 2022, is helping to ensure every young person across Victoria maintains and strengthens their connections to community and culture including supporting work towards Aboriginal self-determination.

Transport

Aboriginal Scholarships Program

In 2022, the Transport Portfolio Aboriginal Scholarships Program continued with pooled funding of \$150,000 per annum for three years. Scholarship awards are tiered and range between \$1,000 to \$15,000 per annum, with the programs aim to provide financial and career support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary, TAFE and university students while creating a talent pipeline to the Victorian transport portfolio.

Throughout 2022 scholarships were awarded to 33 secondary, 1 TAFE and 1 university students.

Transport Portfolio Aboriginal Careers in Transport Strategy

Development of the Transport Portfolio Aboriginal Careers in Transport Strategy focused on attracting, recruiting, retaining and developing Aboriginal employees across the transport portfolio in support of achieving the portfolios two per cent internal Aboriginal employment target, increasing Aboriginal representation on boards and in senior positions. The Transport Portfolio Aboriginal Careers in Transport Strategy is anticipated to be launched early 2023.

Domain 3: Opportunity & Prosperity



Our shared commitment:

Building opportunity and economic prosperity for all Aboriginal Victorians.

Fully participating in the economy provides Aboriginal Victorians with the resources they need to self-determine their future. The Victorian Government is committed to supporting Aboriginal Victorian workers, employers and businesses to thrive, including supporting them to recover from the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic. As part of government's efforts, fostering inclusive economic growth is key.

This means stimulating work and additional economic development and business opportunities for Aboriginal young people, women and people living with disability those in regional areas, and ensuring Aboriginal Victorians are represented at all levels, across all sectors and in all pursuits.



Goal 8: Aboriginal workers achieve wealth equality



Overview

Measures under goal 8 have improved

First Peoples continue to face economic disadvantage as a result of colonisation, exclusion from economic participation, dispossession and the denial of pre-existing rights to and traditional ownership of land and waters. While there remains economic disparity, the personal and household income of Aboriginal Victorians has increased. More businesses have Aboriginal owners and procurement from Aboriginal businesses is at an all-time high.

Home ownership remains a significant barrier to increasing Aboriginal inter-generational wealth. Home ownership has remained stable over the past five years

Closing the Gap – Relevant Outcomes and Targets for Goal 8

The National Agreement does not contain outcomes and targets that align with this VAAF goal. Victoria is pursuing more ambitious and comprehensive goals under the VAAF, which are reported on in this chapter and the Data Dashboard.

Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally

Not applicable.

Data Note



All measures under this goal are reported on.



Objective 8.1 Increase Aboriginal household income in line with the Victorian median

Measure 8.1.1 Median household income and median equivalised household income

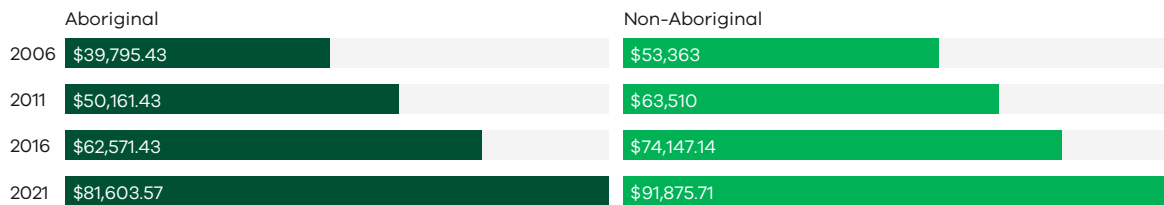
In 2021 Aboriginal Victorian households earned a median income of \$81,0603.57. This is \$10,272 less than non-Aboriginal Victorians. Given there is not as significant a difference between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal personal incomes, this may indicate differing household compositions.

The household income gap has shown signs of decreasing. The median yearly income for Aboriginal household is growing at a rate of 30.4 per cent since 2016 compared with 23.9 per cent in non-Aboriginal households.

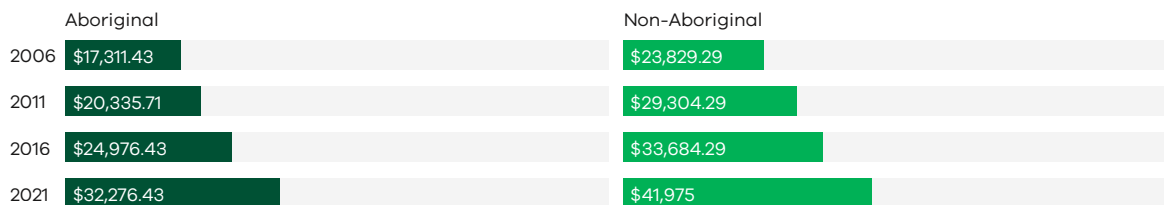
Aboriginal households are closer to income parity with non-Aboriginal households than any time in the past 15 years

Measure 8.1.1

Median yearly household income



Median yearly personal income



Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing

Objective 8.2 Increase Aboriginal home ownership in line with the Victorian average

Measure 8.2.1 Proportion of homeowners versus other tenure types (by age bracket)

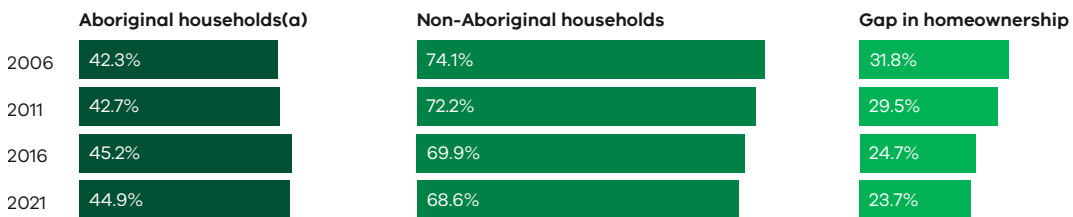
Between 2016 and 2021, the gap between Aboriginal home ownership and the Victorian average decreased by 1 per cent. However, this was due to a drop in non-Aboriginal homeowners as opposed to increased Aboriginal home ownership. Aboriginal home ownership decreased by 0.3 per cent during this time.

As the proportion of Aboriginal Victorian renters also dropped by 2.7 per cent (to 51.3 per cent), this means Aboriginal Victorians are increasingly living in unowned and unrented tenure types, with housing insecurity an ongoing issue. The meaning of 'other tenure types' is in the census data dictionary here:

<https://www.abs.gov.au/census/guide-census-data/census-dictionary/2021/variables-topic/housing/tenure-type-tend>.

Aboriginal homeownership has remained steady

Measure 8.2.1



Source: Table I13, 2021 Census of Population and Housing, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Profile (Catalogue number 2002.0): Victoria



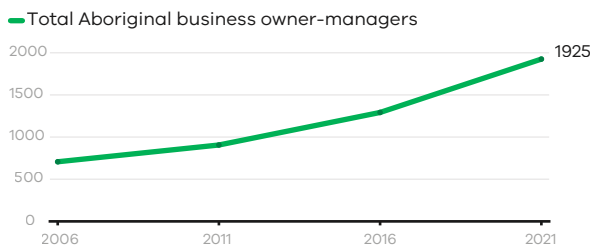
Objective 8.3 Increase Aboriginal business ownership and support Aboriginal entrepreneurs

Measure 8.3.1 Number of Victorian business owner-managers who are Aboriginal.

The growth in the number of Victorian business owner-managers who are Aboriginal accelerated between 2006 and 2021. In 2021, there was a total of 1,925 Aboriginal Victorian business owner-managers, compared to 1,292 in 2016 and 707 in 2006. This demonstrates that the change in Aboriginal participation in the economy is not only in employment but also in Aboriginal control and ownership of business. Growth in Aboriginal controlled enterprise is a positive sign that efforts to limit the barriers to Aboriginal ownership and enterprise are working.

The number of Aboriginal business owners are growing

Measure 8.3.1



Source: Kinaway Chamber of Commerce, ABS Census of Population and Housing

Hospital construction - Aboriginal employment

Multiplex Constructions has been successful in attracting and retaining Aboriginal workers through a range of initiatives related to construction of the new Footscray Hospital. As of February 2023, the project has achieved approximately 24,500 hours in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workforce participation and spent approximately \$3.7 million on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander business procurement. At the Victorian Heart Hospital, there were 45,000 hours completed by Aboriginal employees, exceeding targeted hours of 29,000 hours.

Transfer power and resource

Measure 8.3.2 Aboriginal businesses that government enters into a purchase agreement with as a proportion of small to medium enterprises.

The Victorian Government has increased its procurement from Aboriginal businesses by approximately \$400,000 for 2021-22. Over the past 4 years, procurement from Aboriginal business has increased by 29.3 per cent up to \$21.6 million for 2021-22; with goods and services procured from 129 Victorian Aboriginal businesses.

Transport Portfolio - Kinaway Chamber of Commerce Pilot Program

In late 2022, the Transport Portfolio launched a 12-month pilot partnership program with the Kinaway Chamber of Commerce (Kinaway). The purpose of the program is to enhance relevant spending, build the capability and awareness of the Aboriginal Victorian business community across the portfolio and promote relationship building to maximise the opportunities that exist within the Transport Portfolio. The Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) has committed \$249,300 in funding to support the employment of a Transport Portfolio Relationship Manager at Kinaway, workshops with Transport Portfolio agencies and scoping of a Transport Portfolio Aboriginal procurement policy. DTP has undertaken opportunity analysis workshops with participating entities providing a comprehensive breakdown of typical purchasing categories and identifying procurement opportunities.

Transfer power and resource

Goal 9: Strong Aboriginal workforce participation, in all sectors and at all levels



Overview

Measures under Goal 9 have improved

Aboriginal employment in every industry has grown since 2011. Historical barriers to industries are slowly being taken down. This includes the highest income brackets. With Aboriginal Victorians leading and influencing practice and culture across the broad spectrum of workplaces, this will create a safer work environment for First Peoples.

The Victorian Government is supporting this through growth in the Jobs Victoria program and the highest number of job seeker placements since the program's commencement.

Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally

Outcome 8: In 2021, 55.7 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25–64 years were employed across Australia, compared to 62 per cent in Victoria.

Nationally, based on progress from the baseline, the target shows good improvement and is on track to be met. In Victoria, there has been some improvement since 2016 (the baseline year).

Goal 9 directly aligns with the following Closing the Gap Outcome and Target

Outcome 8 Strong economic participation and development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities

- **Target 8:** By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25–64 who are employed to 62 per cent.

Data Note



All measures under this goal are reported on.

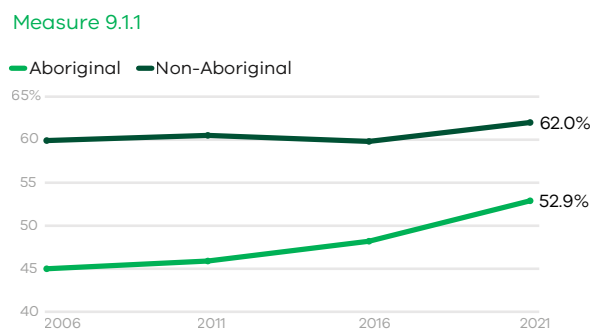
Objective 9.1 Increase Aboriginal workforce participation

Measure 9.1.1 Employment to population ratio

The employment to population ratio for Aboriginal Victorians increased to 52.9 per cent in 2021 (up by 4.7 per cent since 2016), indicating that a greater proportion of the Victorian Aboriginal population is employed. This mainly represents the increased employment of Aboriginal women, as the proportion of employed Aboriginal men remained relatively stable between 2016 and 2021. This could be due to a range of economic factors such as the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and changes in the composition of the Victorian economy. It is encouraging that Aboriginal women are seeing greater paid participation in the economy with 51.3 per cent of the working age population engaged in full and part time work in 2021.

The gap between the proportion of employed non-Aboriginal people and employed Aboriginal people decreased from 11.6 per cent to 9.1 per cent between 2016 and 2021. In 2022, Victoria reached its lowest level of unemployment rate since records began in 1978 with the Australian Bureau of Statistics.⁷

Aboriginal employment is steadily increasing



Measure 9.1.2 Proportion employed in full-time versus part-time or casual employment

The proportion of Aboriginal Victorians employed on a full-time basis continues to increase. In 2021, 57.4 per cent of Aboriginal people are employed full time and 33.2 per cent part time. This is a 4.8 per cent decrease in full time employment and a 9.6 per cent increase in part time employment over the past 15 years.

Aboriginal women are far more likely to be employed part time than male Aboriginal Victorians. This trend is reflected in the non-Aboriginal population, so it is likely a reflection of the gendered nature of paid and unpaid labour within the Victorian economy. The proportion of Victorian Aboriginal women employed full time has decreased by 6.4 per cent over the past 15 years. It should be noted that the 2021 Census was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic and may have affected self-reported employment results.

Aboriginal Victorians in full-time work has remained stable

Measure 9.1.2

Full-time

	Male	Female	Persons
2006	70.4%	48.6%	60.3%
2011	71.6%	47.1%	60.1%
2016	70.1%	45.2%	58.2%
2021	68.9%	45.5%	57.4%

Part-time

	Male	Female	Persons
2006	77.7%	48.6%	64.2%
2011	75.7%	47.5%	62.6%
2016	74.2%	46.5%	61.1%
2021	56.3%	33.5%	44.7%

Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing

7. Source: <https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/victorian-unemployment-rate-lowest-record>

Measure 9.1.3 Aboriginal jobseekers supported into work

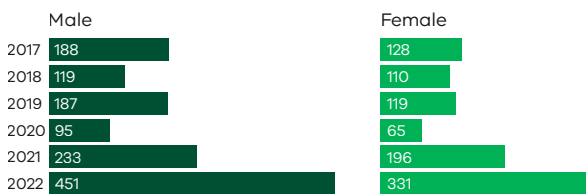
The number of Aboriginal Victorians supported into work placements by Jobs Victoria is at an all-time high. In 2022, Jobs Victoria supported the placement of 331 Aboriginal women and 451 Aboriginal men.

The conversion of these placements to at least 6 months of full or part-time work (Outcomes) is also high and growing. In 2021, 129 Aboriginal women and 143 Aboriginal men achieved Outcomes, representing a respective increase of 130.3 per cent and 113.4 per cent on 2020 figures. High Outcome rates are a good sign that the Jobs Victoria program is producing sustainable employment outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians.

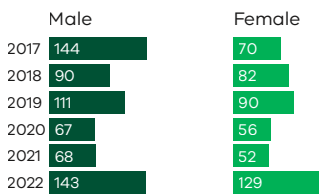
The number of job placements for Aboriginal job seekers is at an all time high

Measure 9.1.3

Placements



Outcomes



Source: Jobs Victoria Program Data

Plan Champions Network

In 2022, funding provided through DJSIR place-based economic inclusion initiatives (including Community Revitalisation) was focused on supporting the Kaiela Institute to implement key priorities under the Goulburn Murray Regional Prosperity and Productivity Plan. This includes Kaiela working with major employers in the region to establish the 'Plan Champions Network'.

Major employers in the region sign-on as a 'Plan Champion'. This commits them to develop Aboriginal Participation Plans to increase employment of local Aboriginal people and procurement from First Nations businesses.

The Plan Champions Network provides a peer-to-peer opportunity to share learnings and experiences and establish a support group of like-minded organisations. Resources such as HR processes and cultural guidance are shared and adapted as required. In 2022, Kaiela worked closely with the first five priority plan champions to act as a demonstration pilot for subsequent roll-out to the wider group of employers in 2023.

Objective 9.2 Increase workforce participation for Aboriginal women

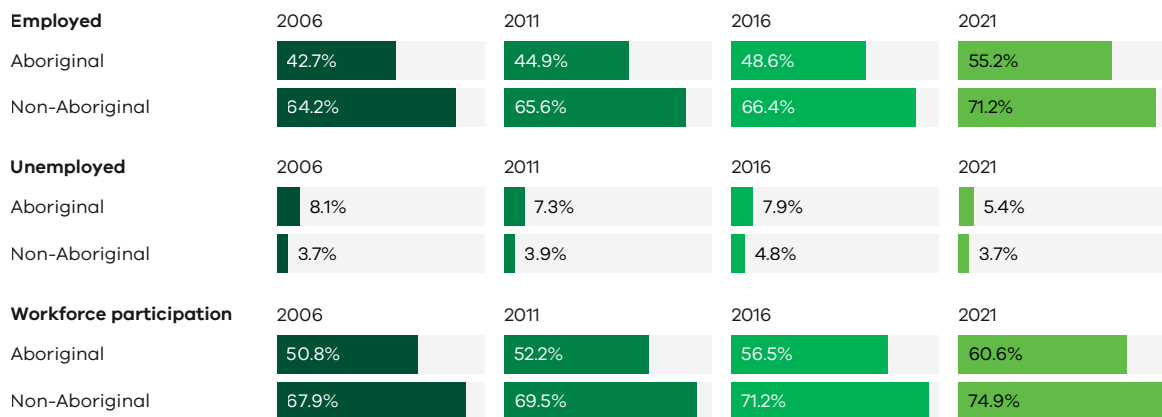
Measure 9.2.1 Workforce participation of women

Since 2006, the proportion of Aboriginal women in employment has steadily increased, reaching 55.2 per cent in 2021. In this time, Aboriginal women's workforce participation (women employed and looking for employment) increased by 19.4 per cent to 60.6 per cent.

The number of women who are not employed or seeking employment has continued to grow, reaching 45.6 per cent. Barriers to employment such as caring duties, and experiences of racism and sexism play a factor in who can return to full and part time work.

Workforce participation for women has steadily increased

Measure 9.2.1



Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing

Objective 9.3 Increase workforce participation for Aboriginal young people, people with a disability and people living in regional areas

Measure 9.3.1 Workforce participation by age and disability status

Workforce participation by age

There has been a steady increase in the proportion of the Victorian Aboriginal population entering the workforce. The proportion of 15-24 year olds in employment rose by 14.6 per cent over the past 5 years (to 47.4 per cent of the population). A growth trend that has been accelerating over the past 10 years.

The greatest increase in proportion of Aboriginal people employed by age group is in those aged 65+ which grew to 15.3 per cent of the population, at a growth rate of 26.2 per cent over 5 years. This trend may be caused by increases in self-identification of Aboriginal Victorians.

Workforce participation by disability status

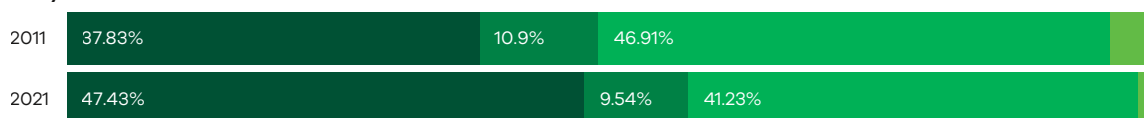
In 2021, 17.2 per cent of Aboriginal Victorians with a disability were employed. This represents an 18.6 per cent increase from 2016. 21.3 per cent of Aboriginal Victorians with a disability are currently participating in the workforce (people either in employment or currently looking for employment). This is the highest proportion in the past 15 years.

Aboriginal people across all age groups more likely to be employed than 10 years ago

Measure 9.3.1

■ Employed
 ■ Unemployed
 ■ Not in the labour force
 ■ Not stated

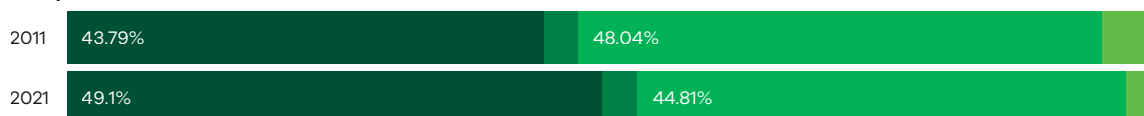
15-24 years



25-54 years



55-64 years



Aged 65 and above



Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing

Objective 9.4 Increase Aboriginal leadership and representation across all sectors and levels

Measure 9.4.1 Aboriginal employment by sector, industry and occupation; with analysis by growth industry

Aboriginal Victorians are employed in all sectors of the Victorian economy. The proportional Aboriginal job growth between 2011 to 2021 has exceeded non-Aboriginal job growth in all industries, with the highest being 181.6 per cent in the Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services industry and the lowest being 31.4 per cent in the Manufacturing industry. However, Aboriginal Victorians continue to make up a small proportion of the Victorian workforce.

Aboriginal Victorians were more likely to work in the Victorian public sector than their non-Aboriginal peers in 2021. The majority of Aboriginal Victorians working in the Victorian public sector work in the Victorian Public Service.

The proportion of employed Aboriginal Victorians, relative to population, in industries with the highest income quartile is less than the proportion of employed non-Aboriginal Victorians. This may be due to systemic racism, and lack of equal opportunity which contributes to the pay gap between Aboriginal Victorians and non-Aboriginal Victorians.

Aboriginal Victorians are more likely to be employed as Professionals, making up 17.4 per cent of total employed Aboriginal Victorians in 2021. The Australian and New Zealand System of Classification for Occupations defines Professionals as skill level one, which means that the profession has a skill level of a bachelor degree or higher qualification. The industry with the greatest proportion of employed Aboriginal Victorians was the Arts and Recreation Services industry, at 16.5 per cent in 2021.

Aboriginal employment has at least doubled in key industries in the past decade

Measure 9.4.1



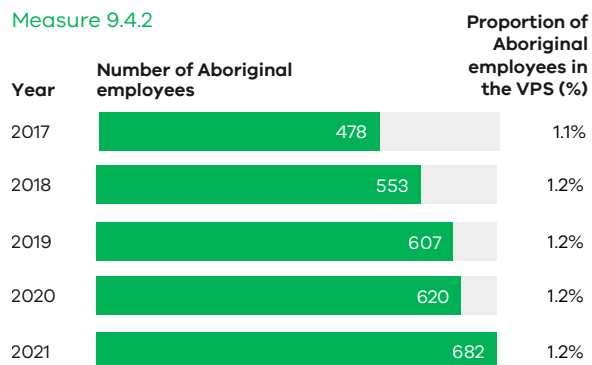
Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing

Measure 9.4.2 Aboriginal employees within the Victorian Public Service (VPS)

The number of Aboriginal employees within the VPS grew by 62 between 2020 and 2021. Existing Aboriginal employment strategies, such as the five-year Aboriginal employment strategy, Barring Djinang 2012-2022, may have contributed to this increase. However, the proportion of Aboriginal employees in the VPS has remained at 1.2 per cent since 2018. This highlights the need for the VPS to continue to transform its processes to improve employment opportunities for Aboriginal Victorians.

The proportion of Aboriginal employees has remained stable

Measure 9.4.2



Source: Victorian Public Sector Commission internal records

Measure 9.4.3 Number of Aboriginal people at VPS 6 level and above in the VPS

The proportion of Aboriginal employees at VPS grade 6 and above, relative to the number of Aboriginal employees in the VPS, reached an all-time high at 12.8 per cent in 2021 (up by 2.8 per cent since 2020). The proportion of non-Aboriginal employees in the same VPS grades, relative to the number of non-Aboriginal employees in the VPS, was 24.8 per cent in 2021 – almost double the proportion of Aboriginal employees.

The number of VPS staff who identify as Aboriginal is at an all time high

Measure 9.4.3

Aboriginal	VPS Grade 6 and above	As a % of all VPS Grade 6 and above	VPS Grade 6 and above as % of all VPS staff by Aboriginal status
2017	42	0.7%	8.8%
2018	59	0.8%	10.7%
2019	56	0.6%	9.2%
2020	62	0.7%	10%
2021	87	0.9%	12.8%

Non-Aboriginal

2017	3,272	51.6%	15.4%
2018	2,622	37.1%	19.1%
2019	3,661	42.2%	15.1%
2020	2,577	28.3%	21%
2021	2,682	24.4%	24.9%

No response

2017	3,033	47.8%	13.9%
2018	4,379	62%	13.2%
2019	4,963	57.2%	19.4%
2020	6,480	71.1%	17.4%
2021	8,441	74.8%	18%

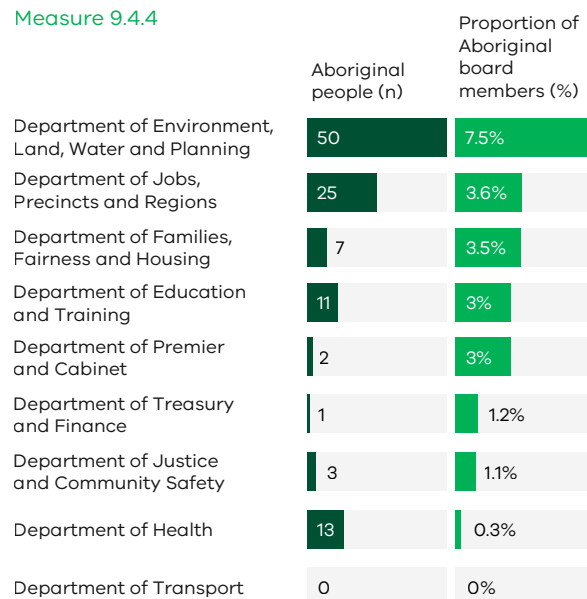
Source: Victorian Public Sector Commission internal records

Measure 9.4.4 Number of Aboriginal people participating on Victorian Government boards

The proportion of Aboriginal Victorians on Victorian Government boards reached 1.6 per cent and the number of Aboriginal Victorian members increased to 112 (up by 25 members) in 2021. This proportion exceeds the proportion of Aboriginal population in the state by 0.6 per cent. When looking at the proportion of Aboriginal Victorians on Victorian Government boards by departments, for two out of nine departments, the proportion is less than the proportion of Aboriginal population in the state. More needs to be done by these departments to increase Aboriginal representation.

Aboriginal representation on Victorian Government boards vary by department in 2022

Measure 9.4.4



Source: Victorian Public Sector Commission internal records

Barring Djinang Aboriginal Employment Strategy

The Victorian Government's current five-year strategy to enhance Aboriginal employment outcomes across the Victorian public sector, led by the Victorian Public Sector Commission (VPSC), has delivered multiple initiatives to enhance attraction, recruitment and retention of Aboriginal staff. This includes targeted employment programs and career development and support for staff, as well as programs aimed at strengthening Aboriginal leadership capacity.

The current strategy is expiring in 2023. In 2022, the VPSC conducted an external evaluation on the strategy and its programs, which was undertaken by an Aboriginal consultancy (PwC's Indigenous Consulting, itself a majority Indigenous owned, led and staffed consulting firm).

Work on a new Barring Djinang Strategy for 2023-2028 is underway in partnership with Aboriginal public sector employees and broader Aboriginal community members and organisations.

The extension of the Barring Djinang Advisory Group and Barring Djinang Community of Practice has continued to ensure wider consultation. Direct feedback from Aboriginal participants of Barring Djinang programs has been actively and regularly sought to help ensure that the new programs will continue to meet the needs of Aboriginal employees.

The new strategy will build on the successes learnings from the first five years, and continue to drive positive employment outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians in the public sector.

Goal 10: Aboriginal income potential is realised



Overview

Measures under Goal 10 have remained stable

Aboriginal workers took home in 2021 an estimated \$1.81 billion in income. A growth of over \$1 billion since 2016.

Although great gains have been made, Aboriginal Victorians still experience the effects of being locked out the economy. Participation in the economy has been limited through historical and structural racism and an economic system based in the dispossession of their lands and waters.

Closing the Gap – Relevant Outcomes and Targets for Goal 10

The National Agreement does not contain outcomes and targets that align with this VAAF goal. Victoria is pursuing more ambitious and comprehensive goals under the VAAF, which are reported on in this chapter and the Data Dashboard.

Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally

Not applicable.

Data Note



All measures under this goal are reported on.



Objective 10.1 Increase Victoria's Aboriginal gross income and decrease the opportunity cost of Aboriginal income inequality

Measure 10.1.1 Victoria's Aboriginal income as sum of all income earned by Aboriginal workers

Aboriginal Victorians make a significant and valuable contribution to the Victorian economy, with an aggregated income of \$1.811 billion per annum, almost 5 times more than the aggregated income of \$381 million per annum in 2006 and more than doubling the aggregated income of \$750 million per annum in 2016. Despite workforce participation steadily increasing, Aboriginal Victorians continue to experience a pay gap when compared to non-Aboriginal Victorians. In 2021, on average, Aboriginal Victorians earned around 19 cents less per dollar than non-Aboriginal Victorians. The potential for Aboriginal Victorians aggregated income to

grow even further and the pay gap between Aboriginal Victorians and non-Aboriginal Victorians to reduce has been hindered by a multitude of factors including differences in employment by occupation and industry, discriminatory employment practices, and gender inequality experienced by Aboriginal Victorians.

Measure 10.1.2 Opportunity cost: Aboriginal gross income at parity minus actual

The opportunity cost of not having an Aboriginal workforce and income parity has increased from \$360 million per annum in 2016 to \$561 million per annum in 2021. Realising Aboriginal workforce potential and reaching income parity is critical and could impact outcomes in the other domains.

Aboriginal Victorians take home approximately 1.8 billion dollars in 2021

Measure 10.1.1

Income range (\$ per week)	Mid-point (\$ per week)	Number of persons	Estimated Total Income (\$)
Nil income	\$-	4,253	\$00
\$1-\$149	\$75	1,743	\$130,000
\$150-\$299	\$225	3,202	\$720,000
\$300-\$399	\$350	4,057	\$1,420,000
\$400-\$499	\$450	3,970	\$1,790,000
\$500-\$649	\$575	3,742	\$2,150,000
\$650-\$799	\$725	3,258	\$2,360,000
\$800-\$999	\$900	3,671	\$3,300,000
\$1,000-\$1,249	\$1,125	3,786	\$4,260,000
\$1,250-\$1,499	\$1,375	2,745	\$3,770,000
\$1,500-\$1,749	\$1,625	2,192	\$3,560,000
\$1,750-\$1,999	\$1,875	1,474	\$2,760,000
\$2,000-\$2,999	\$2,500	1,975	\$4,940,000
\$3,000 - \$3,499	\$3,250	363	\$1,180,000
\$3500 or more	\$3,500	707	\$2,470,000
Total weekly income			\$34,830,000
Total annual income			\$1,810,970,000

Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing

Digital inclusion

The National Agreement includes a socioeconomic outcome and target for digital inclusion. This is relevant to Domain 3 of the VAAF but does not align directly to any VAAF goals or measures.

Outcome 17: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to information and services enabling participation in informed decision-making regarding their own lives.

Target 17: By 2026, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have equal levels of digital inclusion.

Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally

Outcome 17: In 2014-15, 73.5 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over across Australia accessed the internet in their home, compared to 89.5 per cent in Victoria.

There are no comparable data on home access to the internet for non-Indigenous people.

This outcome relies on data from National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey. No new data is available since the baseline year of 2014-15.



Domain 3 - Victorian Government Investment and Action

The Victorian Government is committed to building a strong and competitive economy that provides opportunity, choice and prosperity for Aboriginal Victorians.

The key Aboriginal Governance Forum for realising outcomes in this Domain is the Yuma Yirramboi Council.

Aboriginal economic development

Yuma Yirramboi (Invest in Tomorrow) Strategy

In June 2022, Yuma Yirramboi (Invest in Tomorrow) Strategy was launched with a \$25 million funding envelope to support the Strategy's implementation. The Strategy articulates the Victorian Government and Victorian Aboriginal Communities' shared vision to support wealth creation and achieve economic parity for Aboriginal Victorians within a generation.

Yuma Yirramboi Strategy was led and developed by the former Victorian Aboriginal Employment and Economic Council's (VAEEC) Koori Caucus and Aboriginal Victorians. Yuma Yirramboi Strategy has been built on the following six pillars: culture, people, business, wealth creation, jobs, and accountability.

Yuma Yirramboi Council and Koori Caucus

Yuma Yirramboi Council (Council) is DJSIR's advisory body on Aboriginal Community priorities and replaces the inaugural Victorian Aboriginal Employment and Economic Council. The Council is a key enabler towards achieving shared self-determination goals. The Koori Caucus of the Council provides expert advice to the Victorian Government and DJSIR Secretary and wider leadership on policy and programs designed to improve Aboriginal economic outcomes and enable shared decision-making. The first meeting of the newly appointed Koori Caucus was held in October 2022.

 Transfer power and resource

Traditional Owner Economic Development Program

The Creating Jobs and Supporting Economic Recovery for Aboriginal Victorians grant program supports business-ready projects and provides short-term employment outcomes. This includes investment of approximately \$16 million to support 11 Traditional Owner Corporations in 2021-22. Further funding under this program also supported two Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations towards social enterprise projects.

 Transfer power and resource

2022 Kinaway Business Awards

DJSIR are the major sponsor of the Kinaway Business Awards Night, hosted and presented by Kinaway Aboriginal Chamber of Commerce. The awards celebrate and champion Kinaway members and partners in the Aboriginal business sector in Victoria who are doing outstanding work in their fields. The awards recognise Kinaway members who have shown strength, resilience, and innovation in their businesses over the past twelve months and acknowledge Kinaway partners who have demonstrated their commitment to working with the Aboriginal business sector in Victoria.

Geelong Aboriginal Business Hub

In 2022, DJSIR provided funding to support and resource the fit out and establishment of the Ngarrimili Geelong Aboriginal Business Hub (the Hub) within the Westfield Shopping Complex in Geelong. The Hub will provide facilities and a base of operations for a range of supports to the Victorian Aboriginal business and artist community within the Geelong region. The Hub is due to open to Aboriginal businesses in 2023.

Trade Routes

In July 2022, Global Victoria and DJSIR hosted an inbound delegation of Māori businesses to Victoria. A two-day program was organised and delivered providing an opportunity for Victorian Aboriginal businesses to meet with Māori businesses. In 2022, the Victorian Government also funded RMIT to deliver the Trade Routes program to support Aboriginal companies to become more export ready and engage internationally.

Sport and recreation

Aboriginal Sport Participation Grant (ASPG) program

The ASPG program provides a single-entry point for Aboriginal Victorians to access funding that will assist in addressing a range of barriers to community sport participation across the state. The ASPG program provides funding of \$100,000 over two rounds to the Aboriginal community to increase participation in carnivals and community sport. The Program has been highly popular, with the recent Round 4 being significantly over-subscribed.

Get Active Kids Voucher Program

In 2022, 1,821 applicants identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander in the Get Active Kids Voucher Program, four per cent of all applications submitted under Rounds 4 and 5.

Together More Active (TMA) Program

The TMA program provides grants that assist organisations in the sport and active recreation sector with initiatives that increase inclusive participation and enhance sector capability.

Recent investments through TMA include \$10,000 to the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Limited (VACSAL) towards junior state-wide netball and football carnivals, and \$50,000 to Surfing Victoria towards the Indigenous surfing carnivals (with funding for this initiative also provided by VicHealth).

Community Service Agreements

DJSIR is continuing to work to embed Aboriginal outcomes in funding agreements including Community Service Agreements with Professional Clubs, such as Melbourne Football Club, North Melbourne Football Club and St Kilda Football Club, as part of major infrastructure investments.

Agriculture

Traditional Owner led Native Food and Botanicals Strategy

In 2022, Agriculture Victoria continued to fund the implementation of the Traditional Owner Native Food and Botanicals Strategy, providing a pathway to capture economic benefits and Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property in native food and botanicals.

The Strategy recognises Traditional Owners rights to restore and reclaim custodianship of their knowledge and practices associated with native species and ensure the native foods and botanicals sector is a culturally safe and ethical industry that benefits custodians and their communities. The Strategy provides a policy and practice framework for an effective Traditional Owner-led native foods and botanicals industry.

Djakitjuk Djanga Grant Program

Agriculture Victoria and FVTOC partnered to support Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Victorians to lead the development of Victoria's native food and botanicals industry through the Djakitjuk Djanga (meaning Country's food in Jaara language) grant program. The program awarded 13 Aboriginal businesses and organisations grants to develop native food and botanical enterprises.

Aboriginal Landholder Information Service

The Aboriginal Landholder Information Service works with Aboriginal landholders to assist them to improve economic activity on their land through best practice agricultural production and contemporary land and biodiversity management.

In 2022, the program continued to support Djakitjuk Djanga grant recipients with information, advice, and connections to technical experts within Agriculture Victoria. It also actively contributed to the success of the Djakitjuk Djanga Community of Practice facilitated by FVTOC.

Agricultural College Modernisation Program

The \$50 million Agricultural College Modernisation Program is delivering the agriculture skills of the future and helping more Victorians pursue exciting careers in agriculture.

As part of the program in 2022, the Victorian Government announced the \$15 million Agriculture TAFE and Training Fund and \$5.5 million Secondary Schools Agriculture Fund. Both funds aim to ensure Victoria's agricultural education and training system incorporates Aboriginal knowledge and practices and improves cultural safety and inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

An ACMP Aboriginal working group was created to identify the cultural safety and agriculture education priorities of Aboriginal Victorians. The working group provides advice to Agriculture Victoria about the design and delivery of the program, with the aim of increasing Aboriginal involvement in agricultural education through the ACMP.

Commonwealth Games

First Peoples are being recognised from the outset of the Commonwealth Games planning, placing them at the heart of Victoria 2026. First Peoples representatives were on the world stage at the Birmingham closing ceremony – the first time Aboriginal people have invited a Commonwealth Games to their land.

The Office of Commonwealth Games and Organising Committee are providing funding to Traditional Owners to support their resourcing

of Games-related planning and activities. First Peoples' voices are embedded in Games governance, with the First Peoples Leadership Group established formally as a subcommittee of the Organising Committee.

Prioritise culture

Creative Victoria

First Peoples Direction Circle

The Creative Victoria First Peoples Directions Circle (formally known as the First Peoples Partnership Group) was established in 2019, to embed Aboriginal self-determination and community voice throughout Victoria's next creative industries strategy, Creative State 2025 – with, and for the benefit of, First Peoples creative industries throughout Victoria.

The First Peoples Directions Circle is a partnership with Creative Victoria - with shared authority and decision-making responsibility for the implementation of all First Peoples programs, strategic initiatives, and directions.

The First Peoples Direction Circle ensured that the 11 Guiding Principles of Aboriginal Self-Determination were named in Creative State 2025.

First Peoples Creative Industries Forum

Creative State 2025 commits to the establishment of an annual First Peoples Creative Industries Forum to celebrated and grow Victoria's First Peoples creative industries sector. The inaugural Forum had the theme of 'Strong culture, creative future'. Originally programmed as a live event at Arts Centre Melbourne, to keep First Peoples communities as safe as possible, the Forum pivoted to four online webinars held over two weeks in late November 2021, followed up by a regional roadshow in 2022.

Creative Victoria Grants - First Peoples Funding

Creative State 2025 has committed to dedicated First Peoples funding streams across all Creative Victoria grants programs. The input of the First Peoples Direction Circle and First Peoples external creative peers into the program design and assessment process has ensured that they are culturally safe and adhere to Aboriginal cultural ways of working. As a result, more First Peoples creatives are applying for support, with higher success rates across all grant rounds.

 Transfer power and resource

Tourism and events

First Peoples' Tourism Plan

First Peoples' tourism has been identified as a priority tourism 'pillar' for Victoria with competitive strengths and significant growth potential for Victoria's visitor economy.

The Visitor Economy Recovery and Reform Plan and Regional Tourism Review identified this opportunity, and the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions (DJSIR) has commenced work on the development of a First Peoples' Tourism Plan.

The First Peoples' Tourism Plan will work to empower local communities to develop their own tourism products, unify strategies that are already in place and identify opportunities to enhance cultural experiences by linking existing First Peoples' tourism products.

DJSIR has provided funding and recruitment support to two Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs) to each onboard a VPS5 equivalent tourism officer to undertake tourism product analysis and development of a Cultural Tourism Plan. By December 2022 positions in both Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation and Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation had been successfully filled.

First Peoples Infrastructure Projects

Investment in Victoria's visitor economy is focused on building a strong pipeline of demand-driving infrastructure, by facilitating infrastructure planning, and providing investment for shovel-ready tourism projects.

DJSIR is developing a Tourism Investment Toolkit to support current and potential investors. The Toolkit has supported self-determination through an engagement process led by First Peoples, Traditional Owners and Aboriginal majority-owned businesses to inform the deliverables within the Toolkit.

In addition, the Victorian Government has invested in key infrastructure including:

Flagship Tourism Infrastructure Projects

- Brambuk Cultural Centre Revitalisation – funding for Barengi Gadjin Land Council, Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation and Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation through Parks Victoria - \$5.8 million
- Tourism funding for Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation including development at the Dalki Garringa Native Nursery site - \$350,000

Regional Tourism Investment Fund - Stimulus

- Welcome to Dja Dja Wurrung Country Castlemaine - Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation and Mount Alexander Shire Council - \$400,000

Regional Tourism Investment Projects

- Budj Bim – Development of visitor experiences at Lake Condah and the Tae Rak Traps - Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation - \$7,000,000
- Central Goldfields Art Gallery Indigenous Interpretive Garden – Stage 2 & 3 – partnership between Central Goldfields Shire Council and Dja Dja Wurrung - \$225,000

Enabling Tourism Fund

- Budj Bim Strategic Investment Plan - Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation - \$575,000
- Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC) Gunya Yanakie Nanjet Brautalung - Feasibility Study, Business Case, Concept Designs - \$430,000
- Ned's Corner Biocultural Precinct - First People of the Millewa Mallee - Feasibility Study - \$200,000
- Victorian Cultural Collections Lab - City of Greater Bendigo in partnership with Dja Dja Wurrung Aboriginal Clans Corporation - \$120,000
- Narana Wildlife and Botanical Educational Facilities in Grovedale Masterplan - \$27,600

Aboriginal Community Infrastructure Program

The Aboriginal Community Infrastructure Program (ACIP) is a grants program which enables community-controlled Aboriginal organisations to build new fit-for-purpose infrastructure or to repair, refurbish or expand existing infrastructure. Funding is also available for organisations to develop fully scoped and costed feasibility study/business cases to explore their options and plan future infrastructure projects.

In July 2022, the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples approved funding of \$11,078,992 to 21 Aboriginal-controlled organisations. The 2022-23 funding package included \$2,018,086 for nine repairs and minor works projects; \$8,876,906 for six capital works and upgrades projects; and \$300,000 for six feasibility studies/business cases projects.

ACIP is strongly aligned with the Closing the Gap Priority Reform Two: Building the Community-Controlled Sector.

Local Government

Victorian Aboriginal and Local Government Strategy

Funding of \$140,000 was provided to Reconciliation Victoria to develop, design and initiate activities that facilitate greater awareness and understanding of the Victorian Aboriginal and Local Government Strategy.

Your Community, Country and Council

The former Minister for Local Government, Hon Shaun Leane MP announced a grant of \$50,000 to the Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA) to continue the Your Community, Country & Council project for the 2021-22 year. This 12-month project seeks to evaluate the 2020 project and co-design a project plan and content for delivery ahead of the next local government elections in 2024. A First Nations-identified Steering Committee has been engaged to drive the 2021-22 project and determine priorities.

Regional Development

Regional Economic Development Strategies

DJSIR undertook engagement with Traditional Owners across Victoria's regions to develop Victoria's Regional Economic Development Strategies (REDS). The REDS and supporting analysis used those engagements to inform the impact of strategic directions for economic growth on Aboriginal Victorians and Traditional Owners. DJSIR continues to engage with Traditional Owners to inform the implementation of the REDS.

Women's Portfolio

Ngarrimili - Empowering First Nations Women in Business

This program supported by DFFH with \$420,000 over two years supports First Nations women (including business owners, creatives and entrepreneurs) by providing one-on-one personally tailored support, along with 10 workshops covering a range of different topics, including accounting and financial advice, wellbeing supports, business planning, grant writing, website development and business goal settings. It is anticipated that 80 First Nations women will be supported through the program, with 40 women participating in 2022-23.

Domain 4: Health & Wellbeing



Our shared commitment:

*Self-determining, healthy and safe
Aboriginal people and communities.*

Holistic approaches to Aboriginal health and wellbeing are critical to improving outcomes. This includes not only considering the physical, mental and social determinants of Aboriginal health, wellbeing and safety, but also the cultural determinants, such as connection to culture and Country. While many Aboriginal Victorians report good health, inequities remain.

Together, government service providers, Aboriginal organisations and communities must take significant steps to ensure that all Aboriginal Victorians have access to high-quality, culturally safe and responsive health care services. Improving overall health outcomes and having a good quality of life is a basic necessity to ensure all Victorian Aboriginal communities can thrive.





Goal 11: Aboriginal Victorians enjoy health and longevity



Overview

Measures under Goal 11 have remained stable

Historically Aboriginal Victorians have experienced shorter lives due to the ongoing effects of colonialisation. Reversing that trend is key to a more self-determined future.

Lung cancer was diagnosed in Aboriginal Victorians more than any other cancer between 2016-2020. Promisingly, rates of daily smoking are decreasing year on year. There have also been minor decreases in the number of potentially preventable hospitalisations.

Concerningly, less Aboriginal Victorians reported they were in excellent or very good health in 2020. Some of that may be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Goal 11 directly aligns with the following Closing the Gap Outcome and Target

Outcome 1 People enjoy long and healthy lives

- **Target 1** Close the gap in life expectancy within a generation, by 2031.

Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally

Outcome 1: Nationally, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males born in 2015-2017 are expected to live to 71.6 years and females to 75.6 years, and non-Indigenous males and females to 80.2 years and 83.4 years respectively.

Nationally, based on progress from the baseline, the target shows improvement but is not on track to be met for males or females.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander estimates of life expectancy are currently not produced for Victoria due to the small number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths reported.

Data Note



The following measures rely on datasets that are infrequently collected. No new data was available at the time of reporting.

- Measure 11.1.1 Life expectancy at birth, by sex

Objective 11.1 Improve Aboriginal health status, quality of life and life expectancy

Measure 11.1.2 Proportion reporting 'excellent or very good' health status, by sex

Aboriginal Victorians were less likely to report they are in excellent or very good health in 2020 than 2019. Age standardised results for self-assessed health status from the Victorian Population Health Survey (VPHS) have declined to 29.7 per cent of respondents, down from 32.2 per cent in 2019. Historic results for Aboriginal Victorians for this question have not had a consistent trend, so the decline in 2020 may be attributed to variation in response.

Continued effort is required to increase survey response rates and make sure Victorian Aboriginal voices are heard in a culturally appropriate way within health reporting. The 2020 VPHS was conducted in September of 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic and results may have been affected.

Measure 11.1.3 Rate of daily smoking

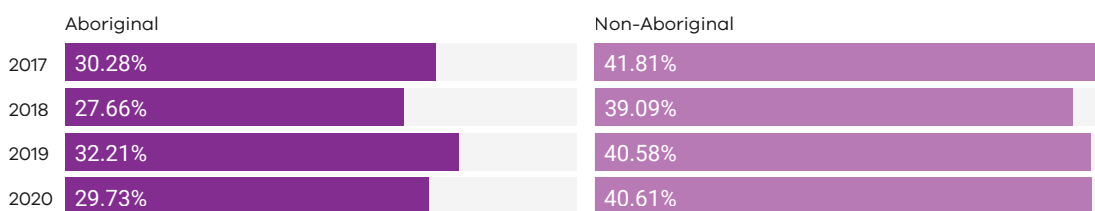
Smoking is the leading cause of lung cancer and contributes to poor health outcomes.

The proportion of adult Aboriginal Victorians who said they are daily smokers has dropped from 30.6 per cent in 2019 to 22.0 per cent in 2020, according to the VPHS. This decline is part of a longer-term trend of reduced daily tobacco smoking for Aboriginal Victorians. If this trend continues Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal rates of daily smoking should reach parity in the coming years.

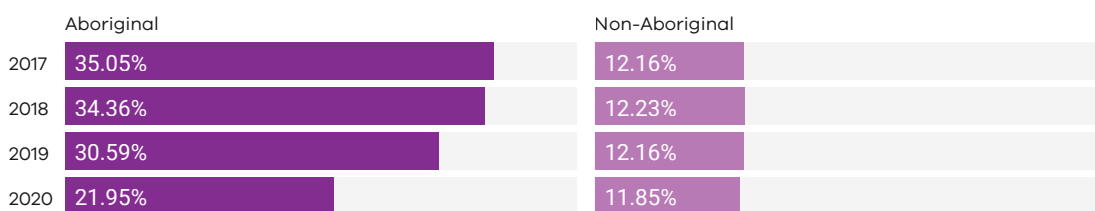
Rates of daily smoking have declined significantly

Measure 11.1.2, 11.1.3

Self assessed excellent/very good health



Rates of daily smoking



Source: Victorian Population Health Survey

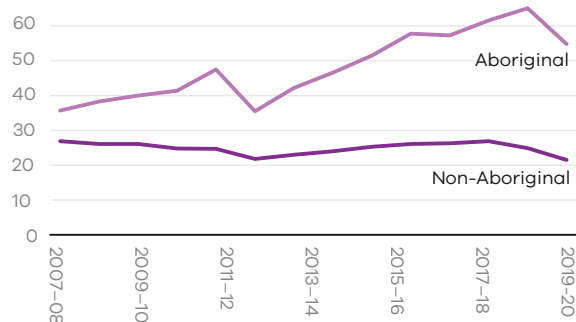
Measure 11.1.4 Rate of hospitalisations for potentially preventable causes (vaccine preventable, acute, chronic and all)

The rate of hospitalisations for potentially preventable causes declined for Aboriginal Victorians by 15.8 per cent to 54.8 hospitalisations per 1,000 people. This is the first significant decline since 2012-13. When breaking down the causes of potentially preventable hospital visits chronic illness accounts for 55.1 per cent of hospital separations. For all causes recorded separations in the past year have declined with vaccine related and acute related separations both declining to 4.1 and 21.1 separations per 1,000 population respectively. A separation is the process by which an episode of care for an admitted patient is completed.

While this decline is promising, Aboriginal separations at hospitals for potentially preventable causes is still at a historic high. When comparing the long-term trend against the non-Aboriginal population; while the rate of Aboriginal separations has grown 53.5 per cent since 2007-08 the non-Aboriginal rate has decline 20.0 per cent. There are many potential causes for this, including the ongoing effects of colonisation, dispossession, and systemic racism mean that life expectancy for Aboriginal Victorians is significantly lower than for non-Aboriginal Victorians. Preventative medicine and culturally safe medical practices are critical to reversing this trend.

While rates of potentially preventable hospitalisations are historically high the rate is declining in 2020-21

Measure 11.1.4



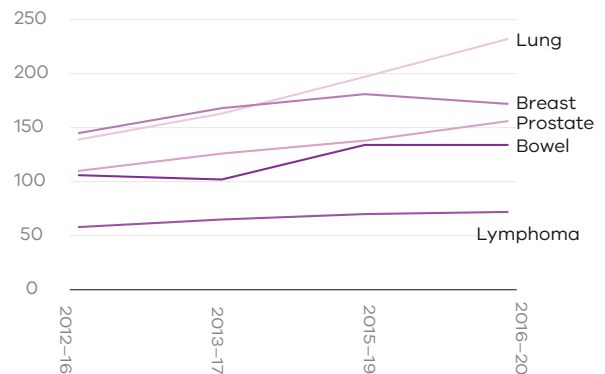
Source: ROGS 2023 Table 10A.666. AIHW (unpublished). National Hospital Morbidity Database

Measure 11.1.5 Incidence of selected cancers

Aboriginal Victorians were twice as likely to be diagnosed with cancer than their non-Aboriginal peers between 2016 and 2020. The most common cancer types diagnosed for Aboriginal Victorians were lung, breast, prostate, and bowel which account for 46.1 per cent of all cancer diagnoses. Since the 2012 to 2016 reporting period, the incidence of lung cancer among Aboriginal Victorians has grown by 66.9 per cent to 232 in the 2016 to 2020 reporting period. For non-Aboriginal Victorians, lung cancer grew only 11.4 per cent in the same period. Some of this may be attributed to increases in self-identification of Aboriginal Victorians.

Incidence of lung cancer continues to rise for Aboriginal Victorians

Measure 11.1.5



Source: Victorian Cancer Registry

Measure 11.1.6 Rate of emergency department presentations for alcohol or drug-related harm

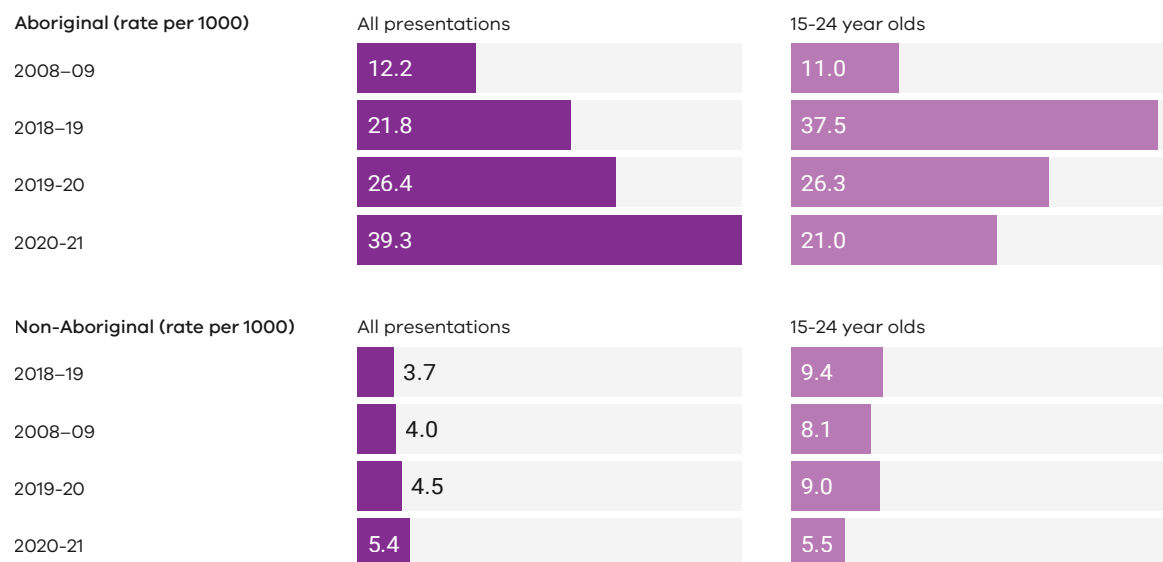
The rate of Aboriginal Victorians of all ages presenting at the emergency department for alcohol or drug related harm increased each year since 2018-19 and more than tripled since 2008-09, reaching 39.3 per 1000 presentations in 2020-21. When looking at Aboriginal Victorians aged 15-24, the rate of presentations at the emergency department for the same cause almost doubled since 2008-09, reaching 21 per 1000 presentations in 2020-21. However, unlike the rate for Aboriginal Victorians of all ages presenting to the emergency department, the rate of Aboriginal Victorians aged 15-24 presenting at the emergency department decreased each year since 2018-19.

The rate of non-Aboriginal Victorians presenting at the emergency department for the same cause has remained significantly low, relative to non-Aboriginal people. The latest reported rate for non-Aboriginal Victorians of all ages and non-Aboriginal Victorians aged 15-24 was 5.4 and 5.5 per 1000 presentations respectively in 2020-21.

In Victoria, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience fatal overdoses at a rate more than three times higher than non-Aboriginal people.⁸

The rate for alcohol and drug related presentations at Emergency Departments is increasing

Measure 11.1.6



Source: Victorian Emergency Management Data collection

8. 'Coroners Aboriginal Engagement Unit and Coroners Prevention Unit (2023). Fatal overdose among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, Victoria, 2018-2021.'

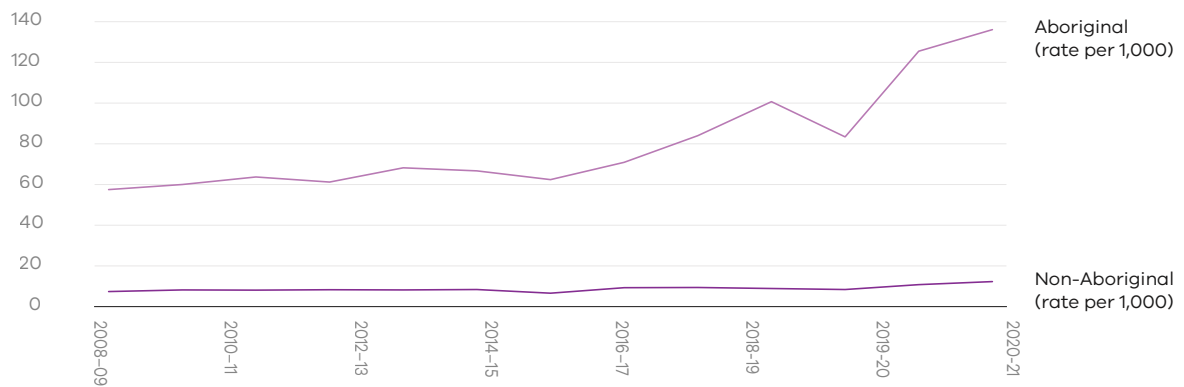
Measure 11.1.7 Specialist alcohol and other drug treatment services provided to Aboriginal Victorians

Since 2018-19, the rate of closed episodes of care for alcohol and other drug treatment increased each year for services accessed by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Victorians. In 2020-21, this rate was 11 times greater for Aboriginal Victorians than non-Aboriginal Victorians. Increases in closed episodes of care may suggest that once treatment is sought, it is effective at reducing the need for future treatment. Counting rules for this measure mean that a treatment episode is considered closed where any of the following occurs: treatment is completed or has ceased; there has been no contact between the client and treatment provider for 3 months; or there is a change in the main treatment type, principal drug of concern or delivery setting.

Lockdown restrictions and increased alcohol sales during the COVID-19 pandemic may have contributed to an increase in risky drinking and use of alcohol and other drug services. Ensuring that the risk of alcohol and other drug related harm is reduced for the community requires a greater focus on increasing protective factors and preventative measures, as well as ensuring access to high quality, culturally safe alcohol and other drug treatment services.

The use of alcohol and other drug treatment services by Aboriginal Victorians is at an all time high

Measure 11.1.7



Source: Table SE VIC.6 AIHW; Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Services National Minimum Data Set (AODTS NMDS), VAHI.

Goal 12: Aboriginal Victorians access the services they need



Overview

Measures under Goal 12 have worsened

Universal health services provided to Aboriginal people have often not met the standard of cultural safety and tolerance of differing viewpoints that we expect of government services. This has led in the past to a distrust of and an underutilisation of key medical services.

General health checks and health assessments for Aboriginal people over the age of 55 have decreased in the past year. A greater number of Aboriginal Victorians are accessing aged care services, disability services and breast cancer screening.

Goal 12 directly aligns with the following Closing the Gap Outcome and Target

The National Agreement does not contain outcomes and targets that align with this VAAF goal. Victoria is pursuing more ambitious and comprehensive goals under the VAAF, which are reported on in this chapter and the Data Dashboard.

Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally

Not applicable.

Data Note



All measures under this goal are reported on.



Objective 12.1 Improve access to health and community services for all Aboriginal Victorians

Measure 12.1.1 Proportion who received a health check or assessment by age

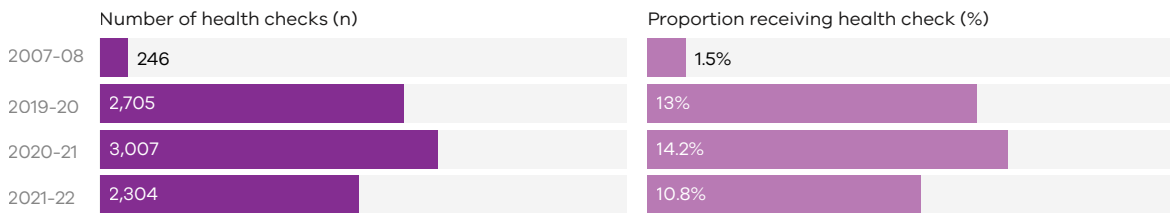
The count and proportion of all age groups who receive a health check or assessment have declined in 2021-22. The largest decline in number is within the 0-14 age range with 2,304 persons checked a decline of 23.4 per cent. There are similar declines for the other age cohorts with

the number of Aboriginal Victorians aged 15-54 and 55+ receiving health checks declining 22.9 per cent and 15.4 per cent respectively. Although it should be noted that the number of health checks on the three age cohorts (0-14, 15-54, 55+) have increased nine times, three times, and five times respectively their level at the baseline year of 2007-08.

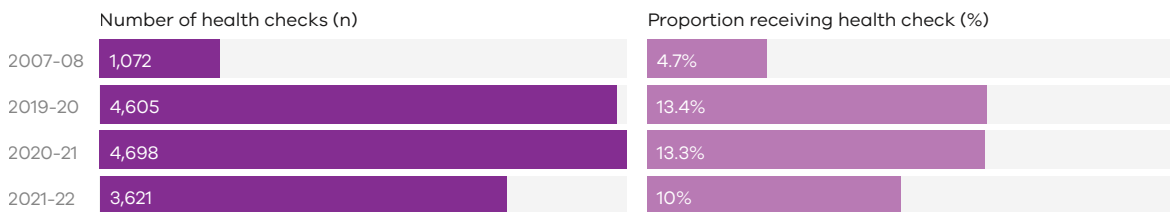
There has been a drop in the number of Aboriginal people who received a health check

Measure 12.1.1

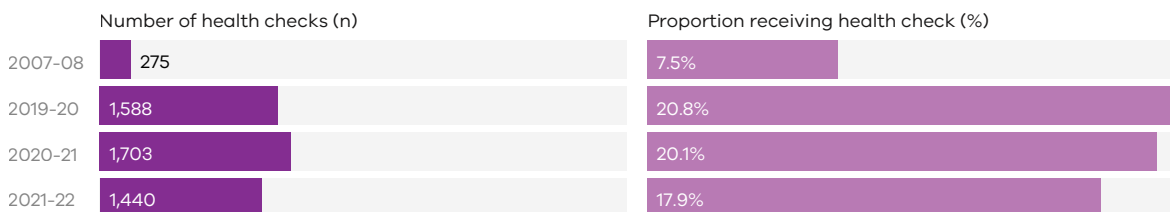
Children 0-14 years



Adults 15-54 years



Adults 55 years or over



Source: ROGS 2023 Table 10A.24 [Department of Health unpublished, MBS data collection]

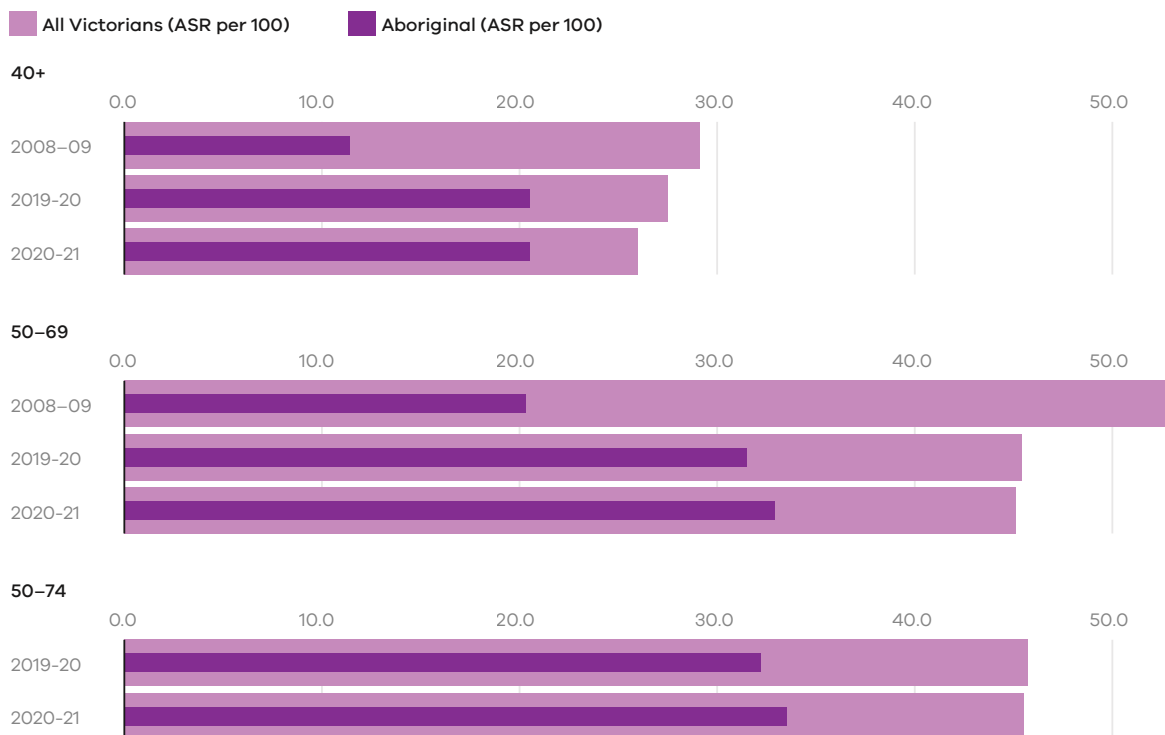
Measure 12.1.2 Participation rates for cancer screening

The BreastScreen Australia program actively invites women aged 50-74 years to participate in the program. Aboriginal Victorian participation rates for breast cancer screening in the target age range (50-74 years) have been increasing from 2019-20 to 2020-21. This is compared to a decrease in the overall Victorian breast screening participation rate during this period as breast screening services were paused between 25 March and 11 May 2020. Upon resumption of service delivery there was a reduced screening capacity under additional infection control measures. Both 50-69 and 50-74 year old Aboriginal women's participation in screenings

increased by over 4 per cent to 32.9 and 33.5 per 100 people respectively with 40+ women remaining stable at 20.5 per 100 people. The long-term trend is also positive with Aboriginal women aged 40+ participation growing by 79.8 per cent for 40+ year olds (from 11.4 per 100 people in 2008-09), 62.0 per cent for 50-69 year olds (from 20.3 per 100 people in 2008-09) and 17.9 per cent for 50-74 year olds (from 28.4 per 100 people in 2014-15). Breast cancer remains one of the highest detected cancers. Early detection is key to provide adequate treatment and increase survivability.

More Aboriginal women are participating in breast screenings than ever before

Measure 12.1.2



Source: ROGS 2023 Tables 10A.49 and 10A.50. Participation in BreastScreen Australia; AIHW (various years) BreastScreen Australia monitoring reports.]

Beautiful Shawl Project - reducing barriers to breast screening

In 2018, a partnership was formed between BreastScreen Victoria, the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS) and the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) to trial a cultural screening shawl with Aboriginal women.

The success of the trial led to The Beautiful Shawl Project where BSV and VACCHO partner with ACCOs across the state to reduce barriers to breast cancer screening. The purpose of the shawl is to increase the cultural safety and comfort of Aboriginal women participating in breast screening, and subsequently, breast screening participation rates of Aboriginal women.

The Project provides customised screening shawls to Aboriginal women that are culturally appropriate, familiar and beautiful to wear during their breast screen. The shawls, designed by talented local artists, are gifts to take home after screening.

The Project has supported hundreds of women to access important health services with BreastScreen Victoria’s mobile screening service visiting over 15 ACCOs once every two years.

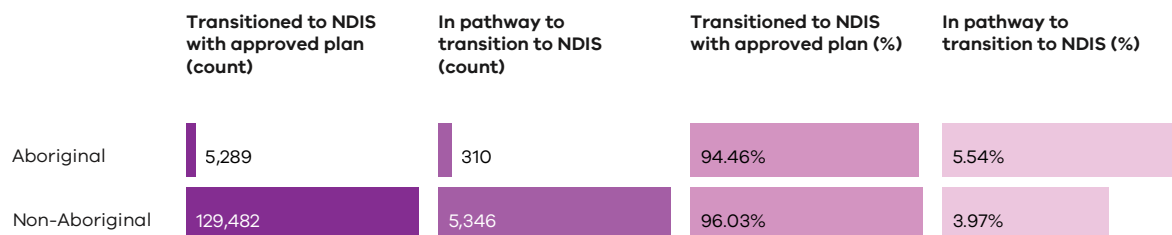
Measure 12.1.3 Proportion and number accessing the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

As of December 2022, 5,599 people identifying as Aboriginal in Victoria had access to the NDIS. The proportion of these with an approved plan was 94.5 per cent (5,289) compared to 96.0 per cent for people identifying as non-Aboriginal. A high number of people with access to the NDIS

have an Aboriginal status not stated (27,592). To understand the full extent of access to the NDIS and the potential need for NDIS services, more needs to be done so that people with a disability feel safe to identify as Aboriginal.

Aboriginal Victorians have access to the NDIS at similar rates to Non-Aboriginal in 2022

Measure 12.1.3



Source: National Disability Insurance Agency - RJ-C Dataset - 31 December 2022

Measure 12.1.4 Number and proportion accessing aged care services

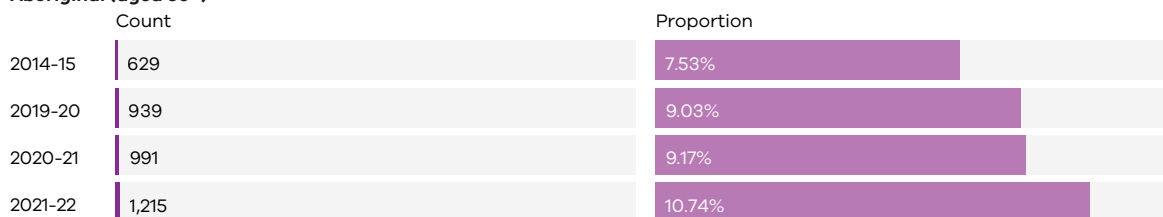
The number of Aboriginal Victorians accessing aged care services has increased in 2021-22 to 1,215; a 22.6 per cent annual growth. This represents 10.7 per cent of all Aboriginal

Victorians. Over the longer term the number of Aboriginal Victorians in aged care has almost doubled since 2014-15 with 629 people accessing aged care services. Culturally safe aged care facilities are an important part of late-stage life care.

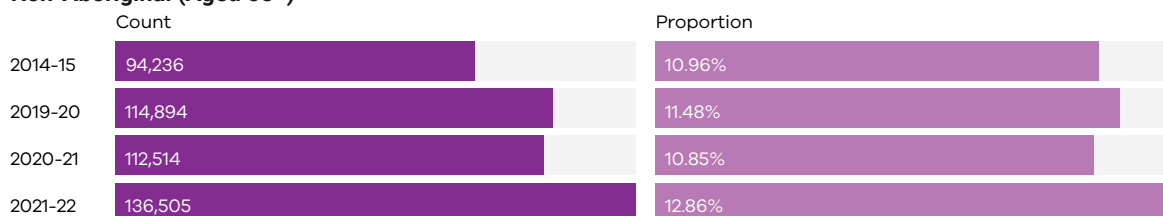
The number and proportion of Aboriginal Victorians accessing aged care services continues to grow

Measure 12.1.4

Aboriginal (aged 50+)



Non-Aboriginal (Aged 65+)



Source: Aged care data snapshot, GEN Aged Care Data, AIHW

Aboriginal Advancement League Elders Lunch to promote COVID-19 safety

The Aboriginal Advancement League Elders Lunch on 13 December 2022 was instigated to respond to a COVID-19 wave and prepare for the upcoming Christmas period. The goal of this program engagement was to ensure COVID-19 information was current, accessible and reached Community at the grass roots level.

The Department of Health (DH) supported the event with one off funding, RATs and N95 masks and merchandise promoting COVID

protective behaviours. These 'care packs' were distributed to 150 Elders and included information about anti-viral medication and what to do when you get COVID. The event encouraged Elders to seek medical advice about anti-viral medication in advance of getting sick and presented messages to the younger generation about caring for Elders.

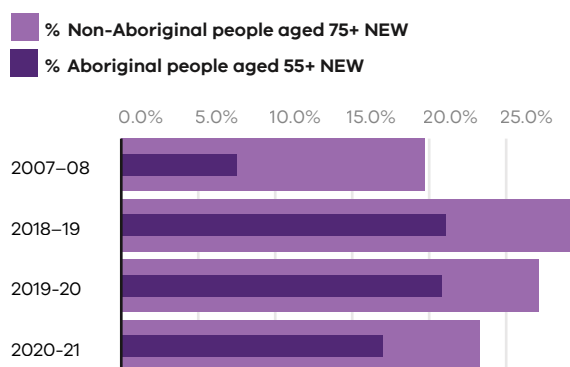
3KND broadcasted from the event and DH Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff were interviewed on live radio to share information about COVID-19. 3KND is a state-wide radio broadcaster, has a big following and is widely considered the "Voice of Indigenous Victoria".

Measure 12.1.5 Number and proportion of people aged 55 years or over who had an annual health assessment

In 2021-22, 1,440 older Aboriginal Victorians received an annual health assessment. This is a decline from 1,588 in 2019-20. Over the longer term, the results are more positive with the number of assessments increasing 11.9 per cent since 2016-17 (1,287 people) and 158 per cent since 2011-12 (558). There are many factors to consider when understanding the fluctuations of health assessments. Long term trends can be understood to be both increased safety for Aboriginal Victorians to identify to health care professionals, a general aging of the Aboriginal population, and increased need for services. The recent declines in health assessments were during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and may have been affected by lockdowns, travel restrictions and the need to not overwhelm frontline medical services. Overall, annual health checks provided by ACCOs have been widely successful and the trend in the number of health assessment may change in future.

The proportion of annual health assessments is declining

Measure 12.1.5



Source: ROGS 2023 Table 10A.23. Australian Government Department of Health (unpublished) Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) statistics; ABS 2020 (and previous issues), Quarterly Population Estimates (ERP), Australia, December 2019 (and previous years), Cat. no. 3101.0, Canberra; ABS 2019, Estimates and Projections, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2006 to 2031, Cat. no. 3238.0, Canberra.

Measure 12.1.6. Services implement strategies, partnerships and campaigns, and offer care and support that is inclusive and address the needs of Aboriginal people who are LGBTIQ+

Victoria’s first whole-of-government LGBTIQ+ strategy, *Pride in our future: Victoria’s LGBTIQ+ strategy 2022–32* was launched in February 2022. Priority area 2 is Equitable, inclusive, and accessible services. Implementation of the strategy is underway, including action to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender diverse, intersex, queer, sistergirl and brotherboy (LGBTIQ+SB) communities. See below case study and further detail under Victorian Government investment and action section.

Koorie Pride Victoria - sector-wide yarning event

In December 2022, the Victorian Commissioner for LGBTIQ+ Communities and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, supported Koorie Pride Victoria to deliver a sector-wide yarning event, inviting leaders from Aboriginal Health services and LGBTIQ+ organisations.

The event, held on Wadawurrung Country in Geelong, aimed to build connections, strengthen leadership and explore how both sectors can ensure their services are culturally safe and responsive for LGBTIQ+ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Over 70 people attended, reflecting on their professional and lived experiences through workshops on identity, cultural awareness and allyship. Event attendees have already begun implementation of projects to increase support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rainbow communities, including Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative CEO, Simon Flagg, who has since become an executive champion for LGBTIQ+ equality. Joe Ball, CEO of LGBTIQ+ organisation Switchboard Victoria, also reflected on the importance of this ongoing cross-sector work as a “joint project of the heart.”

Goal 13: Health and community services are culturally safe and responsive



Overview

Measures under Goal 13 have worsened or remained stable

Concerningly reports of racism within health settings are increasing. Culturally safe medical services should be available to all people. With no significant increases in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people employed in the health and social services sector over the past five years (2016 to 2021) it is hard to see how the health and social services sector will reform.

Closing the Gap – Relevant Outcomes and Targets for Goal 13

The National Agreement does not contain outcomes and targets that align with this VAAF goal. Victoria is pursuing more ambitious and comprehensive goals under the VAAF, which are reported on in this chapter and the Data Dashboard.

Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally

Not applicable.

Data Note



The following measures rely on datasets that are infrequently collected. No new data was available at the time of reporting.

- **Measure 13.1.2** Proportion reporting positive client experience of GP services

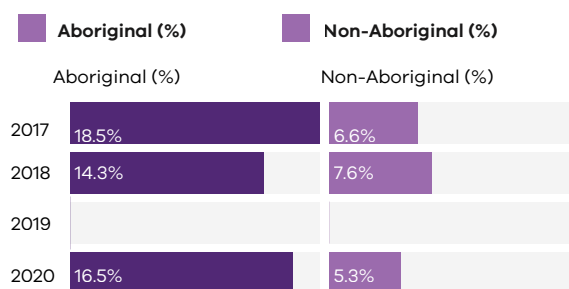
Objective 13.1 Increase the cultural safety and responsiveness of services

Measure 13.1.1 Proportion reporting experiences of racism in the health system

Aboriginal Victorians experience racism at three times the rate of non-Aboriginal Victorians. For the 2020 VPHS, 16.5 per cent of Aboriginal respondents said that they had experienced racism in health settings in the past 12 months. This is compared with 5.3 per cent for non-Aboriginal respondents. It is difficult to determine the long-term trend for this measure using the VPHS as there are reliability issues with the results for 2018 and the question was not asked in 2019.

Aboriginal Victorians continue to experience racism in health settings

Measure 13.1.1



Source: Victorian Population Health Survey

Measure 13.1.3 Hospitalisations where patients left against medical advice/ were discharged at own risk

808 Aboriginal Victorians left hospitals against medical advice or were discharged at their own risk in 2021-22. This is a 1.1 per cent decline from 2020-21. When analysing the long term trend the number of discharges has increased 34.2 per cent since 2017-18 (602 discharges) and 149.4 per cent since 2011-12 (324 discharges). When analysing the rate of discharges per 1000 population it is clear that Aboriginal Victorians are discharged at their own risk at much higher rates than non-Aboriginal Victorians. In 2021-22

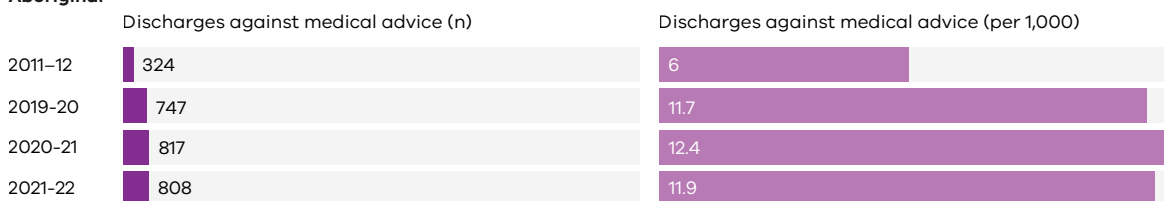
11.9 people per 1000 Aboriginal Victorians left hospitals against medical advice compared with 2.5 non-Aboriginal Victorians per 1000; a rate 4.8 times higher.

There are many factors to consider when understanding the cause of patients leaving hospital against medical advice. As per Measure 13.1.1, Aboriginal Victorians experience racism in health settings at 3 times the rate of non-Aboriginal Victorians. The impact of intergenerational trauma, distrust, and Western modes of care likely also influence experiences in the health care system.

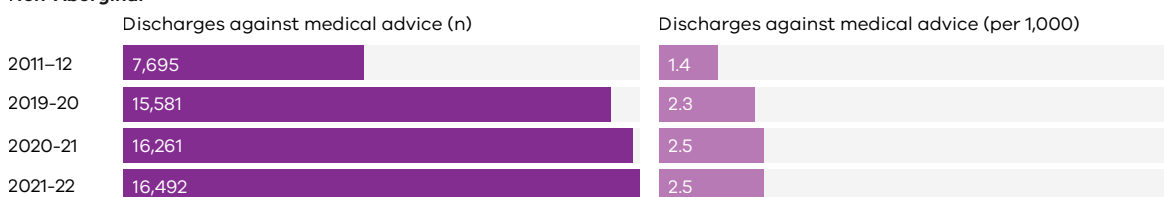
The number of Aboriginal patients being discharged at their own risk remains steady

Measure 13.1.3

Aboriginal



Non-Aboriginal



Source: Victorian Admitted Episodes Data collection

Strengthening Aboriginal cultural safety in mainstream health services

The Department of Health (DH) is committed to strengthening Aboriginal cultural safety in Victoria’s mainstream health services to improve health equity. This is a priority in the Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Partnership (AHWP) Agreement and Action Plan.

Mandatory cultural safety measures have been established along with cultural safety annual planning, reporting and acquittal. The cultural safety measures have targets based on annual reduction of 25 per cent in the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal rates of discharge against medical advice

and Did not Wait measures. Additional measures include outpatient performance and Aboriginal employment.

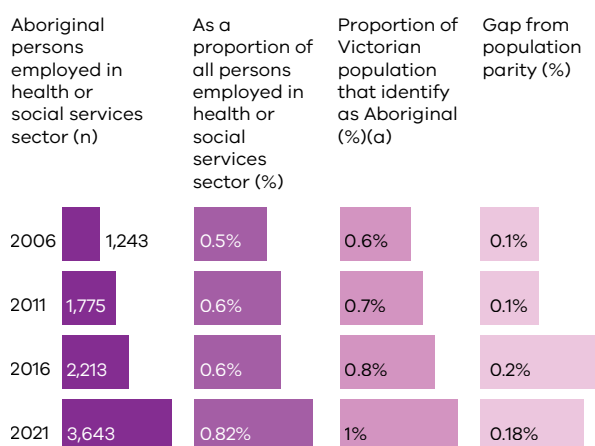
DH is also working with VACCHO to deliver an Aboriginal Cultural Safety program to all Local Public Health Units (LPHUs), which will be modelled on the existing Health Service Partnership approach. This approach is focused on strengthening the cultural safety of all LPHUs through sharing and implementing best practice approaches, whilst also working closely with the Aboriginal community-controlled sector to connect services across local regions. LPHUs were established in 2020 to administer programs for disease prevention and population health.

Measure 13.1.4 Number and proportion of Aboriginal people employed in the health or social services sector

In 2021, 3,643 people employed in the health or social services sector in Victoria identified as Aboriginal. The proportion of all workers in the sector who identify as Aboriginal has steadily increased since 2006 to 0.8 per cent of employees in 2021. When comparing this to the proportion of Victorians who identify as Aboriginal, the gap to population parity (the proportion of people employed reflecting the proportion of the population) has not changed significantly since 2006. Increases in the number of Aboriginal people employed in the health and social services sector is due to increased self-identification of Aboriginal people in general. Increasing the number of Aboriginal health and social care workers is a priority in the AHWP Action Plan including the opportunity to offer more scholarships and training programs.

The number of Aboriginal health and social care workers is increasing

Measure 13.1.4



Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing

VACCHO-led ACCO master planning project

The VACCHO-led ACCO master planning project is focused on securing land and designing new facilities for two ACCOs - Njernda Aboriginal Corporation (Njernda) in Echuca and Dandenong & District Aborigines Co-Operative Limited (DDACL). This is a collaborative project for the development of Aboriginal controlled health infrastructure and presents a new and holistic model to enable ACCOs to deliver health services with and for their community in contemporary and culturally appropriate facilities.

Working in partnership with VACCHO, Njernda and DDACL, DH is supporting the development of service plans and masterplans, and supporting the establishment of a design framework for future ACCO campuses, acknowledging that each ACCO community must determine their own healing environment.

VACCHO partners actively with DH throughout, including being included in procurement, funding arrangements and supporting master planning development. Engagement and dialogue with VACCHO and ACCOs occur at their offices and spaces, rather than at departmental offices to facilitate meetings in culturally appropriate spaces and to limit the historical power-imbalance between Government and Aboriginal organisations.

 **Transfer power & resources**

Goal 14: Aboriginal Victorians enjoy social and emotional wellbeing



Overview

Measures under Goal 14 have varied in performance

Aboriginal concepts of social and emotional wellbeing recognise that many factors contribute to holistic wellbeing, including connection to Country, culture, family and community.

For example, there has been an increase in Victorian Aboriginal people accessing clinical mental health services alongside a significant decrease in the proportion reporting they had high or very high levels of psychological distress.

Goal 14 directly aligns with the following Closing the Gap Outcome and Target

Outcome 14 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy high levels of social and emotional wellbeing

- Target 14 Significant and sustained reduction in suicide of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people towards zero.

Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally

Outcome 14: In 2021, the suicide age-standardised rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was 27.1 per 100,000 people (for NSW, QLD, WA, SA and the NT combined).

Nationally, based on progress from the baseline, the target is worsening.

Current reporting is only for jurisdictions which have adequate levels of Indigenous identification in line with national reporting guidelines.

Data Note



The following measures rely on datasets that are infrequently collected. No new data was available at the time of reporting.

- Measure 14.1.3 Proportion reporting strong social networks they can draw on in times of crisis
- Measure 14.1.4 Proportion of Aboriginal Victorians with a disability that have strong social support networks

Historical data for these measures is available on the Data Dashboard, which can be accessed via the First Peoples – State Relations website at www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/report-data-dashboard

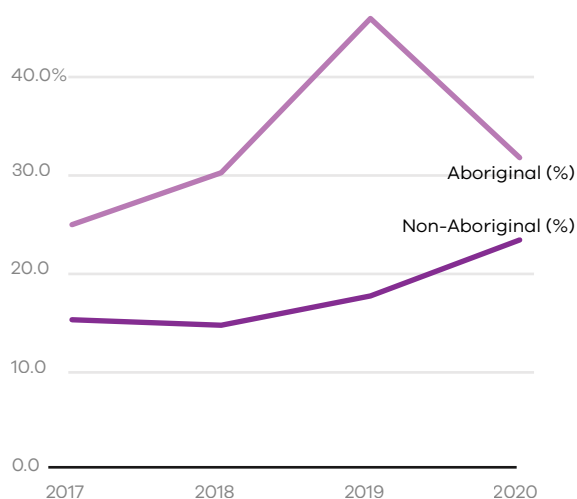
Objective 14.1 Improve Aboriginal mental health and social and emotional wellbeing

Measure 14.1.1 Proportion reporting 'high or very high' levels of psychosocial distress

The proportion of Aboriginal Victorians aged 18 and above who reported high or very high levels of psychological distress in the 2020 VPHS was down to 31.8 per cent from 45.9 per cent in 2019. This is a reversal of trend from the previous three years with Aboriginal respondents experiencing high psychological distress growing 83.8 per cent from 2017 until 2019. When comparing with the non-Aboriginal population; Aboriginal Victorians are 1.4 times more likely to report high or very high levels of psychological distress. Many factors including experiences of racism, and financial and housing stress are linked to mental health.

The number of Aboriginal people reporting high or very high levels of psychological stress has decreased significantly

Measure 14.1.1



Source: Victorian Population Health Survey

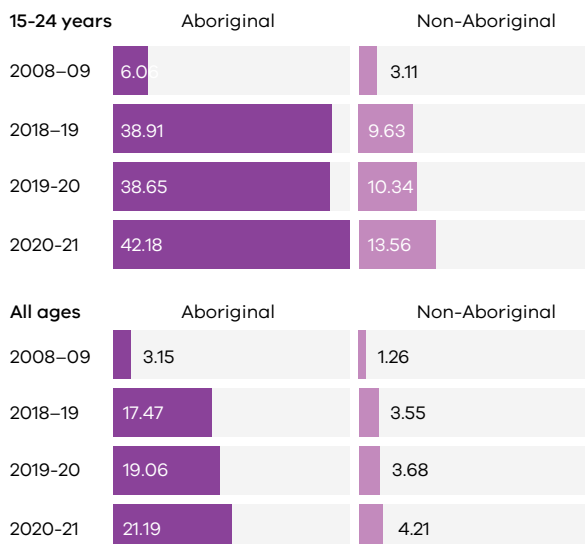
Measure 14.1.2 Rate of self-harm related emergency department presentations (by 15-24 years, and all)

Since 2008-09 the rate of self-harm-related emergency department presentations for Aboriginal Victorians of all ages has increased dramatically. Due to changes in the methodology of identifying self-harm there has been a significant increase in 2018-19 (up by 11.6 per 1000 presentations). In 2020-21 the rate of self-harm presentations increased to an all-time high of 21.2 presentations per 1,000. This is five times the rate for non-Aboriginal Victorians, which was 4.2 per 1000 presentations.

Similarly, the rate of self-harm-related emergency department presentations for Aboriginal Victorians aged 15 to 24 years old increased in 2020-21. The rate increased from 38.7 per 1000 presentations in 2019-20 to 42.2 per 1000 presentations in 2020-21. The rate of self-harm-related emergency department presentations for non-Aboriginal Victorians aged 15-24 also increased but is significantly lower than Aboriginal Victorians with the rate in 2020-21 being 13.56 presentations per 1000 people.

The rate of self-harm related presentations (per 1,000) continues to rise

Measure 14.1.2



Source: Victorian Emergency Management Data collection

Measure 14.1.5 Number of Aboriginal Victorians receiving clinical mental health services

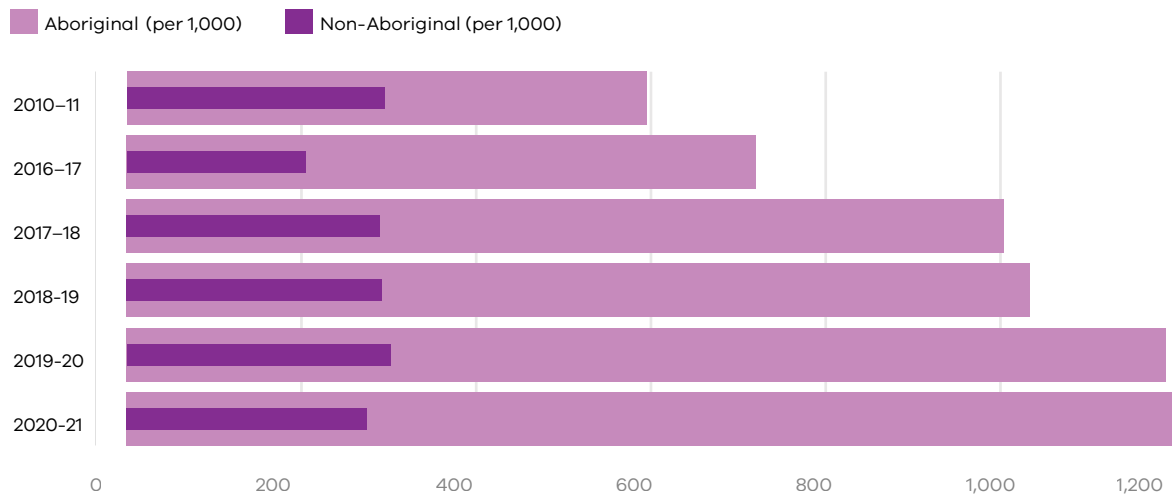
In 2020-21, Victorian Aboriginal people accessed community mental health services more than ever before with 1200.0 contacts per 1,000 people. This is a 0.01 per cent increase since 2019-20 and is 4.4 times more than the number of times non-Aboriginal Victorians accessed community health care services. The number of times non-Aboriginal Victorians accessed community mental health care services per 1000

non-Aboriginal Victorians decreased by 0.09 per cent since 2019-20. When analysing long term trend contacts with community mental health services from Aboriginal Victorians have increased 66.7 per cent since 2016-17.

Increased contacts with community mental health services does not necessarily represent a decrease in the wellbeing of Aboriginal Victorians but could be as a result of greater access to cultural safe services.

Aboriginal people continue to access community mental health services far more often than non-Aboriginal people

Measure 14.1.5



Source: Table CMHC.10: Community mental health care service contacts per 1,000 population, by Indigenous status, states and territories, 2005-06 to 2018-19; AIHW

Mallee District Aboriginal Services (MDAS) Social and Emotional Wellbeing model

This service model has been developed by Mallee District Aboriginal Services (MDAS) as part of a demonstration project that was established in 2017-18 under the Balit Murrup Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing Framework.

The service model is based around a “POD” system which is a culturally safe all-inclusive team. The team comes together to support clients on their healing and recovery journey including mental health, alcohol and other drugs support, housing, diversion from the criminal justice system and assistance reducing family violence. The system is based around the following three domains:

- crisis care and outreach requiring assertive follow up and service provision
- intensive case management with targeted interventions and cultural healing and connections with groups
- community case work.

By the end of July 2022, more than 45 clients were registered at MDAS with the Social and Emotional Wellbeing team. The success of the new model is a testament to the Social and Emotional Wellbeing team and their dedication to providing quality services.



Address trauma and support healing

Culture + Kinship program

In 2021-22, VACCHO piloted the Culture + Kinship program, an initiative that puts connection to culture, community, and Country at the centre of health and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal people. ACCOs were provided funding to implement initiatives to respond to their local context and community needs. Budja Budja Aboriginal Co-operative developed and implemented the Gariwerd Youth Connections program – a series of workshops and camps for primary and secondary school-aged Aboriginal children.

The program provided space for the children and youth to reconnect with their community and culture, through activities such as dance, art, storytelling, ceremony, and sport. VACCHO commissioned an independent evaluation of the pilot, which demonstrated significant health and wellbeing outcomes with a social value of \$8.29 for every dollar invested. Participants reported increased pride in their Aboriginal identity, improved confidence, self-esteem and mental wellbeing, and increased connection to their community. The evaluation highlights the need for, and impact of, ACCO-led approaches that focus on connections to culture, community and Country.



Prioritise culture

Domain 4 - Victorian Government Investment and Action

The Victorian Government is working with service providers, Aboriginal organisations and communities to ensure that all Aboriginal Victorians have access to high-quality, culturally safe and responsive health and wellbeing services.

The key Aboriginal Governance Forums for realising outcomes in this Domain are the Aboriginal Strategic Governance Forum and the Victorian Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Partnership Forum.

Cross portfolio

Aboriginal Workforce Fund delivery and evaluation

In 2022, the Aboriginal Workforce Fund (AWF) continued to deliver critical workforce development support to Aboriginal organisations that provide services in the DFFH portfolio.

The AWF is led by a Steering Committee made up of experienced, respected Aboriginal community services leaders who bring broad representation with a plurality of interests. Organisations in scope for the AWF and the funding allocation methodology were determined by the Steering Committee. The allocation methodology was based on indicative workforce size, with a simple equity weighting to redistribute funds from larger organisations to smaller ones. It was inclusive, non-competitive and focused on self-determined outcomes.

The Steering Committee also devised an Aboriginal-led evaluation. The procurement process involved carefully managing probity, adding protection of cultural intellectual property and data sovereignty to the RFQ documentation, and emphasising capability criteria over pricing. The experience has highlighted the opportunity to make changes to broader DFFH procurement processes. For example, by considering: a procurement panel arrangement for Aboriginal organisations.

In November 2022 an Aboriginal consultancy began delivering a process and effectiveness evaluation of the AWF. Findings and recommendations are due in August 2023.



Transfer power & resources

Disability

Victoria's submission to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (Royal Commission)

The Victorian Government provided a submission to the Royal Commission in October 2022. The submission emphasised the Victorian Government's commitment to self-determination and its support for Victoria's Treaty and truth-telling process. Specifically, the submission recommended that:

- all jurisdictions should support the self-determination of Aboriginal people with disability and the role of ACCOs in policy, governance and service delivery
- the NDIS Commission should update the NDIS Practice Standards and Quality Indicators to incorporate a focus on culturally safe service provision to Aboriginal people.

Review of the *Disability Act 2006*

The Victorian Government is reviewing the *Disability Act 2006* following the full roll out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

The Disability Inclusion Bill (the Bill) would create a new principal Act to drive whole-of-government action and accountability for advancing disability inclusion.

The Bill would:

- recognise the right to self-determination of Aboriginal people with disability
- continue to ensure that members of the Victorian Disability Advisory Council reflect the cultural and Aboriginal backgrounds of people with disability
- acknowledge the intersectional barriers to inclusion experienced by Aboriginal people with disability.

An exposure draft of the Bill was released in September 2022, accompanied by public consultation and communications campaign that engaged with Aboriginal-led organisations and peak bodies, among others. The Government is considering the consultation feedback to inform future options for legislative reform.

Funding for Stronger ACCOs, Our Way

Funding to VACCHO to support Victorian ACCOs to develop and embed the skills and business plan that are required for registration as an NDIS service provider. This will in turn grow the number of Aboriginal workers delivering NDIS supports and build NDIS market capability to respond to the needs of Aboriginal people with disability. VACCHO is working with a consultant and several ACCOs to create and implement business plans and embed management systems to support them as NDIS service providers.

Health and wellbeing

The Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Partnership Forum (AHWPF) is the lead decision-making body for Aboriginal health and wellbeing in Victoria and is co-chaired by the Minister for Health and VACCHO. It is designed to enable strategic collaboration between the Aboriginal community-controlled health sector, the mainstream health sector and government.

In 2022, the Forum developed the Victorian Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Partnership Agreement (the Agreement).

The Agreement is a commitment from the AHWPF members to work together to reform the healthcare system.

The Agreement commits members to uphold self-determination as a key principle, to work in an open and transparent manner and share information, knowledge and resources in a way that ensures accountability to shared priorities.

Accompanying the Agreement is an Action Plan that will be updated every two years, outlining the priority actions for government, the mainstream health system and the Aboriginal sector to achieve the reform priorities identified by the AHWPF. Significant community consultation informed the development of the Action Plan 2023-2025, and government is committed to ensuring all actions are implemented.

These actions are important steps along the journey towards a shared vision of better health and wellbeing for all Aboriginal Victorians, in a health system where there is no wrong point of access for any Aboriginal person

Responding to COVID-19

The COVID-19 Keeping Aboriginal Victorians Safe, Supported and Connected funding program delivered \$12m to Aboriginal health organisations to support responses to urgent and emerging care needs of Aboriginal people with COVID-19 and their households, and to provide general health care in the home. Thirty submissions from Aboriginal community-controlled organisations were supported throughout this program.

As part of the Victorian COVID-19 Outbreak response management plan, the COVID-19 Aboriginal Infoline was extended through to the end of 2022. The COVID Positive Pathways Program (CPP) was extended until mid-2023, with a refocus on priority community cohorts, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members.

The COVID-19 Aboriginal Infoline and CPP provided a tailored resource to connect Aboriginal community members with access to information, and connection to culturally safe health services.

Response to 2022 Victorian floods

During the 2022 Victorian floods, the needs of First People were not necessarily met by existing mainstream emergency responses, including managing chronic health needs, accessing medication and ensuring emergency relief and recovery spaces.

As a result, a funding initiative of \$2 million was allocated for ACCHO flood response and recovery, with six ACCHOs in the flood affected regions invited to apply. The purpose of the funding was to ensure Aboriginal communities could continue to access culturally safe health and wellbeing services with minimal disruption during and after the floods.

To date, flood related activities by the relevant ACCHOs have included:

- Workforce support for ACCHO clinical and outreach staff
- Emergency and outreach support activity and resources, including urgent and ongoing healthcare access, family/children's holistic health and mental health support
- The purchase of clinical equipment and resources to support provision of health services, and water and mosquito-borne disease safety and support activity
- Access to local swimming pool/leisure centres to support safe water activities and mitigate risk of flood affected water hazards
- IT and other infrastructure including back up power supplies, establishment of satellite clinics and increased telehealth capacity.

DFFH also received \$2 million to support Aboriginal communities following this major emergency. DFFH's Aboriginal Self-Determination and Outcomes branch has led engagement with Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations and Traditional Owner groups through the Aboriginal Flood Relief and Recovery Community Forum (a joint initiative with Emergency Recovery Victoria) on the priorities within communities which require resourcing.

To date, \$0.8 million of the DFFH \$2.0 million has been provided to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, such as Rumbalara

and Murray Valley Aboriginal Cooperative to provide culturally safe support to alleviate personal hardship including:

- Emergency food, clothing and temporary accommodation
- Repair or replacement of essential items of furniture and personal effects
- Essential repairs to housing, including temporary repairs, and repairs necessary to restore housing to a habitable condition
- Removal of debris from residential properties
- Personal and financial individual and/or group counselling support for those who have been affected by the October 2022 floods.
- The remaining DFFH funding is under consideration for distribution to Aboriginal-specific agencies once consultation with communities has been finalised.

ACCHOs partnered with Victorian Government agencies and Local Government Authorities and other relevant stakeholders in communications and engagement strategies. This was to ensure information about emergency responses, health risks and disaster payments were disseminated to community.

Key investments

- The 2022/23 State Budget provided funding to support equitable cancer care and prevention. \$262,215 in funding has been provided to VACCHO to support activities to increase human papillomavirus (HPV) uptake in adolescents to reduce HPV-related cancers, which includes cervical cancer.
- \$4.48m ICT funding to Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations to increase ICT infrastructure and capacity and enhance the delivery of health services and programs.
- \$1.1m 'Strong Voice' funding to contribute to the implementation of the VACCHO Strategic Plan: On Solid Ground (2021- 2026).
- \$700k over five years, commencing 2022/23 for Royal Melbourne Hospital's First Nations Dermatology Telehealth service to sustain the service model and expand the service to two sessions per week. RMH is working closely with VACCHO to develop and promote the Dermatology Telehealth service model of care.

- \$349.6 million to expand bed-based forensic mental health services at Thomas Embling Hospital, delivering 82 additional beds through a dedicated 34-bed women's precinct and a 48-bed men's facility, for completion in 2024. The redevelopment will ensure a culturally appropriate design is achieved for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Mental health, alcohol and other drugs

Implementing the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System (Royal Commission)

The Victorian Government is proudly working in partnership with the VACCHO, local Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and mainstream mental health services to deliver on the Royal Commission's recommendations for improving Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing. This is building on the strength and advocacy of Aboriginal communities and leaders; the vision set out in Balit Durn Durn, VACCHO's submission to the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System; and Balit Murrup, the Victorian Government's 10-year Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing Framework 2017-2027.

Building a strong, skilled and supported Aboriginal mental health workforce

To support the delivery of Royal Commission recommendation 33.2, the Victorian Government has committed funding for the phased recruitment of 10 dedicated Koori Mental Health Liaison Officer positions that will be employed within selected Infant, Child, and Family Mental Health and Wellbeing Services. Building the capacity of the Aboriginal Mental Health workforce will help provide more responsive and culturally safe mainstream mental health services and provide better mental health outcomes for Aboriginal families and communities.

Statewide Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing team expansion

The Victorian Government has committed recurrent funding to ACCHOs to establish and expand multi-disciplinary Aboriginal social

and emotional wellbeing teams, with statewide coverage by 2025. The inaugural round of funding in 2021-22 for social and emotional wellbeing teams' expansion saw the creation of 50 new positions across the ACCHO sector.

Social and emotional wellbeing services for children and young people

To implement Royal Commission recommendation 33.3, ACCHOs for the first time are receiving funding to access and commission specialist services for children and young people.

Supporting ACCHOs to deliver and commission self-determined social and emotional wellbeing services marks a shift away from a crisis driven response to mental illness. Commissioning enables ACCHOs to also focus on prevention, early intervention and healing.

Balit Durn Durn Centre

The Balit Durn Durn Centre of Excellence in Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing (Balit Durn Durn Centre) was launched in May 2022 and supports best practice, research, and evaluation in social and emotional wellbeing.

Key achievements include:

- Providing leadership and support to the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health (ACCHO) sector in supporting readiness to establish and expand social and emotional wellbeing teams
- Establishing an Expert Advisory Group to steer the co-design process for the establishment of a culturally appropriate, family-oriented service for infants and children who require intensive social and emotional wellbeing supports
- Leading the co-design for the establishment of two Aboriginal healing centres, to be established by 2026.

Cultural Safety: in Infant, Child, and Family Mental Health and Wellbeing Services

The Royal Commission recommended the Victorian Government support Infant, Child, and Family Mental Health and Wellbeing Services to improve access for Aboriginal people (recommendation 33.2). Funding has been

allocated across 13 Infant, Child and Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Services to support either basic or in-depth cultural safety training, aligned with the broader cultural safety framework.

Strong Brother Strong Sister

Strong Brother Strong Sister delivers a social and emotional well-being and suicide prevention program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people from ages 4 to 26 in the Geelong area. In 2021-22, Strong Brother Strong Sister provided mentoring, youth groups, counselling and cultural activities to 189 participants.

Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide

Victoria is participating in the Commonwealth-led Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide (RCDVS). The RCDVS was established in July 2021 to inquire into systemic issues and risk factors relevant to defence and veteran suicide. In October 2022, the RCDVS advised that it is interested in hearing from First Nations people about their experience with the Navy, Army or Air Force.

Health-based response to Public Intoxication

Current laws in Victoria make being drunk in a public place a criminal offence. In 2019, the Victorian Government committed to decriminalising public drunkenness and replacing the current criminal justice response with a health-led approach. This means putting the right programs in place to help people who are intoxicated in public access the support they need to stay safe. The health-based model will help divert people away from a police response and increase their access to health and social services.

The model prioritises services for the Aboriginal community, in acknowledgement of the disproportionate impact public drunkenness laws and police interactions have on Aboriginal people. This reform was achieved through the strong and sustained advocacy from the Aboriginal community to end Aboriginal deaths in custody.

Key investments

The 2022-23 Victorian State Budget included \$3.5 million over two years to enable Aboriginal communities to co-design suicide prevention and response initiatives, in line with the principles of Aboriginal self-determination. This funding builds on the record 2021-22 funding of \$116 million for Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing to implement the recommendations in the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System interim and final reports.

The 2022-23 Victorian State Budget investment includes funding to support:

- the establishment of an Aboriginal-led suicide and self-harm prevention advisory panel to advise on targeted efforts for Aboriginal clients and families, and areas of most need (led by the Balit Durn Durn Centre)
- an in-depth analysis of Aboriginal suicides in Victoria, as well as a review to improve real-time surveillance and response in partnership with the Coroners Court of Victoria and the Balit Durn Durn Centre.

Equality

Since 2019-20, DFFH has funded Koorie Pride Victoria to the amount of \$320,000 for its establishment and growth as a peak body supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender diverse, intersex, queer, sistergirl and brotherboy (LGBTIQ+SB) communities.

Due to disruptions caused by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, funded activities were delivered from 2022.

Key activities undertaken in 2022 included:

- capacity building workshops for the Dardi Munwurro Brother to Brother crisis line, upskilling the service to better support LGBTIAS&B mob.
- supported the Wathaurong Health Service to be inclusive of LGBTIQAS&B mob in their strategic planning.
- delivery of a sector-wide yarning event (see case study under Measure 12.1.6)

Domain 5: Justice & Safety



Our shared commitment:

Aboriginal people have access to an equitable justice system that is shaped by self-determination, and protects and upholds their human, civil, legal and cultural rights.

Most Aboriginal people will never be involved with the criminal justice system. Those who are, however, are more likely to experience ongoing involvement. Systemic and structural barriers lead to Aboriginal over-representation in the justice system and entrenched cycles of disadvantage. These barriers include inequality, racism, discrimination and unconscious bias, social and economic disadvantage and involvement with the child protection system. While the over-representation of Aboriginal people remains, community-led responses are going some way to address these underlying structural factors.



Goal 15: Aboriginal over-representation in the justice system is eliminated



Overview

Measures under Goal 15 have improved

Although there remains significant over-representation in adult justice measures, there are also some positive trends. There are declines in rates across the age cohorts of young people processed by police and the average daily number of children and young people, and adult men and women under justice supervision. Concerningly there are increases in the number of men and women who are being remanded and a decrease in the number of people receiving intensive bail support.

Data Note



All measures in this goal are reported on.

Goal 15 directly aligns with the following Closing the Gap Outcomes and Targets

Outcome 10: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system.

- **Target 10:** By 2031, reduce the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults held in incarceration by at least 15 per cent.

Outcome 11: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system.

- **Target 11:** By 2031, reduce the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (10-17 years) in detention by at least 30 per cent.

Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally

Outcome 10: At 30 June 2022, the age-standardised rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners was 2,151.1 per 100,000 adult population across Australia compared to 1,605.1 per 100,000 in Victoria.

In Victoria, there has been some improvement since the baseline year of 2019.

Outcome 11: In 2021-22, the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 10-17 years in detention across Australia was 28.3 per 10,000 children compared to 9.5 per 10,000 in Victoria.

There has been improvement nationally and in Victoria since the baseline year of 2018-19.

Objective 15.1 Decrease the number and eliminate the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in the justice system

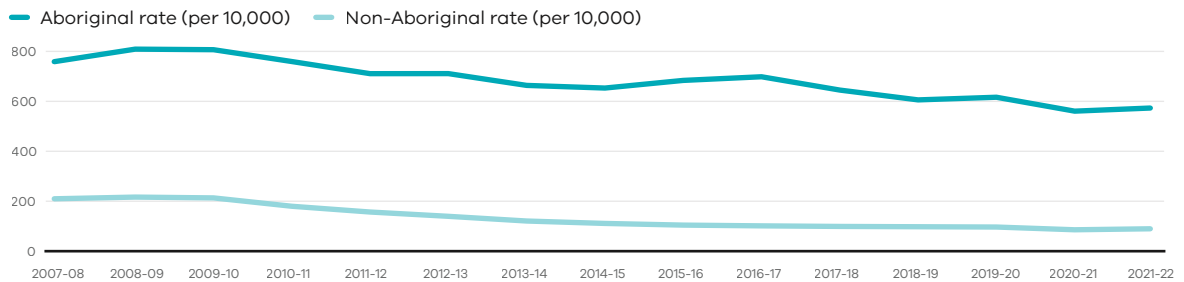
Measure 15.1.1 Number, rate and age profile of unique youth (10-17 years) alleged offenders processed by police

Although decreasing since 2008, the rate of Aboriginal people aged 10 - 17 receiving a caution, arrest, summons, or other processing by police remains highly disproportionate. The rate

currently stands at 573.2 per 10,000 compared to 89.7 for non-Aboriginal children and young people. Since 2008, the rate for non-Aboriginal children and young people has more than halved, whereas for Aboriginal children and young people the rate has only decreased by 24 per cent.

The rate of unique youth alleged offenders has declined

Measure 15.1.1



Source: Crime Statistics Agency (CSA)



Measure 15.1.2 Average daily number and rate of children and young people (10-17 years) under youth justice supervision in detention and community-based supervision

The number of Aboriginal young people and non-Aboriginal young people aged 10–17 under community-based supervision on an average day decreased between 2020–21 and 2021–22. In 2021–22 Aboriginal young people under community-based supervision declined 15.8 per cent to 83.7 people a day on average. Promisingly the rate of Aboriginal young people significantly declined by 25 per cent to 43.9 children per 10,000. This still represents a significant over-representation with Aboriginal young people 11.2 times more likely to be under youth justice community-based supervision.

The number of Aboriginal young people aged 10–17 in detention on an average day remained steady between 2020–21 and 2021–22 while it decreased for non-Aboriginal young people. Concerningly the number of non-Aboriginal

children in detention decreased by 26.5 per cent over the year whereas there was no significant reduction for Aboriginal children. It should be noted that for Aboriginal children in detention the total number is relatively low (9.9 children in detention daily average) so it is subject to large variance over reporting periods. When looking at detention rates per 10,000 people, Aboriginal young people were 8.6 times more likely to be detained than their non-Aboriginal peers in 2021–22.

The reduction in young people under youth justice detention and community-based supervision may be partly attributed to the greater use of diversion programs and support services.

Aboriginal young people were more than 8 times more likely to be detained than their non-Aboriginal peers

Measure 15.1.2

Aboriginal young people

	Community based supervision (daily average number)	Community based supervision (per 10,000)	Detention (daily average number)	Detention rate (per 10,000)
2012–13	158.9	118.23	7.5	7.84
2018–19	83.1	82.4	19	18.5
2019–20	68.7	67.3	16	15.9
2021–22	83.7	43.87	9.9	9.54

Non-Aboriginal

	Community based supervision (daily average number)	Community based supervision (per 10,000)	Detention (daily average number)	Detention rate (per 10,000)
2012–13	991.5	11.03	49.8	0.93
2018–19	397.8	6.8	93	1.6
2019–20	370.3	6.2	103	1.7
2021–22	523.8	3.92	67.9	1.11

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Mar 2023. Youth justice in Australia 2021–22

Measure 15.1.3 Proportion of first-time youth alleged offenders (10-17 years) cautioned by police

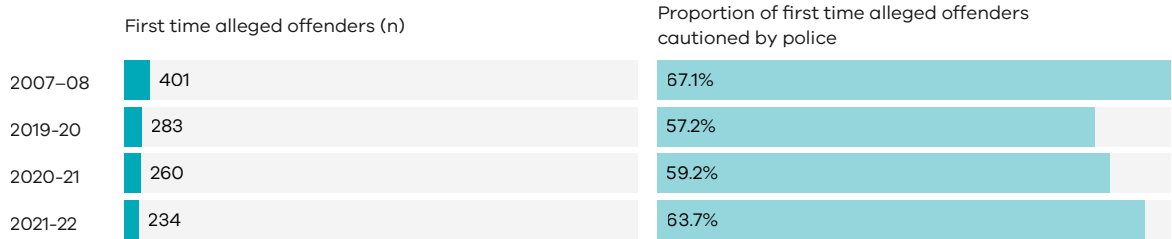
The proportion of 10–17 year old Aboriginal children cautioned by police instead of arrested has grown 6.5 per cent since 2019–20. It has not returned to the highest recorded figure of 67.1 per cent in 2007–08, however the number of

alleged offenders has also dropped significantly during this time. Aboriginal children are still being processed by police at disproportionate rates compared to non-Aboriginal young people.

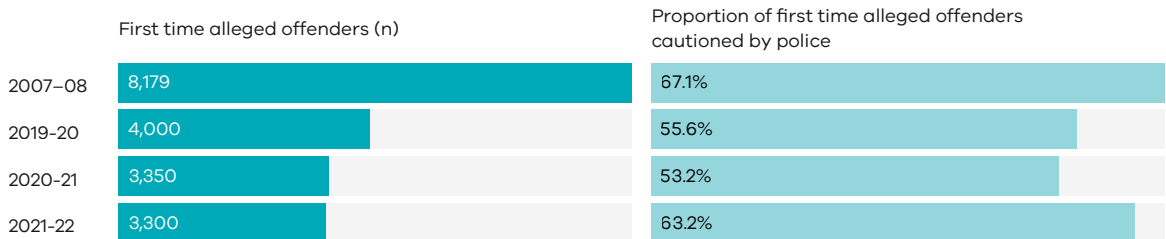
The proportion of 10-17 year old first time Aboriginal offenders cautioned instead of arrested is growing steadily

Measure 15.1.3

Aboriginal



Non-Aboriginal



Source: Crime Statistics Agency (CSA)



Balit Ngulu – legal assistance and representation to Aboriginal young people

A priority initiative for the Aboriginal Justice Caucus has been to re-establish Baliti Ngulu, a specialised legal program within the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS). This has been achieved through funding under Wirkara Kulpa for Balit Ngulu to support the core function of providing Aboriginal children and young people appropriate legal advice and representation as well as diverting Aboriginal children and young people from the justice system and supporting their empowerment and resilience within its service areas.

Through funding received from the 2020-21 State Budget, the Balit Ngulu service at VALS relaunched in September 2021 servicing Broadmeadows, Melbourne, Shepparton and Wodonga Children’s Court criminal divisions. Balit Ngulu will expand its current serving of metro Melbourne to also include Werribee and Sunshine and to expand the existing regional serving to also include Bendigo, Kyneton and Castlemaine in 2023.

Balit Ngulu has been continuing its advocacy and policy development in relation to implementation of the Framework to Reduce Criminalisation of Young People in Residential Care, as well as contributing to VALS submissions to the Yoorrook Justice Commission on both the child protection and the criminal justice system. Balit Ngulu is also involved in legal education and advocacy around the human rights of Aboriginal children, over- representation in youth justice and child protection, decriminalisation, disability and mental health. In addition, Balit Ngulu are working in partnership with Victoria Legal Aid to assess community legal education needs for youth in the Shepparton region with workshops planned for 2023.



Aboriginal Youth Cautioning Program

The Aboriginal Youth Cautioning Program (AYCP) was developed in collaboration with Aboriginal communities in accordance with principles of Aboriginal self-determination outlined within *Burra Lotjpa Dunguludja*. The aim of the AYCP is to increase and enhance the use of police cautioning through a community-led model, based on principles of early intervention, harm-reduction, and community involvement, to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal young people in the criminal justice system.

The AYCP provides young people with an opportunity to be referred to a community-led support panel after receiving a Child Caution. The panel assesses the young person's needs and then supports them to engage with culturally appropriate local services to address the factors underlying their behaviour. Additionally, the AYCP promotes monitoring and accountability of cautioning decisions to ensure that Aboriginal young people receive a caution rather than a charge, whenever appropriate.

Initially established as a pilot in Bendigo, Echuca and Dandenong, the AYCP has now expanded to cover over 20 Local Government Areas and is operating on an ongoing basis. The program will continue to expand to additional sites, in consultation with local Aboriginal communities.

Since the introduction of the AYCP, Victoria Police has noted promising trends, with increased cautioning rates in many areas and supportive relationships with Aboriginal organisations and service providers.

Families and young people have commented on the supportive nature of the ACYP and how it differed from their expectations. Several young people explained that they had initially feared that the community support panel process would be punitive. Instead, young people remarked on how positive and supportive the experience was for them and how it assisted them to connect with supports, including re-engagement with school for one young person and assistance in transitioning into the workforce for another.



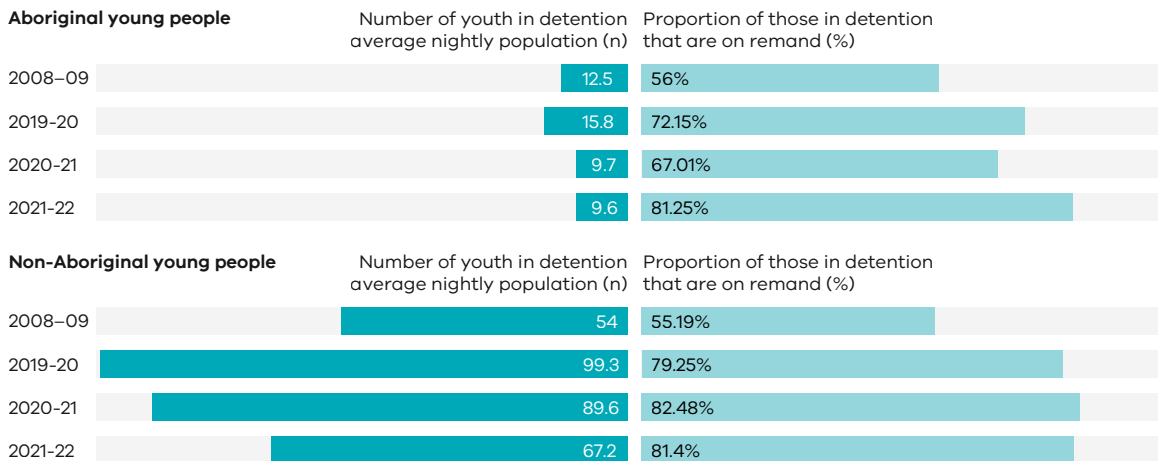
Measure 15.1.4 Proportion of young people (10-17 years) in detention on remand

The average nightly population of Aboriginal young people in detention has remained stable at 12.4 across 2021-22. However, the proportion of those Aboriginal young people who are on remand has increased significantly to 86.2 per cent. This means that the proportion

of Aboriginal young people on remand has exceeded the proportion of non-Aboriginal young people on remand for the first time in some years. The high number of Aboriginal young people on remand needs to be addressed. The Victorian Government has committed to reform bail laws as outlined later in this Report under the Domain 5 – Victorian Government Investment and Action section.

Young people (10–17 years) in detention on remand

Measure 15.1.4



Source: AIHW: Youth detention population in Australia. Bulletin no. 145. Cat. no. JUV 131.



Objective 15.2 Decrease the number and eliminate the over-representation of Aboriginal women in the justice system

Measure 15.2.1 Number and rate of unique adult female alleged offenders processed by police

The rate of Aboriginal women per 10,000 being processed by police has increased by almost 50 per cent since 2008. This makes the discrepancy even greater between the rates at which Aboriginal women and non-Aboriginal women are processed by police. At 606.7 per 10,000 Aboriginal women, the rate is now over ten times the rate of non-Aboriginal women.

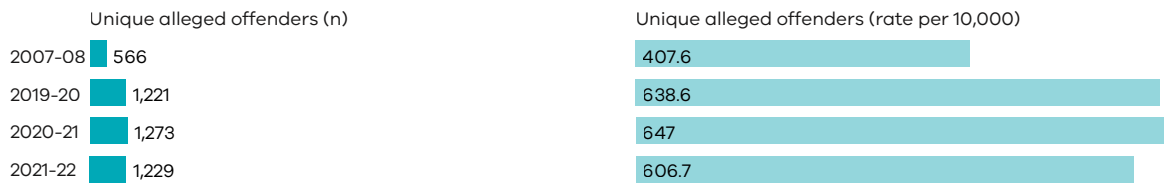
Measure 15.2.2 Average daily number and rate of Aboriginal women under corrections supervision in prison and community corrections

The number and rate of Aboriginal women in prison and under community-based corrections supervision have both declined since 2020. However, over the longer-term, community-based supervisions have markedly decreased while imprisonment has increased. Since 2008, the rate of Aboriginal women under community-based supervision has decreased by 37 per 10,000 and the rate per 10,000 of Aboriginal women in prison has more than doubled from 11 to 23.

Adult female unique alleged offenders processed by police

Measure 15.2.1

Aboriginal women



Non-Aboriginal women

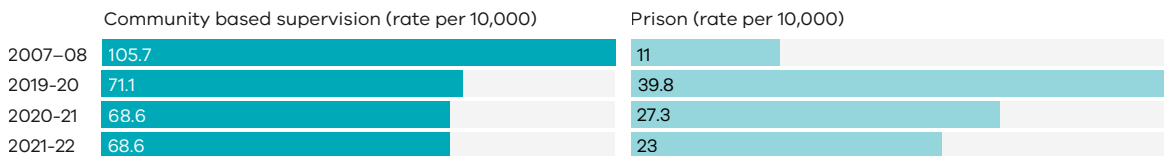


Source: (Counts): Crime Statistics Agency (CSA)

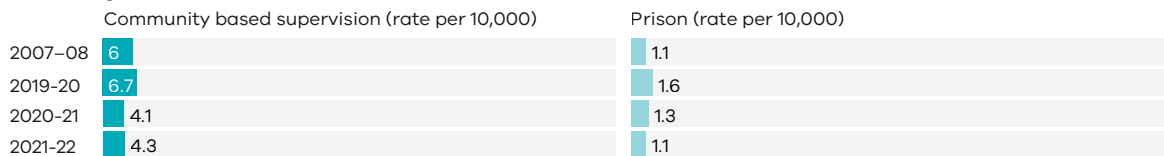
Rates of community based supervision and prison have declined for Aboriginal women

Measure 15.2.2

Aboriginal



Non-Aboriginal



Source: Corrections Victoria

Measure 15.2.3 Proportion of women who return to prison under sentence within two years of release

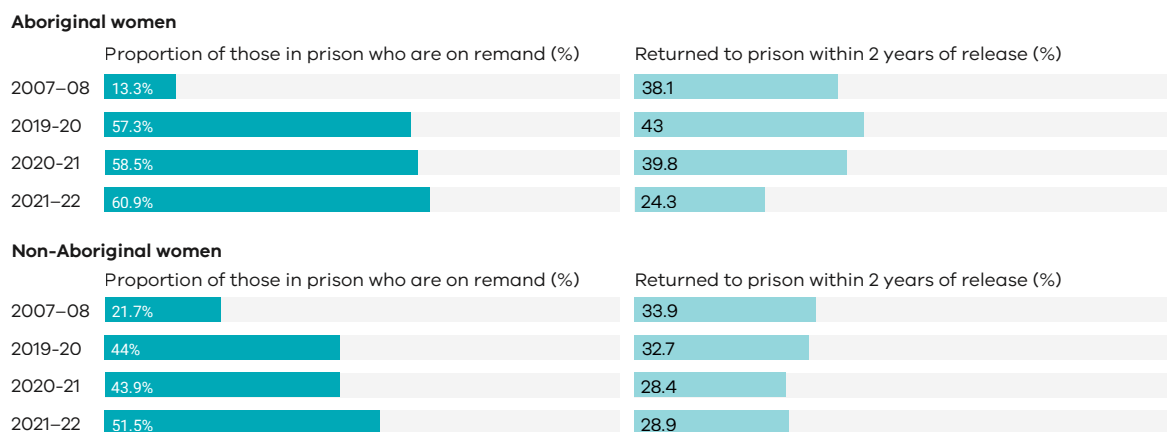
The proportion of Aboriginal women returning to prison under sentence within two years of release has decreased significantly over the last few years. In 2019–20, 43 per cent of Aboriginal women in prison had returned within 2 years of release. By 2021–22, that proportion had dropped to 24.3 per cent. At the same time, the proportion of non-Aboriginal women returning to prison within two years decreased from 32.7 per cent to 28.9 per cent, meaning Aboriginal women are now returning to prison under sentence at lower rates than non-Aboriginal women.

Measure 15.2.4 Proportion of women in prison on remand

The proportion of Aboriginal women in prison who are on remand has grown significantly over the last 15 years. While the proportion of non-Aboriginal women in prison on remand has increased by 2.5 times since 2007–08, for Aboriginal women it has increased by more than 4.5 times. Between 2020–21 and 2021–22, the proportion of Aboriginal women in prison on remand has risen from 43.9 per cent to 51.5 per cent. The recent upward trend can be attributed to the tightening of bail laws in 2018 which made it harder for an applicant to be granted bail and had a disproportionate effect on Aboriginal applicants.

Fewer Aboriginal women are returning to prison after release

Measure 15.2.3, 15.2.4



Source: Corrections Victoria

Objective 15.3 Decrease the number and eliminate the over-representation of Aboriginal men in the justice system

Measure 15.3.1 Number and rate of unique adult male alleged offenders processed by police

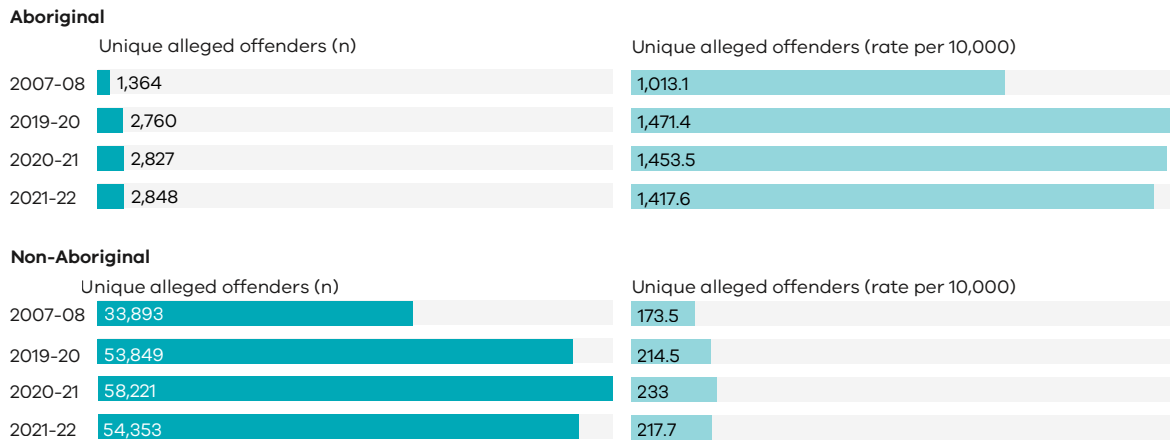
The rate of Aboriginal adult male unique alleged offenders remains extremely high, despite slightly decreasing since 2019-20. Aboriginal men are more than 6.5 times more likely to be processed by police than non-Aboriginal men. The rate has also increased considerably in the last 15 years.

Measure 15.3.2 Average daily number and rate of Aboriginal men under corrections supervision in prison and community corrections

The rate of Aboriginal men in prison has decreased since 2019-20 but remains extremely high. Aboriginal men are imprisoned at a rate more than 15 times that of non-Aboriginal men. Aboriginal men are also under community-based supervision at a very high rate, which has fluctuated in recent years but is more than ten times the rate for non-Aboriginal men.

The rate of Aboriginal male unique alleged offenders remains extremely high

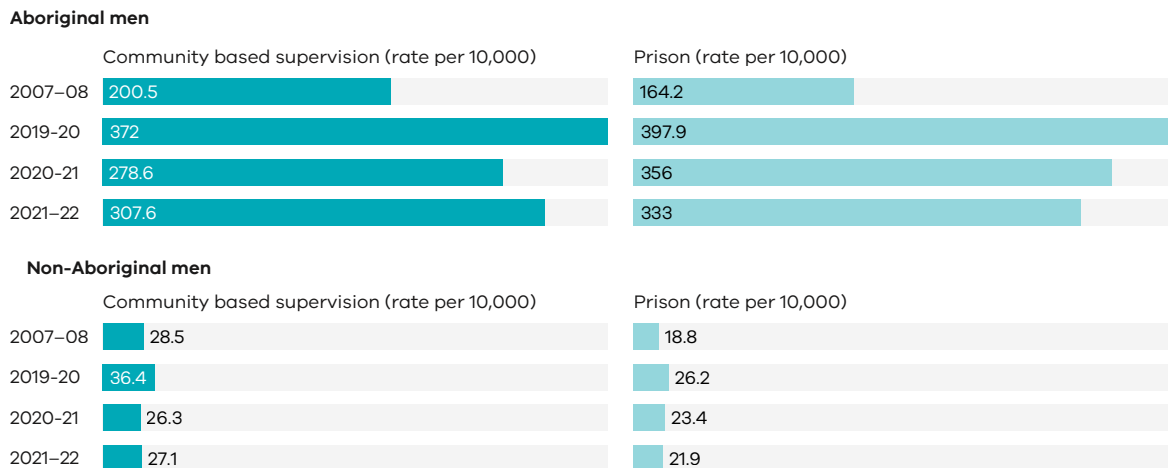
Measure 15.3.1



Source: Crime Statistics Agency (CSA)

The rate of Aboriginal men in prison remains high

Measure 15.3.2



Source: Corrections Victoria

Measure 15.3.3 Proportion of men who return to prison under sentence within two years of release

The proportion of Aboriginal men who return to prison under sentence within two years of release has decreased marginally over recent years and is now steady at 47.8 per cent. Over the same period, the proportion of non-Aboriginal men who return to prison within two years under sentence has also fallen. Almost half of Aboriginal men leaving prison return within two years, whereas the rate is 36.4 per cent for non-Aboriginal men. However, the rate for Aboriginal men has decreased since 2007-08 whereas it has increased for non-Aboriginal men.

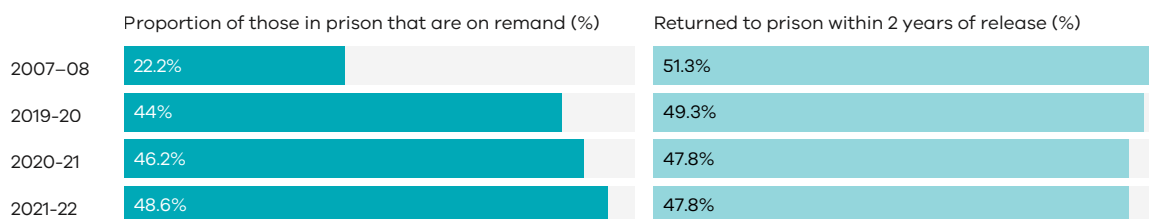
Measure 15.3.4 Proportion of men in prison on remand

The proportion of Aboriginal men in prison on remand continues to rise and the rate of Aboriginal men on remand is now more than double the rate of 15 years ago. Since reform to bail laws in 2018, the proportion of people in prison on remand has risen substantially. As the data shows, Aboriginal men are remanded at higher rates than non-Aboriginal men. In 2021-22 nearly half of Aboriginal men in prison were unsentenced.

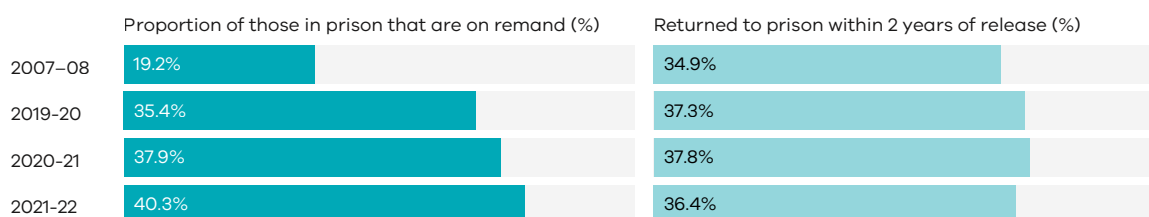
The proportion of Aboriginal men on remand is continuing to increase

Measure 15.3.3, 15.3.4

Aboriginal men



Non-Aboriginal men



Source: Corrections Victoria

Goal 16: Aboriginal Victorians have access to safe and effective justice services



Overview

Measures under Goal 16 have improved.

The number of Aboriginal adults receiving intensive bail support during 2021-22 was considerably higher than any other time, and the proportion was higher than the proportion for non-Aboriginal adults.

There was no new data available for other measures under this goal.

Closing the Gap – Relevant Outcomes and Targets for Goal 16

The National Agreement does not contain outcomes and targets that align with this VAAF goal. Victoria is pursuing more ambitious and comprehensive goals under the VAAF, which are reported on in this chapter and the Data Dashboard.

Data Note



All measures in this goal are reported on.

Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally

Not applicable.



Objective 16.1 Increase Aboriginal Victorians' participation in culturally safe and effective justice prevention, early intervention, diversion and support programs

Measure 16.1.1 Number and proportion of Aboriginal young people receiving intensive bail support through the Koorie Intensive Support Program (KISP)

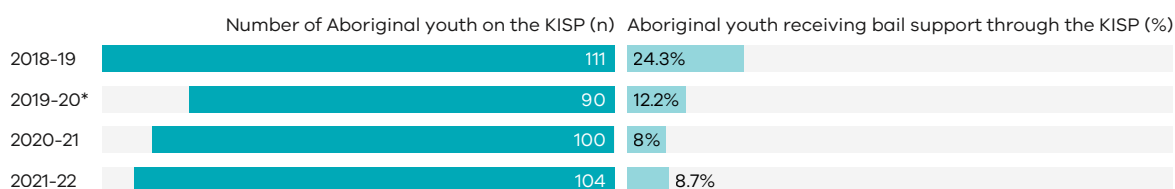
In 2021-22, 104 Aboriginal young people received intensive support through the Koorie Intensive Support Program (KISP). This was consistent with the number of Aboriginal young people in KISP in 2020-21. Of these young people, 9 (or 8.7 per cent) received intensive bail support, consistent with the proportion in 2021-22 but a reduction from the 12.2 percent that received intensive bail support in 2019-20.

Measure 16.1.2 Number and proportion of Aboriginal adults receiving intensive bail support

The proportion of Aboriginal adults receiving intensive bail support has fluctuated slightly since 2019-20 but remains higher than the proportion of non-Aboriginal adults receiving intensive bail support. During 2021-22 the number of Aboriginal adults receiving the support was also considerably higher than at any other time. Intensive bail support provides an alternative to remand for bail applicants considered high risk and who would not otherwise be granted bail. From 2021-22 CISP data counts both intensive bail support from Magistrates Court of Victoria and the County Court of Victoria.

The number of Aboriginal youth receiving intensive bail support through the Koorie Intensive Support Program (KISP) has remained stable

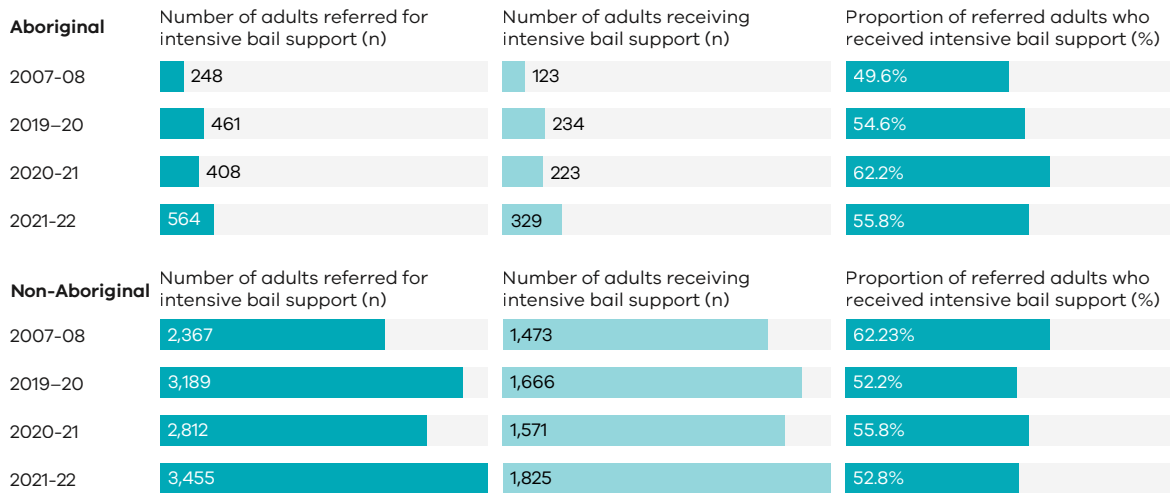
Measure 16.1.1



Source: Department of Justice and Community Safety

More Aboriginal adults are receiving intensive bail support

Measure 16.1.2



Source: Courts Integrated Services Program (CISP) data, Court Services Victoria

Measure 16.1.3 Number of Aboriginal children and young people accessing community support programs through youth justice community services⁹

The number of Aboriginal children and young people (ages 10-17) provided with access to community support programs¹⁰ through youth justice community services declined by 6.9 per cent to 607 people in 2021-22, this is accompanied by a 24.3 per cent reduction in the number of

Aboriginal children and young people (aged 10-17) under Youth Justice community-based supervision on an average day from 2020-21 to 2021-22. However, this is a significant increase since 2019-20, with the number of Aboriginal children and young people provided with access to community support programs increasing by 25.4 per cent. Youth justice support services are important for improving justice outcomes such as reduced recidivism.

The number of Aboriginal children and young people accessing community support programs has slightly decreased

Measure 16.1.3



Source: Department of Justice and Community Safety

9. Data collection for this measure commenced from 2020.

10. This includes all Aboriginal specific programs funded by DJCS.

Goal 17: Aboriginal Victorians feel safe and connected



Overview

Measures under Goal 17 have remained steady.

The Victorian Public Service has set the goal of having a minimum of two per cent representation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in the workforce.

Increasing numbers of Aboriginal people are employed in the justice system. However, the proportion of Aboriginal staff at Victoria Police is still very low, and at a consistent 0.6 per cent for the last three years, is the lowest of any police workforce in the country.

Closing the Gap – Relevant Outcomes and Targets for Goal 17

The National Agreement does not contain outcomes and targets that align with this VAAF goal. Victoria is pursuing more ambitious and comprehensive goals under the VAAF, which are reported on in this chapter and the Data Dashboard.

Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally

Not applicable.

Data Note



The following measures rely on datasets that are infrequently collected. No new data was available at the time of reporting.

- Measure 171.2 Proportion of Aboriginal Victorians who feel safe/very safe walking alone at night in local area in the last 12 months
- Measure 171.3 Proportion of Aboriginal Victorians who reported being a victim of physical or threatened violence in the last 12 months

Historical data for these measures is available on the Data Dashboard, which can be accessed via the First Peoples – State Relations website at www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/report-data-dashboard

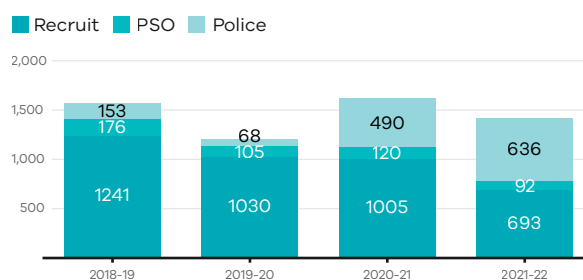
Objective 17.1 Increase community safety and trust in police and the justice system

Measure 17.1.1 Proportion of police officers who have received Aboriginal cultural awareness training

The number of active-duty police officers receiving Aboriginal cultural awareness training has remained steady around 1,500 officers but the spread of officers receiving training has changed. More existing police officers received cultural awareness training in 2021-22 than in any previous year whereas the number of recruits receiving the training has decreased year on year. While the number of recruits receiving cultural awareness training has decreased this is due to the number of total recruits for 2021-22 decreasing. It is Victoria Police policy that all recruits receive cultural awareness training.

The number of active duty police officers receiving Aboriginal cultural awareness training continues to increase

Measure 17.1.1



Source: Internal Victoria Police records

Victoria Police Aboriginal Cultural Awareness Training Package

Aboriginal Cultural Awareness Training (ACAT) talks to the historical relationship between Police and the Aboriginal Community and the intergenerational trauma and fear of police that is still experienced by Aboriginal people today. It also focusses on what cultural safety means and how that might be applied in an operational context.

In 2019, Victoria Police contracted Nyuka-Wara Consulting, a registered Aboriginal training provider, to work with the state-wide Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers and employees to revise the ACAT package. In May 2022, the Aboriginal Justice Caucus endorsed the revised ACAT package, with the training being mandatory for all sworn Victoria Police employees (Police and Protective Services Officers).

“As an Aboriginal employee of the organisation, I had the opportunity to provide cultural contribution into the Aboriginal Cultural Awareness Training package. It was

important for me to have my voice heard through the development of the package and I am proud that my contribution was included in the process.” (quote from an Aboriginal employee at Victoria Police)

Planning is underway, to video record Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees' truth-telling experiences to expand the ACAT package and minimise cultural fatigue.

There has been an increase in Police Aboriginal Liaison Officers (PALOs) applications across the state since the inception of ACAT. To date, there are approximately 216 PALOs across the state.

The development of the ACAT package particularly addresses the ‘Address racism and promote cultural safety’ enabler.

Developing the Aboriginal Youth Justice workforce

Aboriginal Youth Justice (AYJ) provides professional development opportunities for workers in all AYJ Programs, including the Community Based Aboriginal Youth Justice Program; Aboriginal Early School Leaver Program; Aboriginal Youth Support Service; Aboriginal Intensive Support Program and; Aboriginal Liaison Officers. This is offered through Beginning Practice Induction sessions for new starters, professional development and networking opportunities and cultural activities. This training was held in April 2022 and consisted of information on Youth Justice System Overview; Courts; Aboriginal Youth Justice Program; case note recording and privacy issues.



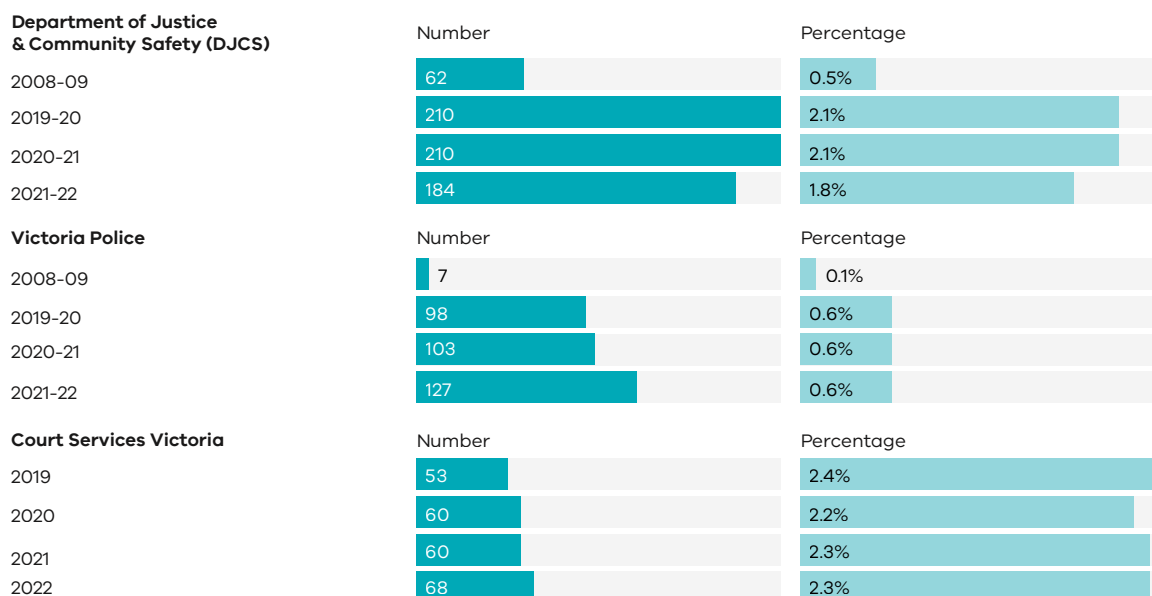
Prioritise culture

Measure 17.1.4 Number and proportion of Aboriginal people employed across the justice system

At 30 June 2022, 379 Aboriginal people were employed across the Victorian justice system. The proportion of the workforce that identify as Aboriginal has remained steady at DJCS, Victoria Police and Court Services Victoria since 2019-20. The proportion of Aboriginal staff at Victoria Police is still very low, and at a consistent 0.6 per cent for the last three years, is the lowest of any police workforce in the country.

Aboriginal staff employed across the justice system

Measure 17.1.4



Source: DJCS: Aboriginal Employment Team, Victoria Police: Internal Victoria Police records. Court Services Victoria: Internal Courts Services Victoria records.

Domain 5 – Victorian Government Investment and Action

The Victorian Government is working to ensure that Aboriginal people have access to an equitable justice system that is shaped by self-determination, and protects and upholds their human, civil, legal, and cultural rights.

The key Aboriginal Governance Forum for realising outcomes in this Domain is the Aboriginal Justice Forum.

Actions for 2022 include:

Evidence to the Yoorrook Justice Commission

The Victorian Government made a submission in response to the Commission's Issues Paper on systemic injustice experienced by First Peoples in the criminal justice system.

This submission acknowledges the historical context of the criminal justice system and

provides examples of past wrongs; outlines key efforts that the Government has made to address historic and ongoing systemic injustice; expresses the Government's commitment to do more to achieve transformational change and identifies some key areas for the Commission's consideration. The Attorney General, Minister for Police, Minister for Corrections and Youth Justice, the Chief Commissioner of Police and senior Government executives also gave evidence.



Wirkara Kulpa Aboriginal Youth Justice Strategy

- Action to address over representation of Aboriginal children and young people in the youth justice system is being progressed through *Wirkara Kulpa* (2022-2032), the first Aboriginal youth justice strategy, developed in partnership with the Aboriginal Justice Caucus (AJC) under the umbrella of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement.
- *Wirkara Kulpa* was launched by the then Minister of Youth Justice, Hon. Natalie Hutchins MP in February 2022. This was followed in June 2022 by a special in person youth friendly launch to provide Aboriginal children and young people with information about *Wirkara Kulpa* in a visual and easily readable child and youth friendly format.
- *Wirkara Kulpa* has been developed in parallel with the Koori Youth Justice Taskforce and responds to 56 recommendations of the combined report from the Taskforce and the Our Youth Our Way (2021) Inquiry led by the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People.
- A suite of *Wirkara Kulpa* funded initiatives and priority projects identified by the Aboriginal community are underway. Two initiatives have been completed in 2021-22. This includes re-establishing Balit Ngulu to provide a specialist holistic legal service for Aboriginal young people and expanding and extending contract agreements with ACCOs to deliver the community based Aboriginal youth justice program.
- In 2022, the foundational work on the following priority initiatives also commenced in partnership with the Aboriginal community.
 - » Establishing Aboriginal Youth Justice hubs to provide place-based Aboriginal led services to children and young people.
 - » Amplifying the voices of Aboriginal children and young people in the design and delivery of youth justice services.
 - » Establishing case management review panels to support Aboriginal young people with complex needs.
 - » Integrating cultural support planning within case management and delivering a single cultural plan that can be shared by all agencies working with Aboriginal children.

- » Keeping Aboriginal children (10-14 years) out of the justice system through family centred initiatives.

Consultations to support an Aboriginal Victims of Crime Strategy

- In response to the priorities identified in the Aboriginal Justice Agreement Phase (AJA4) and the Victim Services Review, DJCS commissioned RMIT University's Centre for Innovative Justice to conduct research into the needs and experiences of Aboriginal victims of crime.
- A governance approach with a consortium of ACCOs (Djirra, Dardi Munwurro and Elizabeth Morgan House Aboriginal Women's Services) was developed to ensure that the project was Aboriginal-led.
- In November 2021, consultations began with Aboriginal victims of crime to understand how the victim support system can better respond to their needs and to provide critical input into an Aboriginal Victims of Crime Strategy (Strategy). This included yarning circles and individual yarns to understand their needs, goals and preferences. Overall, participant voices echoed the calls that have been emanating from community for many years, including from the AJC for culturally specific responses to Aboriginal victims of crime to be established and adequately funded.

Address racism & promote cultural safety

Family-Centred Approaches Pilot

- The family-centred approaches model is for Aboriginal families with complex needs with individual members who are at risk of contact with multiple service systems including the justice system. It aims to provide whole of family-based assessments and tailored supports to strengthen families in a way that is culturally responsive and safe, and trauma-informed.
- The AJG has worked with the AJC to identify three sites across Victoria where a local Aboriginal community-controlled organisation will be funded to pilot the model followed by an Aboriginal-led evaluation process.

- The three sites are in Heywood, Dandenong and Lakes Entrance.
- The pilot sites will provide progress reports through the life of the funding and will be expected to complete the evaluation with accompanying best practice guidelines for this model by the end of 2023.

Expansion of the Aboriginal Justice Group (AJG) – Stolen Generations Reparations Unit and Truth and Justice Response Unit

- The AJG is the group with DJCS that has lead responsibility for eliminating Aboriginal over-representation in the criminal justice system and ensuring Aboriginal Victorians have access to an equitable justice system that is shaped by self-determination, and protects and upholds their human, civil, legal, and cultural rights.
- Two new units were established in the AJG in 2022. The Stolen Generations Reparations Unit was established to administer the Government's \$155 million reparations package to help address the trauma and suffering experienced by members of the Stolen Generations. The Truth and Justice Response Unit was established to lead the DJCS response to the Commission.

Stolen Generations' Reparations Package

- On 31 March 2022, the Victorian Government opened the Stolen Generations Reparations Package. At December 2022, 566 applications had been received and 43 per cent of those have been assessed by the Independent Assessment Panel during the second half of 2022. The package is intended to help address the trauma and suffering caused by the forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families, communities, culture, identity and language. It is considered a model redress scheme for stolen generations across the country. The newly formed unit established to set up the scheme rapidly operationalised to accelerate implementation and the delivery of the 34 Recommendations in Part One of the Stolen Generations Reparations Steering Committee Report.
- Over the period, 70 per cent of these recommendations were completed with nine still underway, including a first-year review

of the Program expected in June 2023. This review will inform further enhancements to the way the program is implemented over the course of the next 4 years.

- The Package continues to be designed by and for Aboriginal people with oversight by the Stolen Generations Reparations Advisory Committee, comprised of people with lived experience of Stolen Generations and their families.

Address trauma & support healing

Key Legislative Reform

Reviewing the age of criminal responsibility

- In August 2022, the Standing Council of Attorneys-General, which comprises Attorneys-General from the Australian Government, all states and territories, and the New Zealand Minister for Justice, recommitted to the national process to consider the age of criminal responsibility.
- On 26 April 2023, the Victorian Government committed to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 10 years old to 12, and to 14 years old by 2027.
- The Government will begin consultation with key stakeholders and agencies in the development of the legislation, which is expected to be introduced to Parliament later in 2023.

Bail reform

- The Victorian Government has committed to reform the *Bail Act 1977* following the release of the recommendations of the coroner inquiring into the death of Veronica Nelson in January 2023.
- Planned reforms include:
 - » limiting the reverse-onus test so it does not apply to low-level criminal activity
 - » amending the unacceptable risk test so minor repeat criminal activity cannot be used for a reason to refuse bail
 - » updating factors that a bail decision maker must consider when an applicant identifies as Aboriginal including children.

Public intoxication reform

- Decriminalisation of public drunkenness was a recommendation of the 1987 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and was reiterated by the coroner inquiring into the death of Tanya Day.
- *The Summary Offences Amendment (Decriminalisation of Public Drunkenness) Act 2021* was passed by Parliament on 19 February 2021 and was scheduled to come into effect on 7 November 2022.
- The *Crimes Legislation Amendment Act 2022*, which was passed by Parliament on 18 August 2022, deferred commencement of decriminalisation of public intoxication until 7 November 2023.
- When public drunkenness is decriminalised in November 2023, the new health-based model will become the default response. Domain 4 of this Report includes more detail about the health-based model.

Implementation of the *Spent Convictions Act 2021*

- In December 2021, the majority of the provisions of the *Spent Convictions Act 2021* (the Act) commenced. Under the Act, convictions for eligible minor or historical offences are 'spent' and no longer show up in most police record checks either immediately or after certain rehabilitation periods of 5 or 10 years.
- Since 1 July 2022, some more serious convictions can become 'spent' by application to the Magistrates' Court, where the Court must consider several factors, including unique systemic factors affecting Aboriginal people.
- By addressing minor and historical convictions, the Act reduces unfair barriers to Aboriginal Victorians' access to employment and training opportunities, including in community-controlled organisations.

None of this legislative reform would be possible without the strong and sustained advocacy of the Aboriginal community.

Key investments

2021-22 Budget

The 2021-22 Budget provided \$33.1 million over four years for 12 Preventing Aboriginal Deaths in Custody initiatives that respond to Aboriginal community calls for greater accountability and action to reduce Aboriginal over-representation in the criminal justice system, as well as the risk of Aboriginal deaths in custody.

Funded initiatives include:

- \$5.950 million over three years to keep Aboriginal children out of the criminal justice system
- \$4.731 million over two years for after-hours specialist family violence support
- \$4.864 million over four years for a Healing Unit for Aboriginal women in prison
- \$1.900 million to ensure the 20-bed Aboriginal Healing Unit is a culturally safe space
- \$4.093 million over two years for to enhance diversion programs for Aboriginal adults
- \$2.491 million over two years for additional Aboriginal Wellbeing Officers in prisons
- \$2.000 million over two years to trial Aboriginal legal assistance hubs
- \$1.835 million over two years for the Wadamba Prison to Work Program
- \$1.519 million over two years so the Baroona Youth Healing Program can provide residential diversion for young Aboriginal males and females
- \$1.488 million over two years for 'The Torch' art program in prisons and community
- \$1.231 million over three years for Ngarra Jarranounith Place for Aboriginal men
- \$0.826 million over three years for the Continuity of Health Care Pilot Program

Implementing public intoxication reforms was allocated \$10.4 million in the 2021-22 Budget.

The 2021-22 Budget supported initiatives targeting Aboriginal children from a \$33.1 million package including family services to keep Aboriginal children under 14 out of the youth justice system (\$5.95 million).

2022-23 Budget

- Early Intervention Programs were provided \$1.23 million to reduce downstream impacts on the justice system. Funded Initiatives include:
 - » \$0.623 million to expanding Dardi Munwurro's Bramung Jaarn early intervention program for Aboriginal young men who use or are at risk of using family violence.
 - » \$0.600 million to provide additional grants to Djirra to expand early intervention and prevention programs for Aboriginal women which targets their use, or risk of, using family violence.
- An additional \$1.438 million over two years for Aboriginal Justice Caucus to conduct an independent, Aboriginal-led review of Victoria's progress in implementing recommendations made by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody'.
- The expansion of Ngarra Jarranouth regional residential program operated by Dardi Munwurro received an additional \$7.12 million over four years for residential support for perpetrators of family violence.
- \$3.08 million over four years (and \$800K ongoing) for Victorian Aboriginal Legal Services (VALS) to operate at the Bendigo Law Court.
- \$115 million of the previously announced \$155 million for the Stolen Generations Reparations Package allocated during this budget cycle.
- \$5.9 million for Aboriginal Land Justice:
 - » \$5.1 million over three years to improve capacity for Traditional Owner Corporations to negotiate 'Recognition and Settlement Agreements'
 - » \$0.75 million over two years to improve outcomes under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* (TOS Act).
- \$11 million over two years for key initiatives to divert children from the Youth Justice system. This includes funding to support establishment of the Aboriginal Youth Justice Hubs.

Domain 6: Culture & Country



Our shared commitment:

The promotion of the rights and responsibilities under section 19(2) of the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006.

Victorian Aboriginal communities and peoples are culturally diverse, with rich and varied languages, traditions and histories. Aboriginal Victorians hold distinct cultural rights, including the right to maintain their spiritual, material, and economic relationship with their traditional lands and waters and continue to strengthen with the resurgence of language, lore, and cultural knowledge.

The richness and diversity of Aboriginal history and culture in Victoria, and the resilience and strength of past and present Aboriginal communities and peoples, is something for all Victorians to acknowledge and celebrate.



Goal 18: Aboriginal land, water and cultural rights are realised



Overview

Most measures under Goal 18 have continued to improve. Further improvement is expected in 2022-23.

Advancement of the Treaty process and the uptake and promotion of initiatives are seeing Aboriginal land, water and cultural rights being increasingly realised.

Data Note



Data for Measure 18.1.4 Number of Whole of Country Plans published was sourced from the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owners Corporations (FVTOC) prior to 2021.

FVTOC no longer collect data for this measure.

Goal 18 directly aligns with the following Closing the Gap Outcome and Targets

Outcome 15: People maintain a distinctive cultural, spiritual, physical and economic relationship with their land and waters.

- **Target 15a:** By 2030, a 15 per cent increase in Australia's land mass subject to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's legal rights or interests.
- **Target 15b:** By 2030, a 15 per cent increase in areas covered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's legal rights or interests in the sea.

Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally

Target 15a

In 2022, 4,138,356 square kilometres of the land mass of Australia were subject to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's rights or interests.

Nationally, based on progress from the baseline, the land mass target shows good improvement. In Victoria, there has been some improvement since the baseline year.

Target 15b

In 2022, 91,111 square kilometres of the sea country of Australia were subject to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's rights or interests.

Nationally, based on progress from the baseline, the sea country target shows improvement but is not on track to be met. In Victoria, there has been some improvement since the baseline year.

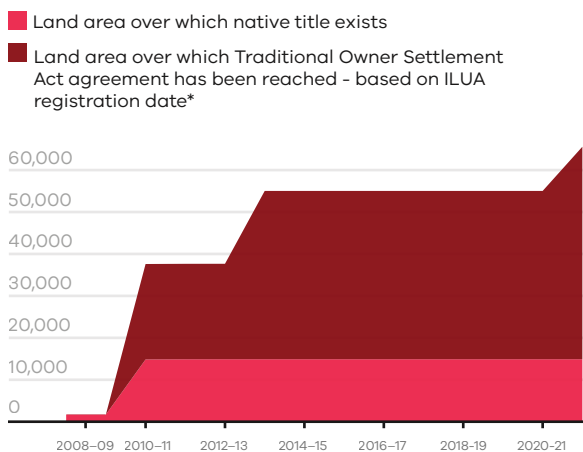
Objective 18.1 Increase the recognition and enjoyment of Aboriginal land, water and cultural heritage rights

Measure 18.1.1 Area of Crown land with native title determinations and/or Recognition and Settlement Agreements

In 2021-22, native title was recognised across 14,899 square kilometres of land (consistent with the area of land recognised in 2020-21) and 50,672 square kilometres of land was recognised under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* agreements (up by 10,540 square kilometres since 2020-21).

The area of land recognised under the Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010 agreements has increased

Measure 18.1.1



Source: National Native Title Tribunal (Geospatial Services)

Measure 18.1.2 Work of the State in advancing the Treaty process

Victoria is continuing to lead the nation in its journey towards Treaty. On 20 October 2022, the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria and the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples signed off on the final two Treaty elements – the Treaty Negotiation Framework and Self-Determination Fund. The Treaty Negotiation Framework sets out the ground rules for negotiating treaties to ensure a fair Treaty process, while the Self-Determination Fund provides a resource for First Peoples to ensure fair and equitable Treaty negotiations. This is a significant step towards Treaty and the transfer of power and resources to First Peoples so they can control the policies and programs that affect their lives. With all Treaty elements now agreed and established by the State and First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria, both parties are set to embark on the next phase of the landmark Treaty process and commence formal Treaty negotiations, which will occur shortly after the opening of the Treaty Authority's Negotiations Database. The Treaty process will also be informed by the ongoing work and reports of the Yoorrook Justice Commission.

Measure 18.1.3 Number of Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs) that have entered into an Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Land Management Agreement

An avenue for recognising Aboriginal land, water and cultural heritage rights is through the establishment of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Land Management Agreements (ACHLMAs). ACHLMAs are designed to facilitate a proactive, holistic approach to managing and protecting Aboriginal cultural heritage and landscape. As of 31 December 2022, 3 RAPs have entered into an ACHLMA and 7 submitted an intention to enter an ACHLMA.

Measure 18.1.5 Number of Joint Management Plans and area of land covered

There are 3 joint management plans with three Traditional Owner groups in Victoria, covering a total of 1,225.75 square kilometres and spanning 17 parks and reserves:

- Gunaikurnai: joint management plan over ten parks and reserves in the Gippsland region
- Dja Dja Wurrung: joint management plan for six parks and reserves in the Central West
- Yorta Yorta: joint management plan for Barmah National Park in the Riverina region.

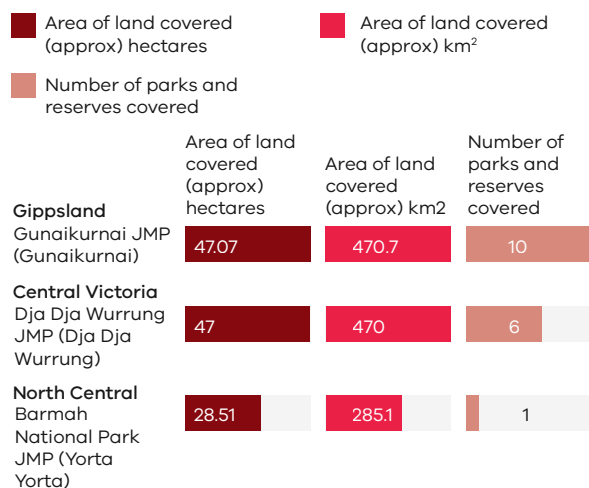
Joint management plans realise the shared aspirations and responsibilities of Traditional Owners and the State for a new approach to managing Country that acknowledges the inherent obligation of Traditional Owners to care for their Country.

The plans are developed by a Traditional Owner Land Management Board comprised of either a majority or exclusively Traditional Owners.

Traditional Owner-led governance, provided by the respective Board, ensures Country is at the core of decision-making regarding the management of jointly managed areas.

Number of Joint Management Plans and area of land covered

Measure 18.1.5



Source: Traditional Owner Agreement Unit - Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP)

Managing our country – Parks Victoria – Raymond Island

Visitors to Gippsland Lakes Reserve can now experience a better understanding of Gunaikurnai culture with a newly installed 1.7km walk through the beautiful landscape of Raymond Island on Tatungalung Country. The walk passes through coastal banksia forest and features a yarning circle and interpretive signage that reflects the knowledge held by Traditional Owners, with a focus on traditionally used plants.

Accessible only by ferry, Raymond Island is one of ten parks and reserves jointly managed between the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC) and Parks Victoria.

The Gunaikurnai have a deep connection with Raymond Island and the Gippsland Lakes. The lake waters in particular were abundant in food and resources and enabled people to travel to the open ocean and up and down the coast.

The upgraded nature trail connects with the existing Koala Walk that goes through the township and into the edge of the park. In addition to upgrading and connecting existing tracks and visitor carparking, improved and directional signs has been installed to make the track easy to follow.

GLaWAC were the lead partner for this project. Work to upgrade the track was completed by the GLaWAC Natural Resource Management Team.

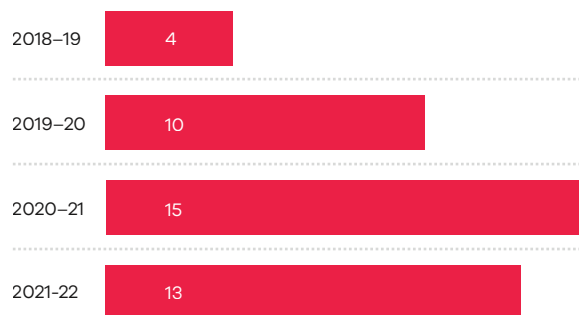
The project received \$350,000 in funding under the Victorian Government's \$120 million Flagship Tourism Projects program aimed at building better visitor infrastructure to entice more tourists to Victoria's regions.

Measure 18.1.6 Number of cultural burns conducted

In 2021/22 (1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022), Traditional Owners conducted thirteen cultural burns with the support of Victorian Government agencies. This represents an increase from four burns in 2018/19 but a slight decrease from fifteen in 2020/21. DEECA continues to work to build stronger partnerships with several TOs, assisting many with the planning, mapping and approvals currently required to deliver Cultural Burns on public land. During 2021/22, many of the Traditional Owner (TO) groups have grown their staffing levels and capacity as well as participating in a range of training. These activities will assist Traditional Owner groups to increase the number of Cultural Burns and to plan and deliver programs that deliver their cultural aspirations.

Number of cultural burns conducted

Measure 18.1.6



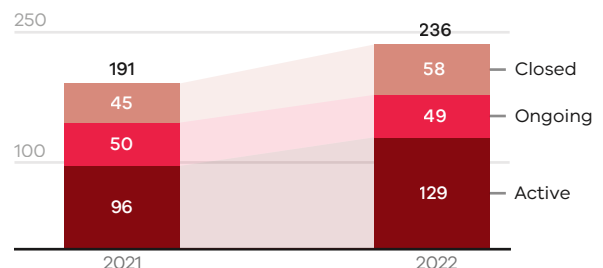
Source: Forest and Fire Operations - Department of Environment, Energy and Climate Action (DEECA) internal records.

Measure 18.1.7 Number of formal partnership agreements for planning and management between Aboriginal communities and key water and catchment agencies

The number of formal partnerships between Aboriginal communities and key water catchment agencies has increased to a total of 236 in 2022 compared to 191 in 2021. This data reflects the increasing numbers and types of formal arrangements of varying sizes and purposes between Aboriginal communities and key water agencies. Partnerships are being established to strengthen the role of Traditional Owners in water management and enable them to hold water and catchment agencies accountable. For example, the commitment to establish a Traditional Owner oversight committee to oversee the implementation of the *Water is Life: Traditional Owner Access to Water Roadmap*. Individual water corporations and catchment management authorities have also established arrangements for deepening partnerships with Traditional Owners.

Number of formal partnership agreements for planning and management between Aboriginal communities and key water & catchment agencies

Measure 18.1.7



Definition: Includes MoUs, project funding and grant funding.

Source: Department of Environment, Energy and Climate Action (DEECA), water corporation and catchment management authority and Victorian Environmental Water Holder internal records.

Celebrating Deadly Aboriginal Women

Two deadly Aboriginal women who work at DEECA recently graduated with a Graduate Diploma in Land and Sea Country Management through Deakin University and the National Indigenous Knowledges Education Research Institute (NIKERI). The Graduate Diploma provides specialist skills for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students involved in the areas of land, waste, water and environmental management, caring for Country, cultural heritage protection and sustainability.

Firstly, a proud Kilcarer/Gilgar Gunditj woman from the Gunditjmara nation in south-west Victoria, who now assists with the planning for the transition of land (Ned's Corner) from Trust for Nature to First Peoples of Millewa Mallee. The person is "very passionate about

caring for Country and ensuring we exist on (and within) our cultural landscapes in a sustainable way".

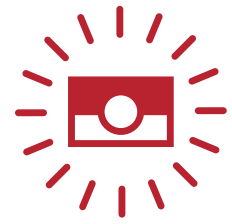
Secondly, a proud Wadawurrung woman, who is the Aboriginal Partnerships Coordinator and Heritage Specialist in the Grampians and Barwon south-west regions. As a state-wide representative, she provides advice about the Joint Fuel Management Program, maintaining parks and public land and engaging with the community. She is also an award-winning weaver and a blak designer with the Koorie Heritage Trust. In her own words: "I was so humbled to graduate at NIKERI with my family present and will be forever grateful to the department for supporting my journey in gaining a graduate diploma in Land and Sea Country Management. As a Traditional Owner, this certificate advances my skills and knowledge to take my work to the next level."



Transfer power & resource



Goal 19: Aboriginal culture and language are supported and celebrated



Overview

Measures under Goal 19 have continued to improve.

There continues to be many examples of recognising and celebrating the unique status, rights, cultures, and history of Aboriginal communities in Victoria.

Data Note



All measures under this goal are featured although no recent data is available from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) for Measure 19.1.1 Participation in community events which celebrate Aboriginal culture.

Goal 19 directly aligns with the following Closing the Gap Outcome and Target

Outcome 16: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and languages are strong, supported and flourishing.

- **Target 16:** By 2031, there is a sustained increase in number and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages being spoken.

Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally

Nationally in 2018-19, there were 123 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages being spoken (with 14 considered strong).

This target relies on data from the National Indigenous Languages Survey. No new data since the baseline year of 2018-19 was available at the time of reporting.

State and territory data are not available.

Objective 19.1 Support the preservation, promotion and practice of culture and languages

Measure 19.1.1 Participation in community events which celebrate Aboriginal culture

Strong Roots for Our Futures Program (Strong Roots)

Strong Roots has enabled Traditional Owner groups without formal recognition to deliver activities that achieve healing, build relationships, celebrate culture, enable connection with Country, engage young people and strengthen governance. Strong Roots was co-designed in 2019 with over 120 Traditional Owners of the four regions where there isn't yet formal recognition: Mid North West, Central North, North East and Far East Gippsland.

To date, Strong Roots has supported ten family gatherings, one of which had over 150 members across four generations from one family, who came together for a five-day camp to celebrate culture and honour the memory of their ancestors. One attendee explained:

"I'm not sure I can put into words what the gathering meant to me, my Elders and my family.... There was so much love, laughter, healing and connection that occurred and was very much needed."

Strong Roots has also supported thirteen small projects, including a possum skin cloak making workshop. Following the workshop, the Traditional Owner project manager explained:

[The workshop] was important for so many reasons, it's important to bring people together, to heal community, for cultural healing, re-establishing our cultural practices and just spending time together on Country. The most important thing though, is the real value of spending time with your family outside of sad times... at funerals.

Traditional Owners who have been engaged through Strong Roots report that the program has supported development of skills required to work with their communities and engage with government, such as being able to connect community, create a safe space, support community to establish healing relationships, and achieve group aspirations.

Measure 19.1.2 Investment in Aboriginal language and culture revitalisation programs

All Victorians should celebrate and take pride in Aboriginal culture and language. The below table outlines standalone Aboriginal language and culture revitalisation initiatives supported by the Victorian Government. Significant government investment in language and culture revitalisation is also embedded in many programs and services delivered by ACCOs, such as kinship family finding, return to Country and cultural camps.

Initiative / organisation	Description
1. Koorie Heritage Trust	The Victorian Government funds the Koorie Heritage Trust to support its operations; delivery of the Koorie Family History Service for members of the Stolen Generations, Aboriginal Victorians in custody and members of the Koorie Community; and the retention and revival of Victorian Aboriginal history and language through the Koorie Oral History Project.
2. Connecting Home Limited	The Victorian Government funds Connecting Home Limited to support its operations and provide case management services, counselling and healing initiatives for members of the Stolen Generations and their families.
3. Koorie Youth Council	The Victorian Government funds the Koorie Youth Council to support its operations and deliver activities that engage with, and advance the rights and representation of, Aboriginal young people, including the annual Koorie Youth Summit.
4. Cultural Markers Project	The Victorian Government is funding the Cultural Markers project, which aims to increase visibility of Aboriginal culture in inner Melbourne. The project is being developed in collaboration with Traditional Owners and seeks to create digital cultural markers that can be viewed through augmented reality on a smart device at a number of cultural sites across Melbourne's CBD.
5. Reconciliation Victoria	The Victorian Government funds Reconciliation Victoria to support its operations and deliver a range of activities and products that promote reconciliation, including the Maggolee website and Reconciliation Week initiatives.
6. Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust (Trust)	The Victorian Government funds the Trust to deliver municipal and essential services to its residents. This funding supports the management of Trust's land, water and built environment, as well as the preservation of cultural heritage.
7. Geographic Names Victoria (GNV)	The Victorian Government funds GNV to oversee the naming and registration of roads, features and localities in Victoria by administering the <i>Geographic Place Names Act 1998</i> . GNV formally engages with Traditional Owners to support and progress this work.
8. Our Language Matters – Aboriginal place names workshops	The Victorian Government funds the delivery of Aboriginal-led workshops to recognise the importance of Aboriginal place names, strengthen partnerships with TOs, and increase the number of Aboriginal place names throughout Victoria. In 2022 a workshop was held on Bunurong Country, with involvement from Traditional Owners and over 40 attendees.
9. Naming Authority training	The Victorian Government is supporting municipal Councils, government departments and agencies to understand the process around using Traditional Owner languages.
10. VICNAMES - Register of Geographic Place Names	The Victorian Government funded enhancements to VICNAMES, which holds over 200,000 road and over 45,000 place names. Functionality has been added to enable future reporting of the number of roads and places named in Traditional Owner languages. Sound file functionality has also been added to assist with pronunciation of place names, with recordings spoken by Traditional Owners.

Remembrance Day service

In 2021, the Shrine of Remembrance introduced a smoking ceremony and Welcome to Country for the first time at its annual Remembrance Day service. This was continued in 2022 when Bunurong elder, Uncle Mik Edwards, performed a smoking ceremony and offered a Welcome to Country, lighting eucalyptus leaves and other native flora from the eternal flame in the Shrine's forecourt before bathing guests and grounds in cleansing smoke.

The smoking ceremony and Welcome to Country acknowledges that for many years the service of Aboriginal people was not adequately recognised, and that Aboriginal people have served in every conflict and peacekeeping mission involving Australia since Federation, including peacetime service.

This is in addition to the Victorian Aboriginal Remembrance Service, which has been held annually at the Shrine of Remembrance since 2006 as part of National Reconciliation Week.



Goal 20: Racism is eliminated



Overview

Measures under Goal 20 have worsened.

Concerningly, there has been an increase in experiences of racial prejudice and an increase in the perceived prevalence of racist attitudes for Aboriginal Australians.

Closing the Gap – Relevant Outcomes and Targets for Goal 20

The National Agreement does not contain outcomes and targets that align with this VAAF goal. Victoria is pursuing more ambitious and comprehensive goals under the VAAF, which are reported on in this chapter and the Data Dashboard.

Data Note



All measures under this goal are featured. However, the data from the Australian Reconciliation Barometer is Australia wide, rather than specific to Victoria.

Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally

Not applicable.

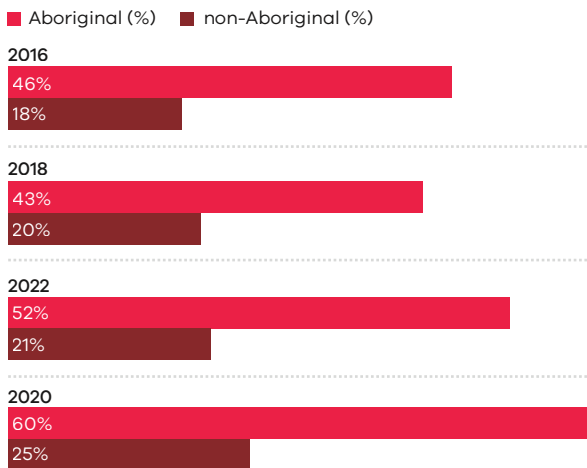


Measure 20.1.1 Proportion of Aboriginal people who report having experienced racism in the previous 6 months

In the 2022 Australian Reconciliation Barometer survey, 60 per cent of Aboriginal respondents reported experiencing racial prejudice in the past six months, compared to 25 per cent of general community respondents. It is concerning that this has been trending upwards since 2016. However, it is not possible to determine if this is due to more instances of racism occurring, or greater awareness, or more reporting. The survey does not include disaggregated results for Victoria.

Aboriginal people experience racism at a disproportionate rate

Measure 20.1.1



Source: Australian Reconciliation Barometer

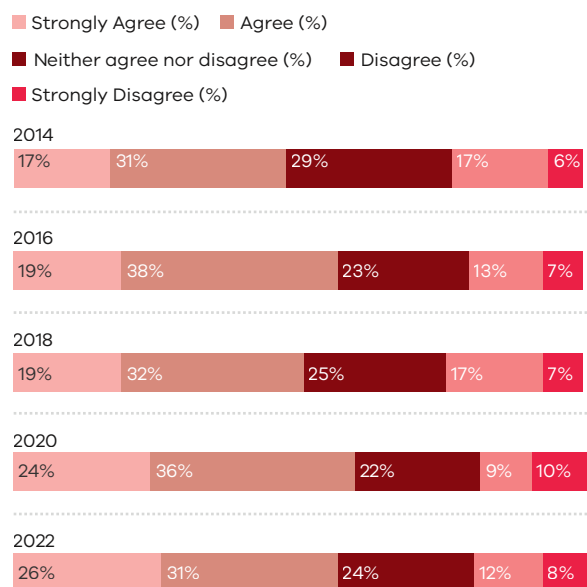
Measure 20.1.2 Prevalence of racist attitudes in Australia

In the 2022 Australian Reconciliation Barometer survey, 57 per cent of Aboriginal respondents and 42 per cent of non-Aboriginal respondents answered agree or strongly agree to the prompt 'Australia is a racist country'. This is compared to 48 per cent of Aboriginal and 35 per cent of non-Aboriginal respondents who responded so in 2014. The survey does not include disaggregated results for Victoria.

Belief that Australia is a racist country has grown since 2014. Overall, this suggests that Australians either believe Australia is becoming more racist or are becoming more aware of existing racism. The increased awareness of discrimination against First Nations Australians and other racial minorities due to social media and the growth of the Bla(c)k Lives Matter movement is likely to have informed the results.

The majority of Aboriginal Australian respondents believe that 'Australia is a racist country'

Measure 20.1.2



Source: Australian Reconciliation Barometer

Aboriginal Flag Permanently on the West Gate Bridge

It was announced at the end of NAIDOC Week 2022 that the Aboriginal Flag will be flown on the West Gate Bridge permanently alongside the Australian Flag.

Since 2019, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags were flown on rotation atop the West Gate Bridge only during Reconciliation and NAIDOC Weeks.

In June 2022, the Department of Transport (now Department of Transport and Planning - DTP) worked closely with the First People's Assembly of Victoria, the Minister of Treaty and First Peoples and the Bunurong Land Council

Aboriginal Corporation on whose Country the West Gate Bridge is located. All supported the permanent installation of the Aboriginal Flag in preparation for the raising of the flag during NAIDOC week.

The installation of additional flagpoles will form part of future investigations which will ensure that the bridge remains structurally safe.

Flying the Aboriginal Flag acknowledges and celebrates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, history, heritage and culture. This is now a permanent fixture in the Victorian skyline.



Domain 6 – Victorian Government Investment and Action

The Victorian Government is committed to promoting self-determination, Treaty and Truth. Supporting Traditional Owners is a critical element of that.

The key Aboriginal Governance Forum for realising outcomes in this Domain is the Caring for Country Partnership Forum.

Victoria 2026 Commonwealth Games

The Victorian Government made a submission in response to the Commission's Issues Paper on systemic injustice experienced by First Peoples in the criminal justice system.

This submission acknowledges the historical context of the criminal justice system and provides examples of past wrongs; outlines key efforts that the Government has made to address historic and ongoing systemic injustice; expresses the Government's commitment to do more to achieve transformational change and identifies some key areas for the Commission's consideration. The Attorney General, Minister for Police, Minister for Corrections and Youth Justice, the Chief Commissioner of Police and senior Government executives also gave evidence.

 Prioritise culture

State sport infrastructure

Traditional owners are consulted in the design of state sport infrastructure, and, where opportunities identified, the naming of new facilities. An example is the Melbourne Park Stage 2 Redevelopment which consulted local traditional owners on naming key elements of the project including the pedestrian footbridge linking the city and Melbourne Park, named Tanderrum Bridge following a public naming competition.

 Prioritise culture

State-wide network of Aboriginal Water Officers

Since 2016, the Department of Environment, Energy, and Climate Action (DEECA) has funded Traditional Owners to take an active role in the management of the State's water resources. Aboriginal Water Officers play a significant role in promoting informed discussion to support Aboriginal values and uses through Victoria's existing water resource planning and management processes.

AWOs provide a dedicated water expert on Country that supports Traditional Owners to self-determine how they partner with the water sector. AWOs work on local projects and programs and support the Victorian Government to better understand and incorporate Traditional Ecological Knowledge into water resource planning. AWOs deliver projects in partnership with Traditional Owner Corporations, Aboriginal communities, Catchment Management Authorities, and Water Corporations.

The Aboriginal Water Program, in partnership with AWOs, established the Aboriginal Water Officer Network as a forum to share knowledge and practices. It is administered by AWOs to provide support for each other and strengthen capability to participate in the water industry. In 2022, there were 25 funded water officers employed in 19 Aboriginal community organisations, four Catchment Management Authorities and one peak body.

Cultural Fire Grants

The Cultural Fire Grants Program supports Aboriginal Victorians to care for Country and reinvigorate Traditional Owner-led cultural land and fire management practices in line with the Victorian Traditional Owner Cultural Fire Strategy.

During this reporting period the first round of the grants were finalised, resulting in 10 Traditional Owner Corporations (TOCs) sharing a total of \$6.2 million in funding. The grants and project plans are a critical step to enable many of the TOCs to start to develop plans and enact their Cultural Burning aspirations. Many of the groups, especially those who have secured the larger grants, have identified the employment of dedicated Cultural Burning staff, increased training and capacity building activities and the procurement of firefighting equipment and vehicles as some of the key areas for investment.

 Prioritise culture

Renewable energy grants program

The Traditional Owner Renewable Energy Program (TOREP) is the Victorian Government's first tailored renewable energy grant program for Traditional Owner Corporations. It is providing up to \$100,000 to each Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP) who applied, addressing energy issues relevant to their individual community and corporation needs. TOREP supports RAPs to decide how they would like to participate in Victoria's renewable energy transformation and transition to clean energy.

DEECA worked in partnership with RAPs towards capacity-building initiatives such as the development of renewable energy roadmaps, implementing solar and battery systems and feasibility reviews to adopt energy efficiency measures. This work is helping communities review their energy usage and find ways to cut power costs. One project is successfully completed, and eight projects are currently underway to displace fossil fuels, advance reconciliation and enable the self-determination in renewable energy.

 Transfer power & resource

Transport – Regional Chapters

Regional Chapters are local co-designed implementation plans between transport regions and Aboriginal community stakeholders and Victorian Traditional Owners. They are designed to capture local priorities, remove barriers for the Aboriginal communities to access transport services and ensure they are culturally safe and supported when commuting.

In 2022, the Department of Transport (now Department of Transport and Planning - DTP) held three Metro Region Regional Chapter roundtables with departmental staff and Aboriginal Community organisations. The aim of the roundtables was to provide an overview of the transport portfolio, promote the purpose of the Regional Chapters, capture Aboriginal community perspectives and establish an ongoing mechanism for co-design and co-governance.

 Address racism & promote cultural safety

Transport Portfolio - RAP Partnership Agreements

In 2022, work continued to co-design pilot partnership agreements with three Registered Aboriginal Parties: Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation, Yorta Yorta Nations Aboriginal Corporation and Taungurung Land and Waters Corporation. This included considerations of their roles regarding transport activities occurring on their traditional lands and waters. All agreements are tailored to respond to incorporate particular needs and priorities of the different RAPs and designed separate to legislative obligations of both RAPs and the transport portfolio.

Yorta Yorta Welcome to Country signs have been replaced and three new signs have been installed on Yorta Yorta Country since the commencement of partnership discussions with the transport portfolio. Funding for this initiative for all three signs totalled \$99,830.

Melbourne Art Trams

For the second year Melbourne Art Trams made a return featuring original artwork from local First Nations artists a collaboration between RISING, DTP, Yarra Trams and Creative Victoria. The 2022 theme 'Unapologetically Blak' required designs to respond to multiple layers of history, country, diverse community and connections across Victoria. Members of DTP's Aboriginal Staff Network were involved in shortlisting artists, with trams showcased on the network for 12 months. DTP has provided funding of \$95,150 (incl. GST) for each year of the program.

Artists include Lin Onus – original artwork from 1991 (Yorta Yorta), Louise Moore (Wamba), Patricia Mckean (Gundijtmara/Kirrae Wurrong), Dr Paola Balla (Wemba-Wemba/Gundijtmara), Tegan Murdock (Burapa), and Darcy McConnell / Enoki (Yorta Yorta/Dja Dja Wurrung).

Prioritise culture

Nation-building Resource Pool

\$5.835 million in flexible funding was available under the Nation-building Resource Pool (Resource Pool) from 2020 to 2024 for Traditional Owners with formal recognition across Victoria to engage in nation-building activities and prepare for Treaty. The Resource Pool is funded by the Victorian Government, delivered by the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations, and overseen in partnership with First Nations Legal and Research Services.

Up to \$530,000 in funding is available for each Traditional Owner group with formal recognition, on a non-competitive and equitable basis. The Resource Pool is underpinned by the principle of self-determination with funded projects designed and led by each Traditional Owner group. This recognises that Traditional Owners are best placed to decide how to invest resources to achieve their nation's goals.

\$4.16 million is now allocated to eight Traditional Owner groups, of which \$2.76 million was allocated in 2022. Examples of projects funded by the Resource Pool include:

- Djaara, representing the Dja Dja Wurrung people of central Victoria, aims to enter into a Treaty or Treaty-like agreement with Local Government Authorities within the area over which it has a Recognition and Settlement agreement with the Victorian Government. These agreements will enable joint decisions regarding Djaara landscape, employment opportunities, and self-determination. Djaara also aims to re-engage and re-energise Dja Dja Wurrung people following the isolation and disconnection experienced during the Coronavirus pandemic.
- Barengi Gadjin Land Council, representing the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagulk peoples in North-west Victoria, is bringing families together on Country to strengthen connection and kinship, as well as undertaking a Wergaia language revival project. The project has a strong focus on re-engaging Elders and youth, and facilitating intergenerational knowledge sharing and connection.

Transfer power & resource

Supporting cultural pride and identity among Aboriginal Victorians through significant dates

NAIDOC week 2022 was celebrated in July with the theme of 'Get Up! Stand Up! Show Up!'. Narrm (Melbourne) was the Focus City for the National NAIDOC Award Ceremony for the first time in 10 years. The NAIDOC State Reception and the Victorian NAIDOC Ball honoured and paid tribute to Aboriginal culture, history and achievements.

Prioritise culture

Glossary

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
ACAT	Aboriginal Cultural Awareness Training
ACAC	Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care
ACCCHO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
ACCO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation
ACF	Aboriginal Children's Forum
ACHLMA	Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Land Management Agreement
ACIP	Aboriginal Community Infrastructure Program
ACLO	Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer
AEDC	Australian Early Development Census
AHV	Aboriginal Housing Victoria
AHWP	Victorian Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Partnership
AJA	Aboriginal Justice Advisory
AJC	Aboriginal Justice Caucus
AJF	Aboriginal Justice Forum
AJG	Aboriginal Justice Group
ASGF	Aboriginal Strategic Governance Forum
ASN	Aboriginal Staff Network
ASPG	Aboriginal Sport Participation Grant
AWF	Aboriginal Workforce Fund
AYCP	Aboriginal Youth Cautioning Program
AYJ	Aboriginal Youth Justice
CPP	COVID Positive Pathways Program
CISP	Court Integrated Services Program
CUST	Community Understanding and Safety Training

DDACL	Dandenong & District Aborigines Co-Operative Limited
DEECA	Department of Environment Energy, and Climate Action (formally Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning)
DE	Department of Education (formally Department of Education and Training)
DFFH	Department of Families Fairness and Housing
DH	Department of Health
DJCS	Department of Justice and Community Safety
DJSIR	Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry, and Regions (formally Department of Jobs, Precincts, and Regions)
DTF	Department of Treasury and Finance
DTP	Department of Transport and Planning (formerly Department of Transport)
DPC	Department of Premier and Cabinet
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
First Peoples' Assembly	First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria
FVTOC	Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations
GLaWAC	Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation
GNV	Geographic Names Victoria
HfAVR	Homes for Aboriginal Victorians Round
HPV	Human papillomavirus
IWG	Implementation Working Group
KFFE	Koorie Families as First Educators
KMS	Koori Maternity Services
KSN	Koorie Staff Network
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Intersex and Queer

LPHU	Local Public Health Unit
MCGC	Marrung Central Governance Committee
MDAS	Mallee District Aboriginal Services
MCH	Maternal and Child Health
MPAS	Medium-term Perpetrator Accommodation Service
NAIDOC	National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
National Agreement	National Agreement on Closing the Gap
NATSIHS	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey
NATSISS	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey
NDIA	National Disability Insurance Agency
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
NIKERI	National Indigenous Knowledges Education Research Institute
NILFET	Not in Labour Force, Education or Training
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
PALO	Police Aboriginal Liaison Officer
PwC	Pricewaterhouse Coopers
QLD	Queensland
RAP	Registered Aboriginal Party
RCDVS	Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicides
REDS	Regional Economic Development Strategies
SCFCPF	State-wide Caring for Country Partnership Forum
SEWB	Social and Emotional Wellbeing
SDRF	Self-Determination Reform Framework
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TMA	Together More Active

TO	Traditional Owner
TOC	Traditional Owner Corporation
TOS Act	<i>Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010 (VIC)</i>
The Report	2022 Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Report
TOR	Terms of Reference
TOREP	Traditional Owner Renewable Energy Program
VAAF	Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework
VACCA	Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency
VACCHO	Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
VAEAI	Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated
VAEEC	Victorian Aboriginal Employment and Economic Council
VAHMF	Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework
VCAL	Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning
VCE	Victorian Certificate of Education
VET	Vocational Education Training
VIC	Victoria
VIT	Victorian Institute of Technology
VPC	Victorian Pathways Certificate
VPHS	Victorian Population Health Survey
VPS	Victorian Public Sector
VSBA	Victorian Schools Building Authority
VPSC	Victorian Public Sector Commission
WA	Western Australia
YBFS	Year Before Full-Time Schooling

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that this document may include photos, quotations and/or names of people who are deceased.

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