



**Victorian Government**  
Aboriginal Affairs  
Report 2023



# Acknowledgment

**We acknowledge the First Peoples of Victoria 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 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 that 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. 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 First Peoples, communities and cultures throughout Victoria. While the terms 'Koorie' or 'Koori' are commonly used by contemporary First Peoples in southeast Australia to identify and differentiate themselves from First Peoples groups from other parts of Australia, this does not encompass the diversity of all First Peoples in Victoria. Unless otherwise stated, we have used the term 'Aboriginal' or 'First Peoples' 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.

# Contents

Acknowledgment	1
Message from the Premier	3
Message from the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples	4
About this Report	5
About Data	7
How government is transforming to enable self-determination	9
Government action under the four self-determination enablers	11
Victoria's approach to implementing the National Agreement on Closing the Gap	13
Priority Reform One: Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision-Making	16
Priority Reform Two: Building the Aboriginal Community-Controlled Sector	20
Priority Reform Three: Transforming Government Organisations	22
Priority Reform Four: Shared Access to Data and Information at a Regional level	25
Domain 1: Children, Family & Home	27
Domain 2: Learning and Skills	58
Domain 3: Opportunity and Prosperity	85
Domain 4: Health and Wellbeing	107
Domain 5: Justice and Safety	131
Domain 6: Culture and Country	156
Glossary	176

# Message from the Premier



This year, I had the profound privilege of being the first head of Government in Australia to participate in a truth-telling process, appearing before the Yoorrook Justice Commission.

It was an opportunity to acknowledge the injustices committed against First Peoples in Victoria since colonisation.

The murder. The massacres. The dispossession – of Country and of culture.

That the policies and practices of government have created the gap that exists between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Victorians.

That injustice is enduring – and despite efforts and intentions, there is still a long, long way to go.

Appearing before the Commission was also an opportunity to hear of the strength, resilience and resistance of Aboriginal people – of their unbroken connection to culture and Country for tens of thousands of years.

Our Government is committed to honouring that connection – and delivering on truth, Treaty and self-determination for First Peoples.

We must reckon with our past, be honest with our present and walk together for a fairer future for First Peoples and all Victorians.

This report is an important tool in recognising the progress we've made and the steps we must still take.

I want to thank the many Aboriginal Governance Forums and Ngarweeyan Maar-oo, the Koorie Caucus of the Closing the Gap Partnership Forum, for their contributions to this report.

Your work is changing our future.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jacinta Allan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end of the name.

**Hon Jacinta Allan MP**  
Premier

# Message from the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples



The Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Report 2023 is delivered in the context of the Victorian Government's significant program of reforms toward First Peoples self-determination.

This Report provides key data to inform implementation of the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018-2025, Victoria's overarching and ambitious framework to improve outcomes for and with First People.

As Victoria prepares for formal Treaty negotiations to begin in late 2024, this Report acknowledges self-determination is crucial in addressing ongoing systemic injustice and securing better outcomes.

Victoria is leading the way on early learning. In 2022, 100 per cent of eligible Aboriginal children enrolled in kindergarten. We know the experiences children have in early childhood directly impact their learning later in life.

In 2022-23 more Aboriginal people of all ages attended Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific health checks and accessed aged care services.

Victoria's first Aboriginal sexual and reproductive health plan was developed, outlining priority actions to improve the sexual and reproductive with approaches based in self-determination.

This Report also shows us where we must direct future action. Aboriginal Victorians are still overrepresented in the criminal justice system and the child protection system.

The Victorian Government is working closely with Aboriginal communities to devise and implement the structural changes needed to deliver lasting change.

At a time of such significant change, the 2023 Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Report focuses our attention on the experiences of First Peoples in Victoria.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Natalie Hutchins".

**The Hon Natalie Hutchins 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 - 2025 (VAAF), the Self-Determination Reform Framework (SDRF), the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (National Agreement), and the Victorian Closing the Gap Implementation Plan 2021-2025 (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 and the Victorian Closing the Gap Implementation Plan have been extended until June 2025 to allow time for ongoing consultation with First Peoples stakeholders to self-determine next steps in the development of a new framework in the context of Treaty.

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 First Peoples’ 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) and informed by the Yoorrook Justice Commission’s historic inquiry. The Yoorrook Justice Commission is the first truth-telling process into the historical and ongoing systemic injustices committed against First Peoples in Victoria since colonisation. Treaty in Victoria is the embodiment of First Peoples 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 complemented by our commitments under the National Agreement. 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.

This is the fifth annual Report against the VAAF since its release in 2018 and for the third year, the Report embeds dedicated reporting on progress in Victoria to implement the National Agreement and Victoria’s Implementation Plan. The Report showcases the most up-to-date available data across the 111 measures in the VAAF and 19 socio-economic targets under the National Agreement. 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. The Report also features case studies about the impact of reform and investment on the lives of First Peoples. The case studies focus on examples of policy and programs shaped by the Aboriginal community-controlled sector.

The Report was developed through a coordinated and collaborative approach with input from Victorian Government departments and agencies. Many Aboriginal Governance Forums and Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, the Koorie Caucus of the Closing the Gap Partnership Forum, also provided input.

## Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework





















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

<p><b>Self-determination enablers: What we'll do</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prioritise culture</li> <li>Address trauma and support healing</li> <li>Address racism and promote cultural safety</li> <li>Transfer power and resources to communities</li> </ul>	<p><b>Self-determination guiding principles: How we'll do it</b></p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top; width: 50%;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Human rights</li> <li>Cultural integrity</li> <li>Commitment</li> <li>Aboriginal expertise</li> <li>Partnership</li> <li>Investment</li> </ul> </td> <td style="vertical-align: top; width: 50%;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decision-making</li> <li>Empowerment</li> <li>Cultural safety</li> <li>Equity</li> <li>Accountability</li> </ul> </td> </tr> </table>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Human rights</li> <li>Cultural integrity</li> <li>Commitment</li> <li>Aboriginal expertise</li> <li>Partnership</li> <li>Investment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decision-making</li> <li>Empowerment</li> <li>Cultural safety</li> <li>Equity</li> <li>Accountability</li> </ul>
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### Domains

 <b>1. Children, family &amp; home</b>	 <b>2. Learning &amp; skills</b>	 <b>3. Opportunity &amp; prosperity</b>	 <b>4. Health &amp; wellbeing</b>	 <b>5. Justice &amp; safety</b>	 <b>6. Culture &amp; Country</b>
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### Goals

 <b>Goal 1</b> Aboriginal children are born healthy and thrive	 <b>Goal 4</b> Aboriginal children thrive in the early years	 <b>Goal 8</b> Aboriginal workers achieve wealth equality	 <b>Goal 11</b> Aboriginal Victorians enjoy health and longevity	 <b>Goal 15</b> Aboriginal over-representation in the justice system is eliminated	 <b>Goal 18</b> Aboriginal land, water and cultural rights are realised
 <b>Goal 2</b> Aboriginal children are raised by Aboriginal families	 <b>Goal 5</b> Aboriginal learners excel at school	 <b>Goal 9</b> Strong Aboriginal workforce participation, in all sectors and at all levels	 <b>Goal 12</b> Aboriginal Victorians access the services they need	 <b>Goal 16</b> Aboriginal Victorians have access to safe and effective justice services	 <b>Goal 19</b> Aboriginal culture and language are supported and celebrated
 <b>Goal 3</b> Aboriginal families and households thrive	 <b>Goal 6</b> Aboriginal learners are engaged at school	 <b>Goal 10</b> Aboriginal income potential is realised	 <b>Goal 13</b> Health and community services are culturally-safe and responsive	 <b>Goal 17</b> Aboriginal Victorians feel safe and connected	 <b>Goal 20</b> Racism is eliminated
	 <b>Goal 7</b> Aboriginal learners achieve their full potential after school		 <b>Goal 14</b> Aboriginal Victorians enjoy social and emotional wellbeing		

# About Data

## Cabinet and Machinery of Government changes

During the reporting period, the Hon Jacinta Allan MP was sworn in as the 49th Premier of Victoria in September 2023. There was a Cabinet reshuffle in October 2023 and this was supported by some Machinery of Government changes that became effective from early 2024.

## 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 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, most 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

Under the National Agreement, socio-economic targets are set as 'national targets' and require a collaborative approach from all jurisdictions to achieve them. Assessments of progress for the Closing the Gap targets are included on the overview page for each relevant VAAF goal based on the latest available data. Further data for some targets is expected to be released in July and October 2024. 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 currently 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.

Further information on national and jurisdictional progress towards the Closing the Gap targets, including data specifications, can be found at [www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/dashboard](http://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 <https://www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/victorian-aboriginal-affairs-framework-data-dashboard>. 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.

## Indigenous Data Sovereignty

The Victorian Government acknowledges the critical importance of Indigenous Data Sovereignty. Resourcing Aboriginal people and organisations to collect, analyse, disseminate and manage data supports self-determination.



## 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).

### Victorian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Population 2016-2021

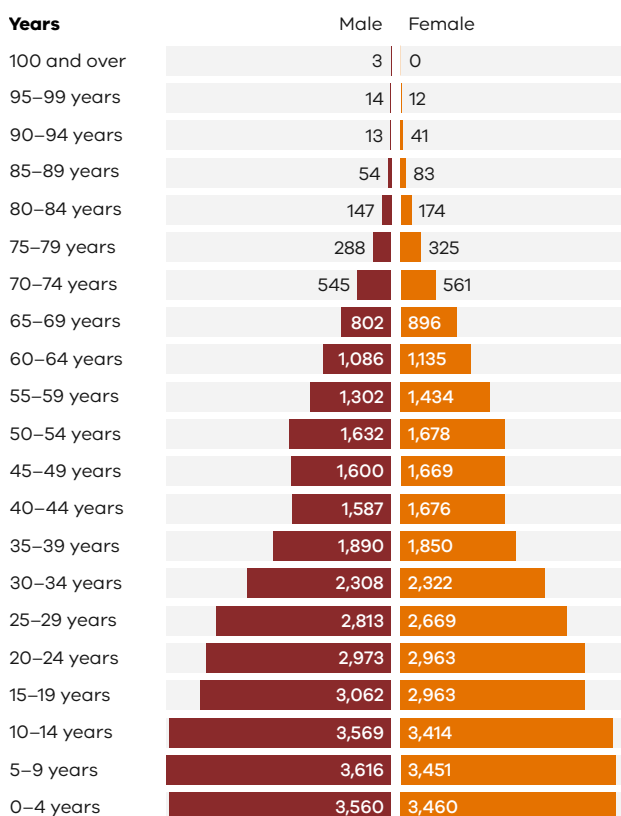
Indigenous Status	Victoria, 2021	%	Victoria, 2016	%
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander total	65,646	1.0%	47,788	0.8%
Aboriginal	61,865	1.0%	44,590	0.8%
Torres Strait Islander	2,083	0.0%	2,027	0.0%
Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	1,692	0.0%	1,169	0.0%
Non-Indigenous	6,148,188	94.5%	5,532,275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

Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing

## Demographics

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

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

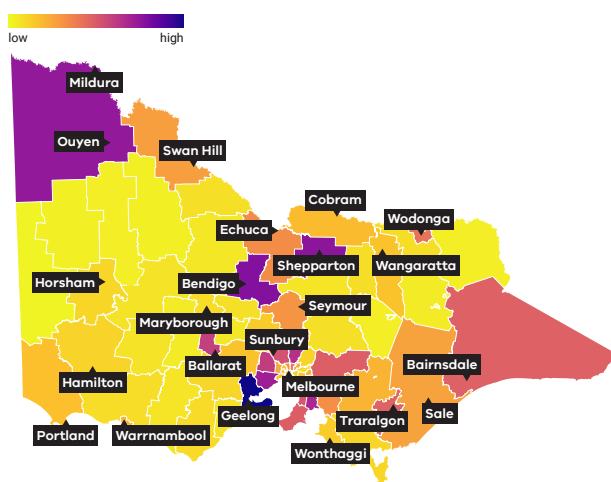


Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing

## 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 Population Heatmap, 2021



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

# How government is transforming to enable self-determination

Self-determination is key to improved outcomes for First Peoples. 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 2023, 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.

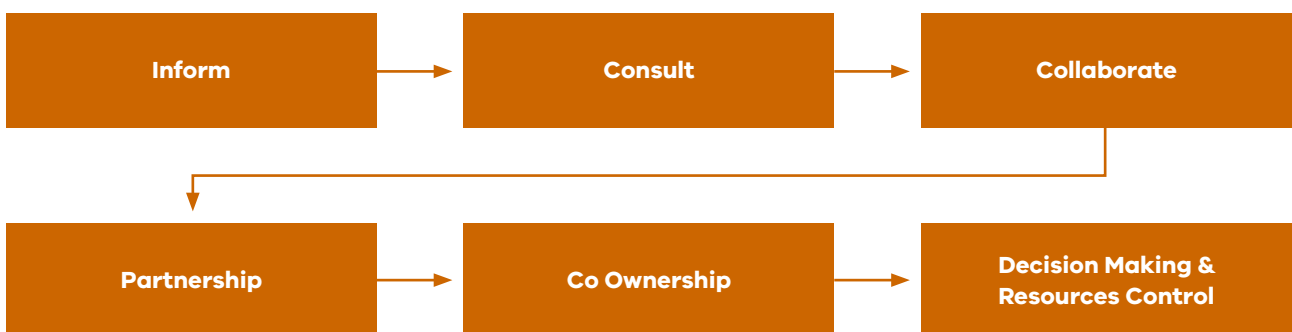
**3 Address racism and promote cultural safety**

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

The heritage of First Peoples is particularly significant because it represents the oldest continuing cultures in the world. Recognising and celebrating First Peoples' culture strengthens and enriches the identity of all Victorians. Prioritising culture is also key to creating culturally safe workplaces, policies, programs and services. The Domain chapters of this Report include some examples of how departments demonstrated a commitment to making culture a priority in policy, program and service delivery in 2023.

Treaty also presents an opportunity to further recognise and celebrate the unique status, rights, cultures and histories of First Peoples. In negotiating Treaty with First Peoples, the Victorian Government is acknowledging that prior to the formation of the State of Victoria, First Peoples communities were here – practicing their own law, lore, and cultural authority.

## 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 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. However, government organisations must move beyond small-scale, individual actions, and prioritise system-level changes to policies and practices. Developing and executing whole-of-organisation transformation strategies are necessary to ensure that government organisations are cultural safe and responsive to Aboriginal people, including through the services government funds.

## 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. The Commission operates independently from government and is First Peoples-led. The Commission has an unprecedented and broad mandate to hear, record and make recommendations to address the truth of First Peoples' experiences of colonisation in Victoria from 1788 to the present. Its objectives include:

- Establishing a public record based on First Peoples' experiences of systemic injustices,
- Developing a shared understanding among all Victorians of the individual and collective impact of systemic injustices, and
- Determining the causes and consequences of systemic injustices, including the role of the State's laws and policies.

In this truth-telling process, the Government has responded to information and document requests, provided submissions, and given evidence to support the Commission's lines of inquiry. The Victorian Government is committed to acknowledging the truth of Victoria's history and laying the foundations for improved relationships between the State, Aboriginal Victorians and the broader Victorian community. Truth-telling provides an opportunity to develop a shared understanding of the contemporary injustices that persist and to guide the reforms needed to address them, including through Treaty. The Yoorrook Justice Commission will run until 30 June 2025 after being granted a 12-month extension.

Government must 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

Self-determination means that the State supports First Peoples to exercise control over their own lives. This requires a transfer of decision-making power and resources to First Peoples. Progress on this has been limited so far. Examples include: providing funding to Traditional Owner Corporations, progressing agreements with Traditional Owners, and transferring resources to ACCOs to support service delivery.

Treaty provides a path to negotiate the transfer of power and resources and realise self-determination. As detailed under Domain 6 of this Report, the Treaty process has achieved significant milestones in 2023. Victoria is preparing to embark on the next phase of the landmark Treaty process and commence formal Treaty negotiations in 2024.

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

Case studies and actions from departmental SDRF reports are spread throughout Domain chapters of the VGAAR (identified by relevant enabler symbol).

### 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

## Overview of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap

The National Agreement represents a fundamental shift in the way First Peoples and governments are working in partnership to deliver better outcomes for First Peoples.

When the Victorian Government signed the National Agreement in July 2020, alongside all Australian governments, the Australian Local Government Association and the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations (Coalition of Peaks), it committed to a 10-year journey to fundamentally transform the way it works with First Peoples. The Coalition of Peaks, a representative body of over eighty Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled peak organisations and members, was formed as an act of self-determination to work in partnership with Australian governments on Closing the Gap.

The National Agreement is structured around four Priority Reforms that are the mutually reinforcing enablers for achieving better outcomes for First

Peoples. 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 socio-economic outcome areas and 19 associated socio-economic 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 socio-economic outcome areas are included on the overview page of each relevant VAAF goal.



## The Productivity Commission Review of the National Agreement

Implementation of the National Agreement is at a critical juncture. On 7 February 2024, the Productivity Commission published its first, three-yearly review of progress under the National Agreement (Review). The Review raises significant concerns with the implementation of the National Agreement, finding that governments have failed to enact the transformative changes required to realise the National Agreement's vision.

While noting the significant progress made towards self-determination in Victoria through the Treaty process, the Review highlights significant structural issues in governments' approaches to implementing the National Agreement, which have resulted in a lack of progress towards the Priority Reforms. The Review recommends significant changes to government policies and implementation approaches at the national and jurisdictional level. It includes 16 essential actions, grouped under four recommendations:

1. Power needs to be shared.
2. Indigenous Data Sovereignty needs to be recognised and supported.
3. Mainstream government systems and culture need to be fundamentally rethought.
4. Stronger accountability is needed to drive behaviour change.

In November 2023, the Victorian Government made a public submission to the Productivity Commission review, highlighting Victoria's commitment to implementing the National Agreement in partnership with First Peoples, and driving the fundamental, transformational change across government that is required to do so. Victoria is now working with government parties and the Coalition of Peaks to develop the Joint Council response to the Review, which will discuss opportunities for interjurisdictional collaboration to address the Productivity Commission's findings. The Review will also be a key consideration in the development of Victoria's new Implementation Plan.

Under the National Agreement, an independent First Peoples led review is due to be carried out within twelve months of the Review. This will be an opportunity to capture the lived experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities of the implementation of this National Agreement, to highlight areas of achievement and improvement, as well as priority areas where greater collective effort of the parties is required.

## Victoria's Closing the Gap Implementation Plan

Victoria's Implementation Plan runs until the end of June 2025, and it outlines the actions Victoria is taking to implement the National Agreement, driving progress towards the Priority Reforms and socioeconomic outcomes. The Implementation Plan, Victoria's first under the National Agreement, sets the groundwork for actions that will create lasting change, including providing greater resourcing to ACCOs, addressing cultural safety in mainstream institutions, and investing in data and information sharing with First Peoples.

Over the next twelve months, the Victorian Government will be working in close partnership with First Peoples to reflect on the lessons learned from the Victoria's first Implementation Plan. The new Implementation Plan will include an update on the progress of the whole-of-government actions that are ongoing from the 2021-2025 Implementation Plan, including identifying challenges and opportunities for improvement, and detail the next stage of actions that will build on the progress achieved thus far.

The new Implementation Plan will also incorporate the findings from the Productivity Commission Review and its recommendation that implementation plans should be drafted more strategically and in collaboration with First Peoples. Consistent with Priority Reform One, a partnership approach will be embedded in all stages of the development of the new Implementation Plan, to ensure that it reflects the needs and priorities of First Peoples in Victoria and recognises the expertise and authority of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) sectors to determine how service systems can best meet their needs.

## Victoria's Closing the Gap Partnership Forum

Victoria's Partnership Forum, established in May 2022, is the formal body for shared decision-making between the Victorian Government and First Peoples on whole-of-government Closing the Gap implementation. The Partnership Forum comprises:

- Representatives of fourteen ACCO sectors, elected by ACCOs and Traditional Owner groups through a community-based selection process.
- Aboriginal Governance Forum delegates, as nominated by the Aboriginal Caucuses of the Victorian Aboriginal Governance Forums.
- Senior executives across the Victorian Government, including Secretaries of each department, the Chief Commissioner of Police, the Victorian Public Sector Commissioner and the Chief Executive Officer of Homes Victoria.

The Partnership Forum has been steadily gaining momentum since its establishment. It met three times in the 2023 calendar year and has met a total of five times as of May 2024. The Partnership Forum is currently building on 2023 achievements profiled in this Report by:

- Progressing Victoria's Place-based Partnership (PBP) and Community Data Project (CDP) in Gippsland in partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, local communities, key sector representatives and government.
- Allocating the remaining \$2.76 million sector funding across the priority sectors of health, disability, housing, early childhood care and development, and languages.
- Overseeing planning for a second Victorian Expenditure Review, building on lessons learned from Victoria's 2023 Expenditure Review.
- Strengthening whole-of-government accountability mechanisms for Closing the Gap implementation.

## Ngaweeyan Maar-oo

Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, the Koorie Caucus of the Partnership Forum, comprises the Partnership Forum's ACCO sector representatives and Aboriginal Governance Forum delegates. As the formal decision-making partner with the Victorian Government on implementation of the National Agreement, Ngaweeyan Maar-oo informs the design, implementation, oversight and monitoring of the National Agreement and Victoria's Implementation Plan.

Ngaweeyan Maar-oo meets independently of Government to determine policy positions and engage independent policy advice. This includes producing responses to drafts and inquiries, allocating funding, community engagement and expert working groups. It is supported by a secretariat, auspiced by the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service.

Through its membership of the Coalition of Peaks, Ngaweeyan Maar-oo ensures that the wide range of knowledge and expertise within its membership informs Closing the Gap implementation at both the national and local level.

## Annual reporting approach

Government parties report annually on the implementation of the National Agreement. In Victoria, annual reporting against the National Agreement is currently embedded in the annual Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Report. Reporting for the calendar year 2022 was embedded in the 2022 Report, which was tabled in Parliament on 22 June 2023. This Report primarily relates to the calendar year 2023 with 2024 updates included where appropriate.



# 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.

Shared decision-making extends beyond individual partnership arrangements and is only a step towards achieving the ultimate goal of First Peoples' self-determination. Treaty is the embodiment of First Peoples' self-determination and represents a fundamental reset of the relationship between the State and First Peoples. It provides a pathway to ensure that First Peoples in Victoria have the power and resources to control matters which impact their lives.

## Victorian actions

The **Partnership Forum** coordinates shared decision making with First Peoples communities and whole-of-government implementation of the National Agreement. In 2023, the expertise and leadership of Ngaweeyan Maar-oo has been critical to ensuring that shared decision-making with the Victorian Government is informed by the needs and experiences of the ACCO sector, and that the Victorian Government is held accountable for delivering its Closing the Gap commitments.

Key achievements of the Partnership Forum in 2023 included:

- Endorsing Gippsland as the location for Victoria's Place-based Partnership (PBP) and Community Data Project (CDP) and establishing a working group to scope a research proposal.
- Overseeing the two-phased Victorian Expenditure Review, the first review of spending on programs and services for First Peoples to identify opportunities to reprioritise funding to increase the proportion of services delivered by ACCOs.
- Endorsing the allocation of \$540,000 from Victoria's committed \$3.3 million sector strengthening funding to the delivery of a cross-sectoral Early Years Summit, which is set to take place in June 2024.
- Introducing quarterly departmental reporting on implementation of the four Priority Reforms, including action to improve shared decision-making and accountability.

**Treaty** has been a Victorian Government commitment since March 2016. 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. Treaty will deliver long-term, sustainable solutions because First Peoples will be in the driver's seat, making decisions about the matters that impact their lives.

The First Peoples' Assembly is the independent and democratically elected body recognised under the *Advancing the Treaty Process with Aboriginal Victorians Act 2018 (Vic)* as the Aboriginal Representative Body that represents all First Peoples in Victoria in the Treaty process.

As detailed under Domain 6 of this Report, the Treaty process has achieved significant milestones and Victoria is preparing to commence formal negotiations in 2024. Further information about the work of the Victorian Government in advancing the Treaty process is included in the Treaty Annual Report.<sup>1</sup>

For a comprehensive list of actions to implement shared decision-making, please refer to [Closing the Gap Table A](#).

**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.

In June 2023, Joint Council endorsed Victoria's nomination of Gippsland as the location for a Place-based Partnership to be combined with Community Data Project, which will enable First Peoples communities and organisations to access and use location-specific data on the Closing the Gap priority reforms and outcomes. This followed the Partnership Forum's endorsement of Gippsland at its April 2023 meeting, with local ACCOs identifying Gippsland as a region with high demand for early childhood, child protection and justice services.

The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) is leading the development of a detailed project proposal for consideration by the Partnership Forum in 2024, to inform a 2025-26 State Budget submission.

The proposal, with strong local Aboriginal leadership, will be developed in partnership with local communities, key sector representatives and across governments to identify local priorities and how the Place-based Partnership and Community Data Project can address them.



1. Treaty Annual Report < <https://www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/annual-report-and-plan-advancing-victorian-treaty-process> >

**Aboriginal Governance Forums** are well-established strategic and coordinating bodies across various sectors. Aboriginal Governance Forums, which comprise senior Aboriginal community leaders and Victorian Government representatives, are responsible for overseeing the development, implementation and direction of Aboriginal-led policy and service delivery agendas. All Aboriginal Governance Forums are resourced to enable shared decision-making with Aboriginal communities and organisations.

Partnership Forum	Summary
<b>Aboriginal Children's Forum (ACF), Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH)</b>	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.  Relevant Strategy: <i>Wungurilwil Gaggapduir</i> : Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement
<b>Aboriginal Justice Forum (AJF), Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS)</b>	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.  Relevant Strategy: <i>Burra Lotjpa Dunguludja</i> : Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement
<b>Aboriginal Strategic Governance Forum (ASGF), DFFH</b>	Established in 2017 as an advisory and decision-making forum used to set DFFH's strategic direction on relevant portfolios.  Relevant Strategies: Aboriginal Governance and Accountability Framework, <i>Korin Korin Balit-Djak</i> : Aboriginal Health, Wellbeing and Safety Strategic Plan 2017-2027
<b>Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum, Family Safety Victoria / DFFH</b>	Established in 2005 to address issues of Aboriginal family violence. The forum meets three times a year.  Relevant Strategy: <i>Dhelk Dja</i> : Safe Our Way - Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families
<b>Marrung Central Governance Committee (MCGC), Department of Education (DE)</b>	Established in 2016 to ensure all Koorie Victorians achieve their learning aspirations. The MCGC meets three times a year.  Relevant Strategy: <i>Marrung</i> : Aboriginal Education Plan 2016-2026
<b>State-wide Caring for Country Partnership Forum (SCfCPF), Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA)</b>	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 twice a year as determined by the Traditional Owner Corporation Caucus.  Relevant Strategy: <i>Pupangarli Marmarnepu</i> : 'Owning Our Future' Aboriginal Self-Determination Strategy 2020-2025
<b>Yuma Yirramboi Council (Council), Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions (DJSIR)</b>	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.  Relevant Strategy: <i>Yuma Yirramboi</i> : Invest in Tomorrow - Aboriginal Employment and Economic Strategy
<b>Victorian Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Partnership Forum (AHWPF), Department of Health (DH)</b>	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.  Relevant Strategy: Victorian Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Partnership Agreement and Action Plan
<b>Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework Implementation Working Group (VAHWF IWG), Homes Victoria / DFFH</b>	Established in 2021 to support actions that ensure a resourced and capable housing and homelessness system within Victoria. The VAHWF IWG meets quarterly.  Relevant Strategy: <i>Mana-na Woorn-Tyeen Maar-Takoort</i> : Every Aboriginal Person has a Home - Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework.

## National Partnership actions

Victoria hosted **Joint Council on Closing the Gap in November 2023**. The meeting focused discussion on key 2024 priorities, including the Inland Waters Target, Independent Mechanism, and the First Peoples-led review of the National Agreement.

The Minister for Treaty and First Peoples hosted a Welcome Reception at the Ian Potter Centre: National Gallery of Victoria for Joint Council members and support staff, government officials and First Peoples leaders from across Victoria. This provided an opportunity to showcase the Victorian Government's commitment to the National Agreement, Truth and Treaty, and First Peoples' art and culture in Victoria.

**Policy partnerships** have been established between all governments and the Coalition of Peaks to identify opportunities to work more effectively, reduce gaps and duplication, and improve Closing the Gap outcomes. Under clause 38 the National Agreement, five policy partnerships have been established:

- Justice Policy Partnership, established in 2021.
- Social and Emotional Wellbeing (Mental Health) Policy Partnership, established in 2022.
- Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership, established in 2022.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Policy Partnership, established in 2023.
- Housing Policy Partnership, established in 2023.

Victorian Government representatives actively participate in all five policy partnerships, which provide a crucial forum for discussion with First Peoples stakeholders on sector issues and priorities.

Some policy partnerships have faced challenges including achieving quorum, securing adequate funding, ensuring representation, and maintaining transparency.

As part of its 2023 Closing the Gap Implementation Plan, the Commonwealth committed to delivering a policy partnership evaluation methodology to Joint Council. It is expected that this will be considered in 2024.

Victoria will work with parties to the National Agreement to identify additional policy partnerships in 2024.

**Partnership stocktake** the Victorian Government has acquitted its commitment under clause 36 of the National Agreement to conduct reviews in 2022 and 2023 of its partnership arrangements to assess how they meet the partnership elements at clauses 32 and 33. All Aboriginal Governance Forums have met, to a high degree, the partnership elements.

Victoria's 2023 partnership stocktake was submitted to Joint Council and will be critically considered in 2024 alongside all jurisdictional reviews.

**Partnership Agreement Health Checks** are undertaken annually under clause 33 of the Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap, and the reports are published on the Closing the Gap website. Victorian Government senior officials participated in the 2023 Partnership Health Check Report, the findings and recommendations of which demonstrate that more work is required across jurisdictions to move from a compliance relationship between parties to embedding a true partnership approach that enables the self-determination of First Peoples. The 2023 Partnership Health Check highlighted Victoria's nation-leading work in Treaty an example of good practice that moves away from business as usual.

In 2024, National Agreement parties will develop a plan to implement the recommendations of the 2023 Partnership Health Check Report and improve the utility of the Partnership Health Check model.

## 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 more culturally safe, and employ more Aboriginal people than mainstream services. The Victorian Government is committed to building the Aboriginal community-controlled sector.

### Victorian actions

**Victoria's Aboriginal Expenditure Review** examined spending on First Peoples programs and services to identify reprioritisation opportunities to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, in line with Clause 113 and Priority Reform Two of the National Agreement. Throughout 2023, the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) engaged Supply Nation-certified consultants Inside Policy and actuaries Taylor Fry and were led by Ngaweeyan Maar-oo and the Partnership Forum to complete the first Expenditure Review of its kind in Victoria.

Victoria finalised and presented its 2023 Expenditure Review to Joint Council in November 2023.

The Victorian Government has committed to working in partnership with Ngaweeyan Maar-oo to undertake a second Expenditure Review, building on lessons learned from the 2023 Expenditure Review. Findings of these reviews will help inform funding reprioritisation opportunities and build strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sectors and organisations in line with commitments under the National Agreement.

The **virtual funding pool** to build the capacity of the ACCO sector was a commitment of all jurisdictions upon signing the National Agreement, with Joint Council agreeing in April 2021 that this funding be directed towards the priority sectors of Health, Early Childhood Care and Development, Disability and Housing.

Victoria's contribution to the virtual funding pool was \$3.3 million over four years in 2020-21. In August 2023, Victoria's Partnership Forum endorsed the allocation of \$540,000 from this funding to a cross-sectoral Early Years Summit to be delivered in mid-2024. The Early Years Summit will identify and address sector-specific priorities at a statewide and regional level.

DPC will continue to work with Ngaweeyan Maar-oo on allocating funding from Victoria's contribution to the virtual funding pool. This includes identifying and agreeing the projects to be funded across the priority sectors.

Victoria continued to progress other key actions to strengthen the Aboriginal community-controlled sector, including:

- DPC administered a range of grant programs providing funding to ACCOs including the Koorie Youth Council, Koorie Heritage Trust and Connecting Home for operations and program delivery.
- DFFH has developed a new social services regulatory framework which will mean ACCOs will have streamlined registration and reporting requirements, a common set of social service standards, and an independent regulator.
- DH continued to work with VACCHO to plan a staged approach to transitioning ACCOs to self-determined, outcomes-based funding.
- DJCS provided over \$35 million per annum in community grants to improve Aboriginal justice outcomes, with over 98 per cent of this funding going to ACCOs and businesses.

## National partnership actions

Under the National Agreement, national **sector strengthening plans** were established in 2021 and 2022 for the four priority sectors under Priority Reform Two: Health, Early Childhood Care and Development, Disability and Housing.

In 2023, three additional sectors were identified and agreed by Joint Council for Sector Strengthening Plans; Justice, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages; and Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence. The finalised plans will identify opportunities for joint national strengthening efforts.

The Victorian Government will continue to work closely with the Coalition of Peaks and the ACCO sector to support the development and implementation of these plans, including through our representation in sector strengthening working groups. Victoria's implementation approach for these plans will be determined by the Partnership Forum.

For a comprehensive list of actions to strengthen the Aboriginal community-controlled sector, please refer to [Closing the Gap 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.

Under the VAAF, SDRF, National Agreement and Victoria's Implementation Plan, Victoria has committed to structural transformation of government organisations and mainstream service providers to respond to the needs of First Peoples. This means doing more to tackle systemic racism and promote cultural safety.

Victoria's nation-leading work on Treaty and Truth is central to the transformation of government, the transfer power and resources to communities and the improvement of outcomes.



## Victorian actions

**Yoorrook Justice Commission:** In 2023, the Victorian Government progressed implementing the two recommendations from the Yoorrook Justice Commission's first interim report, *Yoorrook with Purpose*. In response to Recommendation 1, in April 2023, the Victorian Government granted a 12-month extension to the Commission from June 2024 to June 2025. The Victorian Government is progressing a reform proposal to address Recommendation 2 which seeks to uphold the choices of First Peoples providing evidence to the Yoorrook Justice Commission about how their information will be stored, accessed and used in the future.

In mid-2023, the Yoorrook Justice Commission delivered its second interim report, *Yoorrook for Justice*, on the inquiry into the Victorian child protection and criminal justice systems. The Victorian Government response to this report was released on 3 April 2024. The response accepts 28 of the 46 recommendations either in full or in principle. The Victorian Government will further consider 15 recommendations which require significant policy and/or legal work, further consultation or progress through the Treaty negotiation process before the Victorian Government can arrive at an updated position.

The Victorian Government is committed to delivering the transformative change set out in *Yoorrook for Justice*, and will do so in a considered and collaborative way.

For the Yoorrook Justice Commission's inquiries into land and social injustices affecting First Peoples in Victoria, the Victorian Government responded to Notices to Produce and has provided extensive information to support hearings scheduled from March to June 2024.

Establishing an **independent mechanism** by First Peoples for the benefit of First Peoples is a critical commitment under the National Agreement. Clause 67 of the National Agreement specified 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. No jurisdiction has met this timeline.

The Victorian Government has committed to progressing the establishment of an independent mechanism for First Peoples' affairs through Treaty negotiations with the First Peoples' Assembly. The Victorian Government cannot pre-empt Treaty negotiation outcomes.

Independent oversight of Closing the Gap implementation remains a core priority for the Coalition of Peaks and for First Peoples in Victoria, and as the Treaty process unfolds the Victorian Government is committed to continuing to identify opportunities to strengthen accountability and transparency in all areas of Closing the Gap implementation.



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

- **Anti-Racism Strategy:** The Victorian Government is developing a statewide Anti-Racism Strategy to create a safer and more inclusive society for Victoria's First Peoples, multicultural and multifaith communities. The Anti-Racism Strategy is a five-year plan for how the Victorian Government will work across departments and agencies, and in partnership with communities, to tackle racism across Victoria. The Anti-Racism Strategy is underpinned by four goals which tackle all forms of racism across Victorian society, including interpersonal, intracultural, institutional and structural racism.
- **Cultural safety in government:** The Government continues to apply cultural safety and self-determination principles to the budget process. Guidance was also provided to budget analysts in DPC and DTF to assist with analysing whether proposals for the 2023-24 State Budget were aligned with Victoria's commitments to advancing self-determination. Resources are available to all Victorian Government staff to support cultural safety, including cultural safety and self-determination training, supporting efforts to identify and eliminate racism.
- **Cultural safety in schools:** The Community Understanding and Safety Training (CUST) program provides professional learning for school staff to increase their understanding of Koorie culture, history, and experiences. The training aims to ensure a strong foundation for culturally inclusive schools and practices, which can positively impact Aboriginal students' health and wellbeing. As of end of 2023, school staff at 1,531 of the 1,790 Victorian Government school campuses have undertaken CUST.

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

## National partnership actions

Under the National Agreement, several products have been developed to guide the development and implementation of Priority Reform Three.

Regarding the **independent mechanism**, products include the Independent Mechanism Principles developed by the Coalition of Peaks and an Independent Mechanism Research Report by the Australian and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG).

Victoria will continue to participate in the Independent Mechanism National Working Group, established in comprising representatives from all government parties and the Coalition of Peaks, which has been established to support consistency across jurisdictions in the development of independent mechanisms and will consider the ANZSOG recommendations.

Embedding **cultural safety** is a key commitment under the National Agreement. In 2023, ResearchCrowd, an independent First Nations research organisation, developed definitions and principles of cultural safety as part of their recommendations in the Cultural Safety Research Report.

In 2023, it was further agreed to establish the Cultural Safety National Working Group to consider joined-up actions and support consistent implementation of the recommendations made in the Cultural Safety Research Report.

For a comprehensive list of actions to transform its institutions and systems, please refer to [Closing the Gap 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.

## Victorian actions

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. The Projects are to include community data portals that will support First Peoples organisations to access, interpret and use the collected data. The Projects are designed to strengthen the data capabilities of ACCOs, support local data governance and data sovereignty, and enable First Peoples to use data to make decisions that are pertinent to their communities.

In June 2023, Joint Council endorsed Victoria's nomination of Gippsland as the location for a combined Place-based Partnership and Community Data Project, which will enable First Peoples communities and organisations to access and use location-specific data on the Closing the Gap priority reforms and outcomes.

VACCA is leading the development of a detailed project proposal in partnership with local communities and for consideration by the Partnership Forum in 2024, to inform a 2025-26 State Budget submission. Further details are included under Priority Reform One.

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

- **Data to support Aboriginal Governance Forums and ACCOs:** Victorian Government departments and agencies have continued to implement data sharing processes to provide Aboriginal Governance Forums and ACCOs with data and insights to support analysis of trends, monitoring and evaluation, and decision making. This includes enhancing datasets, developing data packs and developing interactive data visualisations. It also includes facilitating meetings, agenda items or deep dives to discuss data.
- **Data to support transparency and public accountability:** For example, the Crime Statistics Agency has developed an expanded set of statistics related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Corrections Victoria custody that will be released to the public for the first time in early 2024. This will improve transparency and accessibility of these statistics.
- **Indigenous Data Sovereignty principles:** Victorian Government departments and agencies are working with Aboriginal stakeholders to embed Indigenous Data Sovereignty principles across data systems. For example, DEECA has commenced implementation of the Pathway towards Indigenous Data Sovereignty Policy (Pathway), which will include the integration of data sovereignty into training for DEECA staff. Additionally, the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions is providing funding to support the delivery of the Aboriginal Health, Medical and Wellbeing Research Accord which will improve the ethical standards of research in Victoria to align with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander principles of self-determination.

## National 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.

The Productivity Commission commissioned the Australian National University Centre for Aboriginal and Economic Policy Research to undertake an external review of the methods for assessing progress on closing the gap in 2023/24. The Review has explored options for calculating adequate state and territory contributions to meeting national targets. Victoria is considering the draft recommendations prior to implementation later in 2024.

Joint Council agreed in August 2022 to allocate funds from the shared resourcing pool to develop a framework that enables all jurisdictions to **measure progress against the four Priority Reforms**.

This work has been progressed in 2023 with input from Victoria and other jurisdictions.

Victoria participated in a project under the National Data Sharing Work Program in 2023 with a focus on Aboriginal community infrastructure (Target 9b in the National Agreement). DGS worked in partnership with DEECA and DPC to feed into an interjurisdictional project led by NIAA to develop a list of indicators that can underpin reporting against electricity and drinking water supply were developed to enhance data development on community infrastructure provision in discrete Indigenous communities.

Victoria also supports the work underway at a national level to consider a Bureau of Indigenous Data as recommended in the Productivity Commission's Review of the National Agreement. The Bureau of Indigenous Data will mean First Peoples will have the ability to collect, access, interpret and control data in way that reflects their priorities, values, cultures and diversity.

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



## Domain 1: Children, Family & Home



*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.*

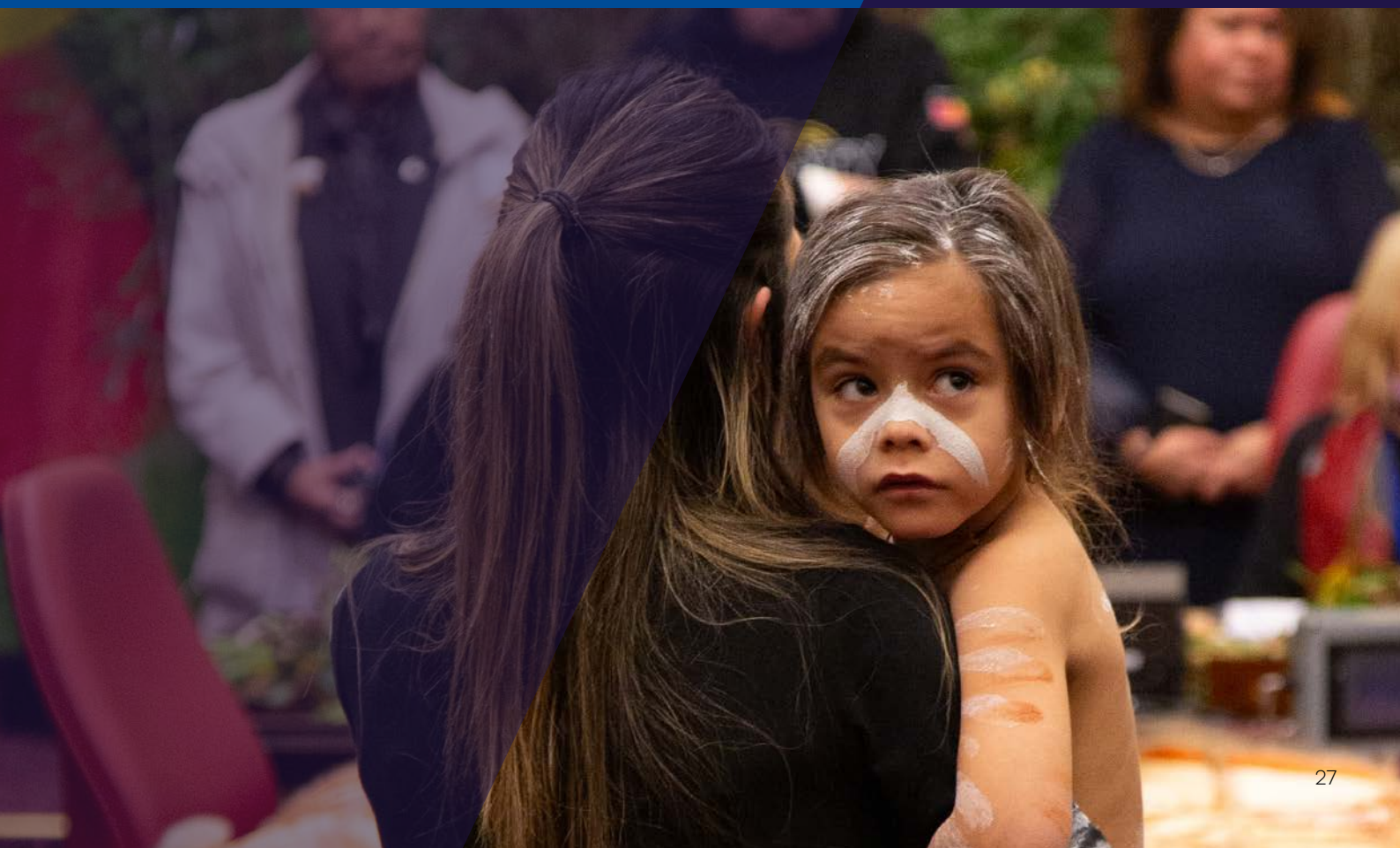
### **Our shared commitment**

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

Families, communities, and Aboriginal child-rearing practices are fundamental to raising strong Aboriginal children and young people. Supporting Aboriginal families to access 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

Participation rates for Aboriginal children have improved for all Maternal and Child Health Key Ages and Stages consultations. Compared to non-Aboriginal children, participation rates were the same or higher for home visit, 18-month, 2-year and 3.5-year visits in 2022-23.

While Aboriginal children are being immunised at historically high rates, for some age groups the rates are now declining.

### Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally

**Outcome 2:** In 2021, 90.8 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies born were of a healthy birthweight across Australia, compared to 91.1 per cent in Victoria. Nationally, based on progress from the baseline, the target shows improvement and is 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 latest year of available data varies across the Report due to the inconsistent frequency of collection of survey data and lags in processing administrative data. Data in this Report is the most up to date available for publishing.

All measures under this goal are reported on.

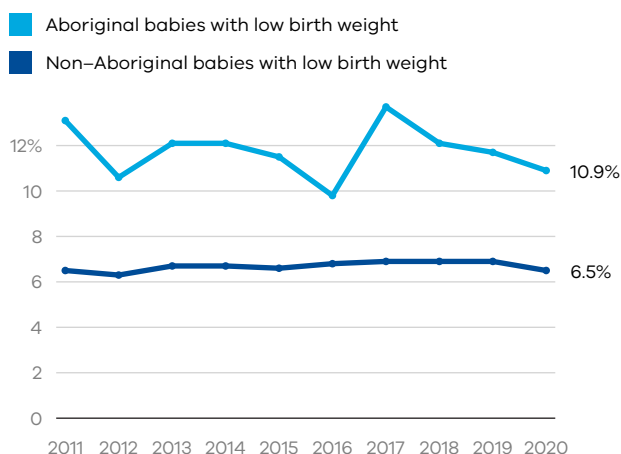
## Objective 1.1 Improve maternal and infant health

### Measure 1.1.1 Rate of low birth weight

In 2020, 10.9 per cent of babies of Aboriginal mothers were born with a low birth weight. For babies of non-Aboriginal mothers 6.5 per cent were of low birth weight. Low birth weight is defined as births less than 2500 grams. The proportion of babies of Aboriginal mothers born with a low weight has been decreasing since 2017 (13.7 per cent). By contrast, the proportion of babies of non-Aboriginal mothers born with low weight remained stable over the long term. Birthweight is a determinant for health outcomes later in life. Major factors influencing low birthweight are extremes of maternal age (younger than 16 or older than 40), multiple pregnancy, obstetric complications, chronic maternal conditions (for example, hypertensive disorders of pregnancy), infections (such as malaria), nutritional status, exposure to indoor air pollution, tobacco, and drug use<sup>2</sup>. Aboriginal culture is a strong protective factor for Aboriginal Victorians' health and wellbeing. The ongoing effects of colonisation and racism has harmed those protective factors.

#### Lowest proportion of Aboriginal babies born at low birth weight since 2016

##### Measure 1.1.1



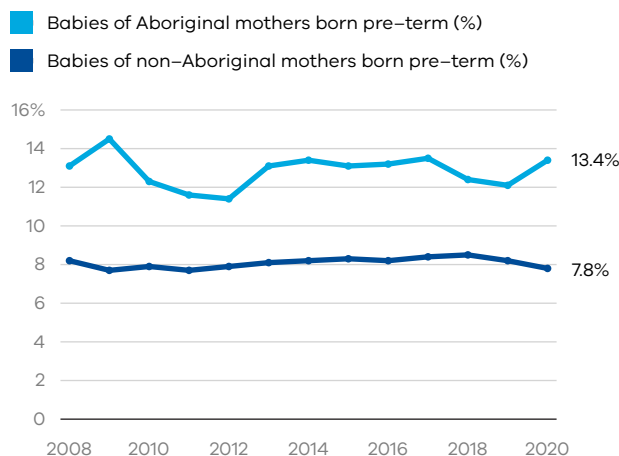
Source: Victorian Perinatal Data Collection; Consultative Council for Obstetric and Paediatric Mortality and Morbidity

### Measure 1.1.2 Rate of pre-term birth

In 2020 13.4 per cent of babies born to Aboriginal mothers were pre-term. This was an increase of 1.3 percentage points for the year. This is similar to the proportion in 2008 (13.1 per cent). Demonstrating marginal improvement over the short- and long-term period. In the same period babies born to non-Aboriginal mothers decreased to 7.8 per cent. Pre-term birth is influenced by maternal nutrition, cigarette smoking, substance use or abuse, work and physical activity, prenatal care, genitourinary tract infection, sexually transmitted diseases, psychological factors, and multiple gestations. Mainstream healthcare services do not adequately consider the cultural needs and safety of Aboriginal Victorians. This has deterred Aboriginal mothers from accessing essential services, impacting their health and the health of their babies.

#### More Aboriginal babies were born pre-term in 2020

##### Measure 1.1.2



Source: Victorian Perinatal Data Collection; Consultative Council for Obstetric and Paediatric Mortality and Morbidity

### Measure 1.1.3 Rate of perinatal mortality

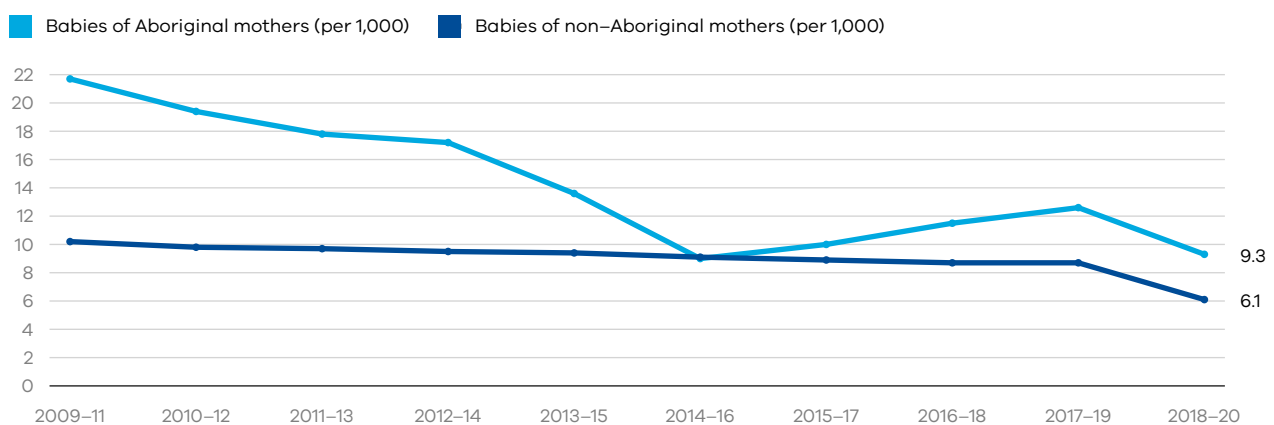
In 2018-20, the rate of perinatal mortality for babies of Aboriginal mothers was 9.3 per 1,000 babies. This is a decrease by 3.3 per 1,000 from 2017-19 and 12.4 per 1,000 10 years prior (2009-11). This is the first decrease since the rate started increasing in 2014-16. While this is a positive change, the rate of perinatal mortality was 1.5 times higher for Aboriginal mothers than non-Aboriginal. Rates of perinatal mortality have been linked with rates of antenatal care and pre-existing medical conditions (hypertension, diabetes etc). Racism plays a major role in both the quality of delivered care and the ability for mothers to access that care<sup>3</sup>. Aboriginal health in Aboriginal hands is key to grounding perinatal services in culturally safe practices.

### Measure 1.1.4 Smoking during pregnancy

In 2020 39.4 per cent of Aboriginal women smoked during their first 20 weeks of pregnancy. For non-Aboriginal women 7.3 per cent smoked during the first 20 weeks. Historically Aboriginal women have been more likely to smoke during their first 20 weeks of pregnancy than non-Aboriginal women. Since 2009 there has been a 0.8 percentage point decrease in the proportion of Aboriginal women and a 3.8 percentage point decrease in the proportion of non-Aboriginal women smoking during pregnancy. Underlying socio-economic determinants present challenges to decreasing rates further. Tobacco control strategies need to consider the unique impact of colonisation on outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians.

## Perinatal mortality is 1.5 times higher for babies of Aboriginal mothers

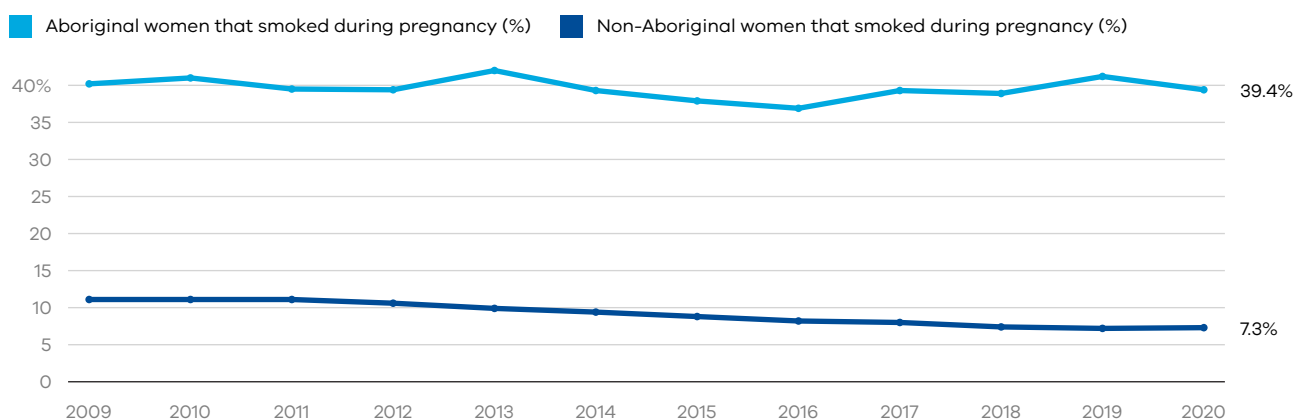
### Measure 1.1.3



Source: Victorian Perinatal Data Collection; Consultative Council for Obstetric and Paediatric Mortality and Morbidity

## The proportion of Aboriginal women smoking during pregnancy remains high

### Measure 1.1.4



Source: Victorian Perinatal Data Collection; Consultative Council for Obstetric and Paediatric Mortality and Morbidity

3. Kiarna Brown, Providing the right tools before the start of life (2021) < [www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2214109X21001728](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2214109X21001728) >

## Objective 1.2 Children thrive in their first 1000 days

### Measure 1.2.1 Participation rates for Maternal and Child Health Key Ages and Stages Consultation

Aboriginal children were more likely to attend their Key Ages and Stages consultations across all stages in 2022-23 than in 2020-21. 80.6 per cent of Aboriginal children attended their Key Ages and Stages consultations in 2022-23 when averaging across all stages. Participation rates have improved for all Key Ages and Stages consultations since 2013-14. Consultations at 18 months have grown the most with 65.5 per cent participation in 2022-23.

When comparing to all children, Aboriginal children attended Key Ages and Stages consultations at the same proportion or higher for home visit, 18-month, 2-year and 3.5-year visits in 2022-23. While a result

of an estimated 100 per cent participation for Home Visit consultations is positive, this result should be treated with caution. Population projections for very young children used to calculate this rate are subject to a margin of error. The participation rates over time indicate a positive and sustained trend. Access to health care in the early stages of life is a key factor in greater health outcomes later in life. Addressing the cultural safety of perinatal healthcare is necessary to improve outcomes. If Aboriginal mothers do not feel safe or listened to consultation participation is likely to be low. Currently these consultations are free of charge for all Victorian children.<sup>4</sup>

### The proportion of Aboriginal children at Key Ages and Stages Consultation is almost at all children level

#### Measure 1.2.1

##### Proportion of Aboriginal children (%)

	Home visit	2 weeks	4 weeks	8 weeks	4 months	8 months	12 months	18 months	2 years	3.5 years
2013-14	94.8%	87%	83.9%	84.2%	81.6%	64%	60.3%	49.9%	50.1%	49.1%
2020-21	99.5%	94%	93.7%	90.7%	84.8%	75%	69.6%	60.3%	61.8%	48.3%
2022-23	100.9%	94.8%	94.5%	94.1%	89.8%	77.6%	74.3%	65.5%	62.4%	52.4%

##### Proportion of all children (%)

	Home visit	2 weeks	4 weeks	8 weeks	4 months	8 months	12 months	18 months	2 years	3.5 years
2013-14	100%	97.2%	97.3%	96%	93.6%	85.5%	83.4%	74.7%	71%	64.9%
2020-21	101%	97.5%	97.7%	96%	92.1%	82.6%	76.3%	67%	63.8%	52.6%
2022-23	100.9%	97.5%	97.8%	97.5%	93.6%	80.9%	77%	66.1%	61.2%	48%

Source: Victorian Perinatal Data Collection; Consultative Council for Obstetric and Paediatric Mortality and Morbidity

4. More information on Key Age consultations at < [www.health.vic.gov.au/publications/maternal-and-child-health-service-practice-guidelines](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/publications/maternal-and-child-health-service-practice-guidelines) >

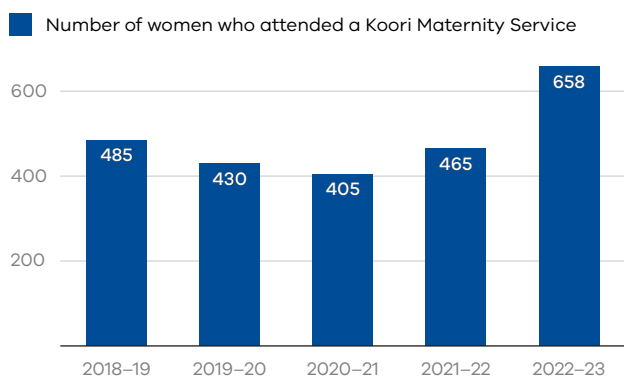


### Measure 1.2.2 Attendance at Koori Maternity Services

The number of women attending the Koori Maternity Services (KMS) program increased to 658 women in 2022-23, an increase of 193 since 2021-22. This is after declining since 2018-19 and 2020-21. In partnership with VACCHO, the KMS program continues to provide flexible, holistic, and culturally safe antenatal and postnatal care. KMS is central to improving outcomes for Aboriginal mothers and babies. The Department of Health is committed to working in partnership with VACCHO to drive systemic reform across the maternity sector, strengthen cultural safety and improve access to care for Aboriginal mothers and babies.

#### Koori Maternity Services access is at an all-time high

##### Measure 1.2.2



Source: Koori Maternity Services minimum dataset - number of women attending KMS for pregnancy related health services, birthing between 1 July to 30 June.

### Maternity and newborn learning health network

DH's 100,000 Lives initiative is committed to contributing to closing the gap in health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in Victoria. As part of the program and initiative planning and delivery, there have been proactive efforts to identify evidence and opportunities to achieve this. DH has formed a partnership with VACCHO to improve outcomes for women birthing Aboriginal babies.

The Maternity and Newborn Learning Network is committed to fostering a closer working relationship with Koori Maternity Services and VACCHO to better understand how DH can engage with ACCOs and sector leaders to enable self-determination. Through VACCHO, DH has invited an Aboriginal health practitioner to join the Maternity and Newborn Learning Health Network Advisory Group. This will enable greater understanding of barriers affecting Aboriginal women and their families accessing culturally appropriate care.

 Address trauma and support healing

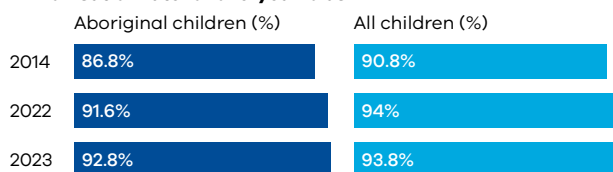
### Measure 1.2.3 Immunisation rates at 12, 24, and 60 months

Aboriginal children are being immunised at historically high rates in Victoria. In 2023, health providers immunised Aboriginal one-, two- and five-year-olds at 92.8, 88.3, and 95.6 per cent respectively. Aboriginal Victorians aged five have a greater immunisation rate than non-Aboriginal Victorians by 0.7 percentage points. National targets for immunisations are still not being met for the majority of key ages (for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cohorts). In 2023, Aboriginal five-year-olds were the only cohort to meet the Federal Government immunisation target rate of 95 per cent or higher. Concerningly, immunisation rates for Aboriginal two-year-olds are declining. Overall, Aboriginal Victorians are still not immunised at the same rates as non-Aboriginal Victorians. To support improved immunisation amongst Aboriginal Victorians, Aboriginal Health Practitioners were authorised to administer certain vaccinations under the instruction of an authorised prescriber in August 2023. VACCHO has been funded to support the delivery of an Immuniser Program of Study for Aboriginal Health Practitioners in 2024 to increase their scope of practice to deliver vaccinations.

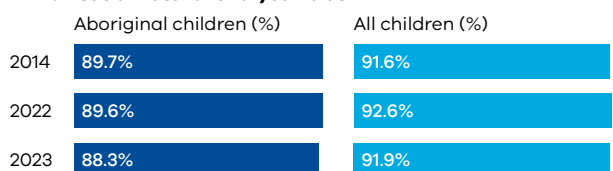
#### Immunisation coverage parity has not been reached

##### Measure 1.2.3

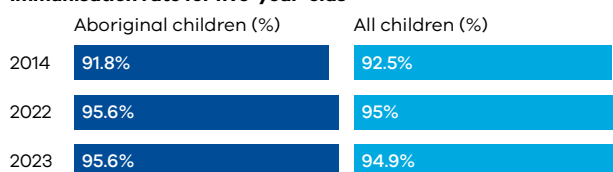
###### Immunisation rate for one-year-olds



###### Immunisation rate for two-year-olds



###### Immunisation rate for five-year-olds



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

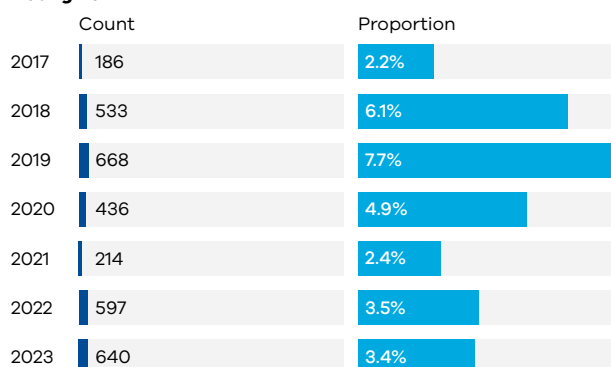
### Measure 1.2.4 Participation in facilitated playgroups (0-5 years)

The number of Aboriginal children (0-5 years old) in Supported Playgroups and Koorie Supported Playgroups increased in 2023 to 640 and 317 children respectively. In Supported Playgroups, this represented a proportion of 3.4 per cent of all children (0-5 years). In Koorie Supported Playgroups, this presented a proportion of 0.07 per cent of all children (0-5 years).

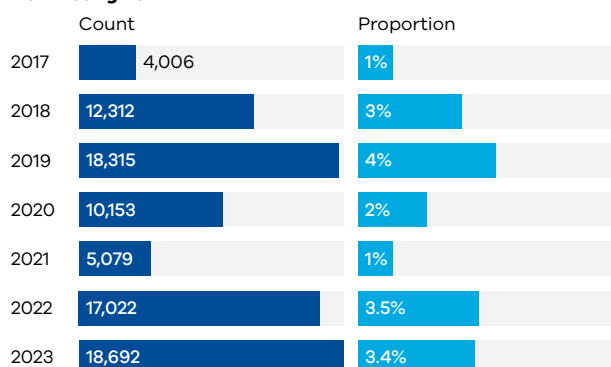
#### Proportion of Aboriginal children in supported playgroups at parity with all children

##### Measure 1.2.4 Participation of children 0-5 years in Supported Playgroups (SPG)

###### Aboriginal



###### Non-Aboriginal



Source: Kindergarten Information Management System (KIM) and Parenting Support Program (PSP) database

### 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 *smalltalk*, an evidence-based curriculum, to parents in a facilitated playgroup setting as well as one-on-one through In Home Support.

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.

### 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 funding for the initiative 'Early intervention and diversion', which included funding to give 400 Aboriginal families each year access to Koorie Supported Playgroups and In Home Parent Coaching to support the home learning environments of young Aboriginal children.



## Goal 2: Aboriginal children are raised by Aboriginal families



### Overview

#### Measures under Goal 2 have varied in performance

Aboriginal children continue to be removed from their families and placed in the out-of-home care system at a historically high rate. In 2022-23, Aboriginal children were placed in out-of-home care at a rate 22.4 times that of non-Aboriginal children.

Legislation has been introduced to Parliament to expand the role of Aboriginal agencies delivering children and family services, which should result in a decrease in this vastly disproportionate rate in coming years.

While the number of Aboriginal children reunified with parent(s) within 12 months of admission to care has increased over the long-term, the rate of reunification has worsened as the number of admissions to care has tripled.

The *Yoorrook for Justice* Report found that there is an unbroken connection between First Peoples' experiences with colonial child removal practices and their experiences with the current child protection system.

The Victorian Government acknowledges the inter-generational trauma caused by the failings of Victoria's child protection system and the recommendations made by the Yoorrook Justice Commission to remedy ongoing injustices within the system.

#### 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.

#### Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally

**Outcome 12:** In 2023, the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0-17 years in out-of-home care was 57.2 per 1,000 children across Australia, compared to 102.9 per 1,000 children in Victoria. Nationally and in Victoria, these rates are worsening based on the baseline.

#### Data Note



The latest year of available data varies across the Report due to the inconsistent frequency of collection of survey data and lags in processing administrative data. Data in this Report is the most up to date available for publishing.

All measures under this goal are reported on.

## 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 in out-of-home care remains at historic highs. In 2022-23, the number of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care increased to 2,668. The rate remained stable at 102.9 per 1000 Aboriginal children. This rate was 22.4 times the rate of non-Aboriginal children in out-of-home care.

This demonstrates a significant over-representation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care. The Children and Health Legislation Amendment (Statement of Recognition, Aboriginal Self-Determination, and Other Matters) Bill 2023 introduced a Statement of Recognition and principles for all decision makers involved with Aboriginal children and their families in the child protection system. The Bill expands the role of Aboriginal agencies delivering children and family services, with the goal of reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal children in care in Victoria.

### The number and rate of Aboriginal children in out of home care remains high

#### Measure 2.1.1

Aboriginal		
	Number (n)	Rate (per 1000)
2008-09	734	37.7
2020-21	2,572	103
2021-22	2,595	102.2
2022-23	2,668	102.9

Non-Aboriginal		
	Number (n)	Rate (per 1000)
2008-09	4,549	3.8
2020-21	6,574	4.7
2021-22	6,529	4.7
2022-23	6,464	4.6

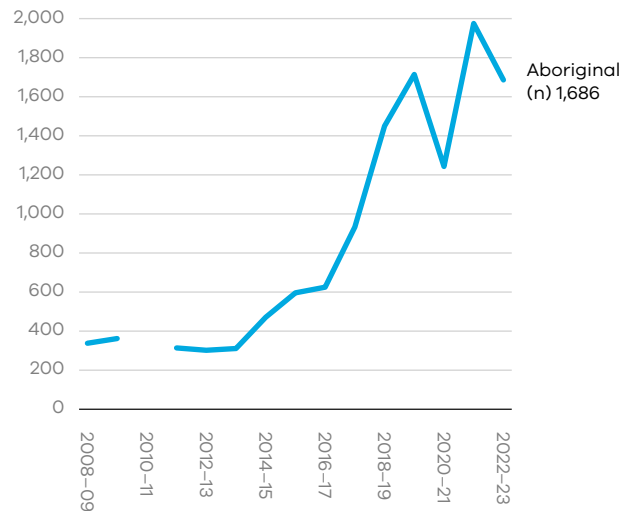
Source: Report on Government Services 2024

### Measure 2.1.2 Number of families engaged with intensive family support services

In 2022-23 the number of Aboriginal families using intensive family support services decreased to 1686. This was after a high point of 1975 families in 2021-22. This decrease also occurred for non-Aboriginal families. 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 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 declined in 2022-23

#### Measure 2.1.2



Source: Report on Government Services 2024

## 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 proportion of Aboriginal children in care under each type of caregiver remained stable 2022-23. 40.4 per cent of Aboriginal children were under the care of their Aboriginal relatives and kin in 2022-23. This represents 1,077 children. In total 79.1 per cent of Aboriginal children in care were with either Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal relatives and kin. The Children and Health Legislation Amendment (Statement of Recognition, Aboriginal Self-Determination and Other Matters) Bill 2023 recognises that Aboriginal people are best placed to make decisions and deliver services that protect the best interests of Aboriginal children. Aboriginal agencies delivering more child and family services will mean more Aboriginal children under the care of Aboriginal people.

**79.1 per cent of Aboriginal children in care were placed with relatives or kin in 2023**

### Measure 2.2.1

#### Aboriginal relatives/kin

	Count (n)	Proportion (%)
2020-21	1,018	39.7%
2021-22	1,027	39.6%
2022-23	1,077	40.4%

#### Non-Aboriginal relatives/kin

	Count (n)	Proportion (%)
2020-21	1,010	39.4%
2021-22	1,014	39.1%
2022-23	1,033	38.7%

#### Other Aboriginal carer

	Count (n)	Proportion (%)
2020-21	35	1.4%
2021-22	42	1.6%
2022-23	38	1.4%

#### Other non-Aboriginal carer

	Count (n)	Proportion (%)
2020-21	412	16.1%
2021-22	391	15.1%
2022-23	391	14.7%

#### Residential care or family group home

	Count (n)	Proportion (%)
2020-21	86	3.3%
2021-22	113	4.4%
2022-23	120	4.5%

Source: Report on Government Services 2024

### 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 increased over the past 3 years (2020-21 to 2022-23) to 71.4 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.

ACCOS, funded by DFFH for the provision of cultural planning, are responsible for supporting care teams to develop, check and endorse cultural plans.

The Victorian Government acknowledges further work needs to be done to ensure all Aboriginal children in statutory care have a cultural plan.

In September 2023, the Aboriginal Children's Forum (ACF) agreed the approach to cultural planning should be reconsidered through an Aboriginal-led Statewide Cultural Planning Forum.

Considerations include how the current model can be improved and redesigned to increase the quality and compliance of initial and review plans and to support culturally appropriate implementation.

### 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)

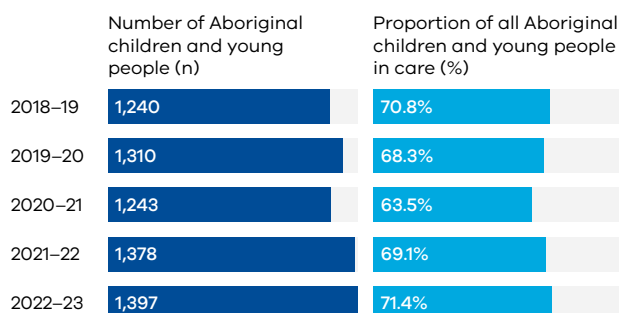
In 2022-23, the proportion was 38.0 per cent, a decline from 43 per cent in 2019-20. This is the second straight year decline in the proportion and the first decline in the total number of children on a contractible order. These declines could be due to a number of factors within the care system, including more children being released to family and kin relationships instead of in the care of an ACCO.

### 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)

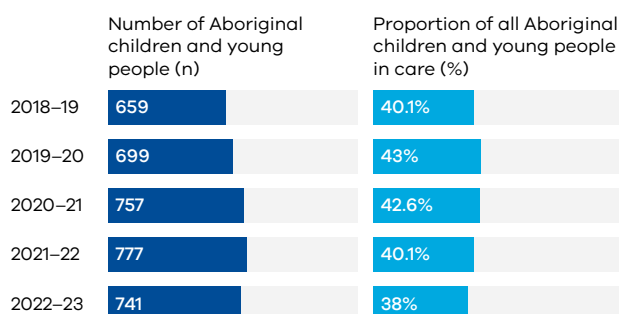
In 2022-23 8.9 per cent of Aboriginal children under a protection order were in the care of an Aboriginal organisation. Over the last five years this proportion has increased. In 2018-19 only 3.3 per cent of children under a protection order were in the care of an Aboriginal organisation. While it is positive to see the increase, there is still a significant amount of work required to transition the care system to a self-determined model.

### More Aboriginal children on protection orders are under the direct authority of an ACCO

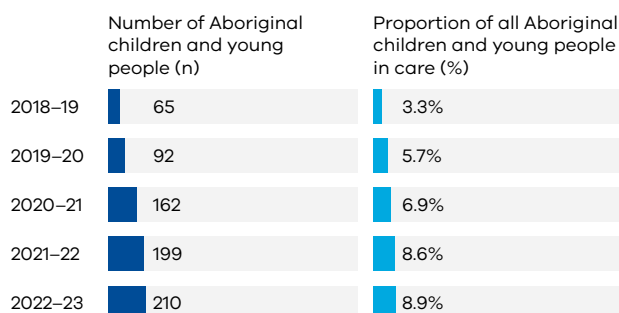
#### Measure 2.2.2 - Aboriginal children and young people in care with a cultural plan



#### 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

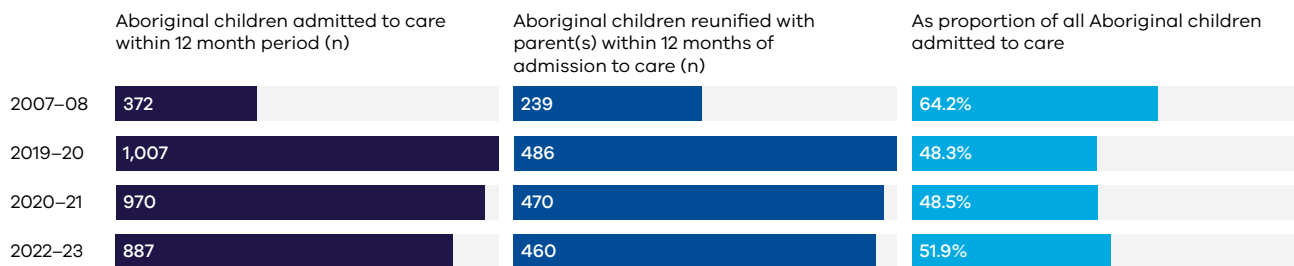
460 Aboriginal children were reunited with their parent(s) within 12 months of admission to care in 2022-23. This number has increased over time with only 239 reunifications in 2007-08. During that period the number of Aboriginal children and young people in care has almost tripled, and the

reunification rate has not kept pace. 51.9 per cent of Aboriginal children and young people were reunified in 2022-23 compared to 64.2 per cent in 2007-08. In contrast, 64.5 per cent of non-Aboriginal children and young people were reunified in 2007-8 compared to 48.3 per cent in 2022-23.

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 these rates over the next few years.

### 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





**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 number of Aboriginal children exiting care increased to 850 in 2022-23. Of those, 613 did not return to care within 12 months. The proportion of

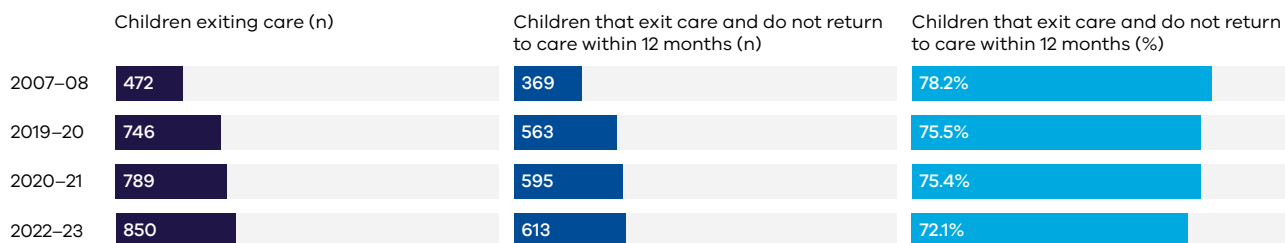
Aboriginal children that did not return to care was 72.1 per cent in 2022-23 compared to 75.4 per cent in 2020-21.

For non-Aboriginal children the trend is more stable. The proportion of children that did not return to care was 79.7 per cent in 2022-23 compared to 80 per cent in 2020-21.

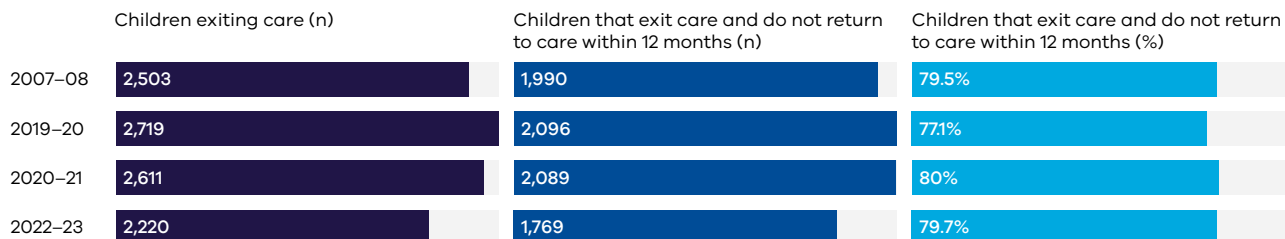
**The number of Aboriginal children who exit care and do not return within 12 months has increased**

**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 have declined

Family violence continues to have a disproportionate impact on Aboriginal people in Victoria. The rates of family violence incident reports involving an Aboriginal other party or Aboriginal affected family member are significantly higher than the population rate.

After a 2021 decrease in the number of family violence notifications to child protection involving Aboriginal children, the number has again increased significantly. The 5,575 notifications involving Aboriginal children in 2022-23 was the highest since records have been kept.

Worsening outcomes are also evident in the number of Aboriginal Victorians accessing homelessness services and the number of Aboriginal adults running out of food and being unable to buy more.

### 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.



## Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally

**Outcome 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.

**Outcome 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.

### Data Note



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

- **Measure 3.2.2a:** Median weekly gross household income (inflation adjusted 2021).
- **Measure 3.2.2b:** Proportion of households with approximately less than 50 per cent of the median income.
- **Measure 3.2.3a:** Proportion of Victorian Households in rental stress(a), by Aboriginal status.
- **Measure 3.2.3b:** Proportion of Victorian Households in mortgage stress(a), by Aboriginal status.
- **Measure 3.2.4b:** Proportion of clients accessing homelessness services.
- **Measure 3.2.5a:** Proportion of Aboriginal Victorians living in over-crowded dwellings.
- **Measure 3.2.5b:** Proportion of Victorians households that are overcrowded, by Aboriginal status.

Historical data for these measures is available on the First Peoples – State Relations website at [www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-affairs-report](http://www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-affairs-report).

## Objective 3.1 Reduce the incidence and impact of family violence affecting Aboriginal families<sup>5</sup>

The 2016 Royal Commission into Family Violence report acknowledges that a significant majority of perpetrators of family violence are men, and that Aboriginal people, particularly Aboriginal women and children, are disproportionately impacted by family violence compared to non-Aboriginal people.

Dhelk Dja: Safe Our Way – Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families is an Aboriginal-led Victorian Agreement to address family violence in Aboriginal communities. The Agreement recognises that family violence is not part of Aboriginal culture and that family violence against Aboriginal people is perpetrated by both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people.

The extent of the impact of family violence on Aboriginal women compared to non-Aboriginal women is highlighted in the Family Violence Reform Rolling Action Plan 2020-2023, which states that Victorian Aboriginal women are 45 times more likely

to experience family violence and, where violence occurs, 25 times more likely to be killed or injured.

Aboriginal people face intersecting barriers to reporting family violence and seeking support. Some barriers highlighted in the Royal Commission's report include discrimination, racism and lack of understanding experienced by Aboriginal people when seeking support, and the effects of trauma associated with dispossession, child removal and other practices. The Royal Commission's report acknowledges that there is 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 specialist and holistic family violence prevention and legal services.

5. 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.

**Measure 3.1.1** Number and proportion of family violence incident reports involving an Aboriginal other party<sup>6</sup>; and proportion of those who were the subject of a previous family incident report

In 2022, there were 6,315 family violence incident reports that involved an Aboriginal other party. This made up 6.84 per cent of all family violence incident reports that involved an other party. Relative to the Aboriginal population, the proportion of family violence incident reports that involved an Aboriginal other party is significantly high. Of the 6,315 incidents in 2022, 86.9 per cent involved a repeated incident and 37.6 per cent had charges laid.

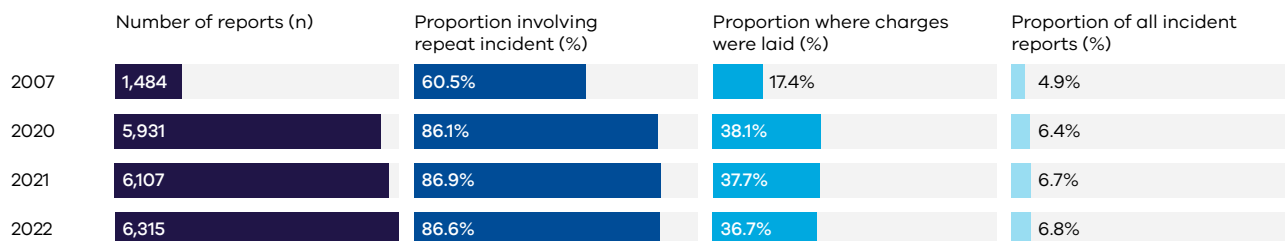
**Measure 3.1.2** Number and proportion of family violence incident reports involving an Aboriginal affected family member; and proportion of those who were the subject of a previous family incident report

In 2022, there were 5,266 family violence incident reports that involved an Aboriginal affected family member. This made up 5.7 per cent of all family violence incident reports that involved an affected family member. Relative to the Aboriginal population, the proportion of family violence incident reports that involved an Aboriginal family member is high. However, it is less than the proportion of family violence incidents involving an Aboriginal other party. Of the 5,266 incidents in 2022, 81.7 per cent involved a repeated incident and 34.4 per cent had charges laid.

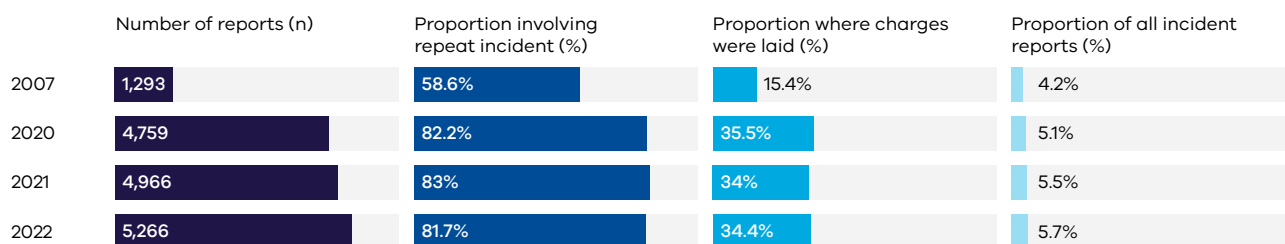
**The majority of family violence incidents are from repeat offenders**

**Measure 3.1.1, 3.1.2**

**Other Aboriginal Parties**



**Affected Aboriginal Family Members**



Source: Crime Statistics Agency

6. 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.

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

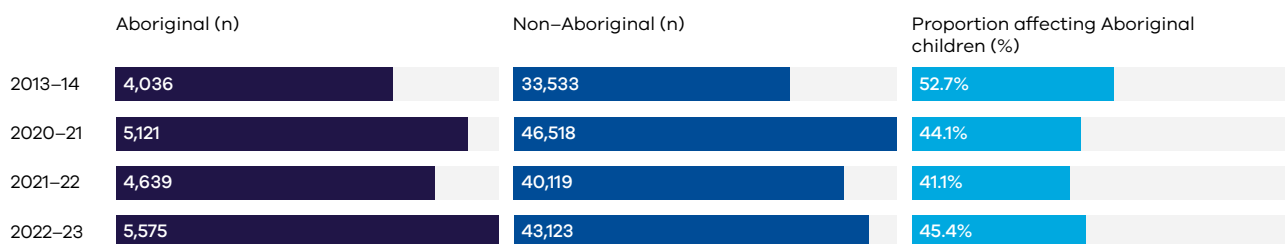
Family violence brings Aboriginal people into contact with many parts of the service system, including the child protection and out-of-home care system.<sup>7</sup> In 2022-23 there were 5,575 family violence incidences notified to child protection for Aboriginal children and young people. This is the highest

number of notifications where family violence was identified, and a significant increase of 936 notifications from 2021-2022.

Compared to 10 years ago (2013-14), the number of family violence notifications to child protection has increased by 38.1 per cent for Aboriginal children and young people and 28.6 per cent for non-Aboriginal children and young people.

**Notifications to child protection for Aboriginal children and young people have increased in the past year**

**Measure 3.1.3**



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

7. Dhelk Dja: Safe Our Way – Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families (October 2018)  
< <https://www.vic.gov.au/dhelk-dja-partnership-aboriginal-communities-address-family-violence> >

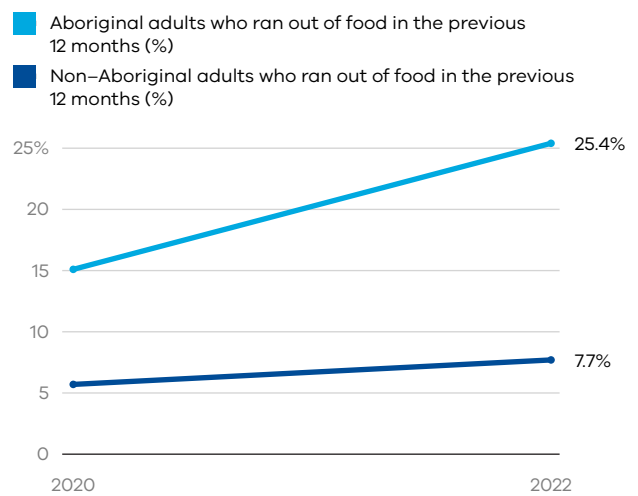
## Objective 3.2 Increase income and housing security for Aboriginal households

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

In 2022 24.5 per cent of Aboriginal respondents to the Victorian Population Health Survey ran out of food in the past 12 months and could not buy more. This was an increase from 15.1 per cent in 2020. Compared to non-Aboriginal adults, Aboriginal adults were more than three times likely to run out of food in 2022. Due to changes in data collection and survey methodology, it is difficult to determine the trend of the proportion of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal adults who ran out of food in the past 12 months of a year, over time. This shows the need to have consistent data collection. With the increasing cost of living, food insecurity is becoming a significant challenge for policy makers to tackle.

**Aboriginal adults are more than 3 times likely to run out of food and not be able to afford to buy more**

**Measure 3.2.1**



Source: Victorian Population Health Survey

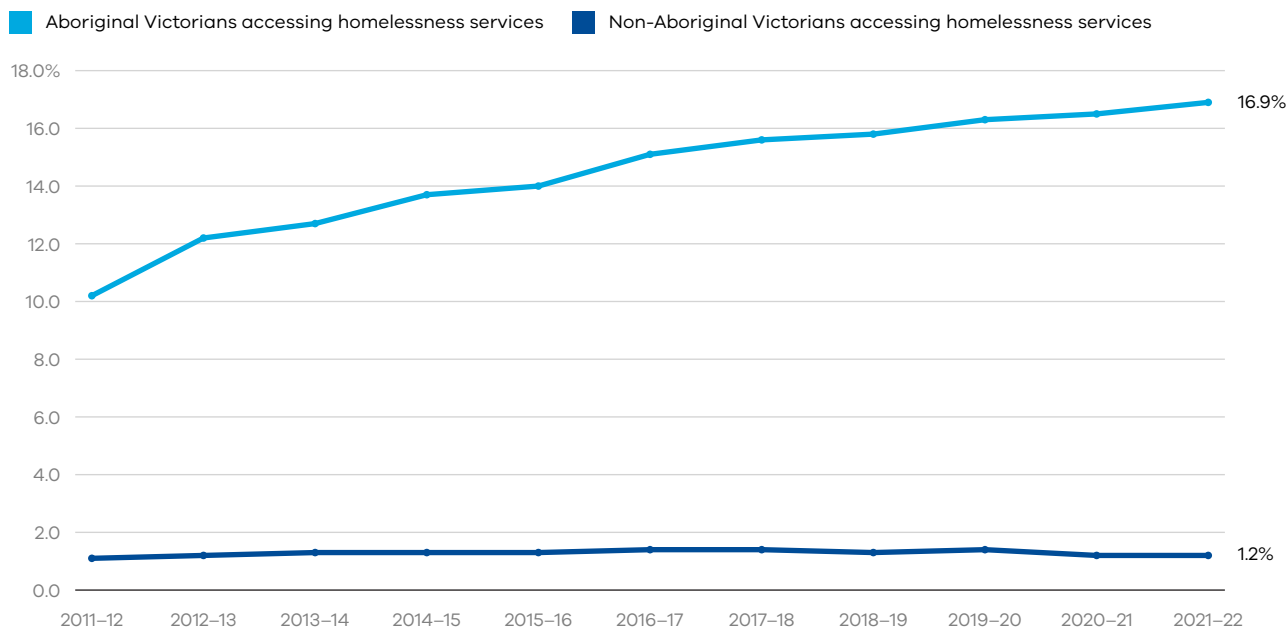
**Measure 3.2.4 Proportion of Victorians accessing homelessness services**

13.1 per cent of Aboriginal Victorians accessed homelessness services in 2022-23. This was an increase from 10.2 per cent in 2011-12. Over the same period, non-Aboriginal Victorians accessing homelessness services remained steady. Aboriginal Victorians were 10.1 times more likely to access homelessness services in 2022-23. 1.7 per cent of Aboriginal Victorians reported being homeless in the 2021 Census. This is a small increase from 2016

but this has been decreasing since 2011. During this same period non-Aboriginal homelessness has remained steady at 0.4 per cent. The leading cause of homelessness, particularly for Aboriginal women and children, is family violence.<sup>8</sup> It is therefore important that housing and homelessness programs support safe and suitable housing options for Aboriginal women and children that experience family violence. The history of colonial dispossession of land and resources also has ongoing impacts on housing for Aboriginal Victorians.

**Aboriginal Victorians are more than 13 times likely to access homelessness services**

**Measure 3.2.4**



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

8. Ending family violence: annual report 2022 (November 2023) < <https://www.vic.gov.au/ending-family-violence-annual-report-2022> >



### Aboriginal-specific homelessness entry points

The 2022-23 State Budget provided funding of \$7.3 million over 2023-24 and 2024-25 for a new Aboriginal-specific homelessness entry point, brokerage, and Housing First multi-disciplinary teams pilot program.

As recommended by the Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum (AHHF), the pilot will operate in two sites, one regional and one metropolitan. Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative has commenced pilot service delivery in the Barwon region and Ngwala Willumbong in the Bayside Peninsula and CBD areas. Both Entry Points are funded from February 2024 through to June 2025.

These entry points will enable Aboriginal people who require homelessness support the choice of an Aboriginal-specific response or a 'mainstream' service response. The Aboriginal-specific response provides an additional layer of support at outreach and entry to the

homelessness system as well as intensive support for people with multiple and complex needs. The pilot program will be Aboriginal-led and will provide culturally appropriate responses to Aboriginal people's homelessness needs. Additionally, the pilot will enhance the service offering of existing ACCOs supported by a 'no wrong door' approach to screening rather than a single point or funnel for entry to the homelessness system.

Ongoing design and implementation of the entry points and multidisciplinary teams will be self-determined with support from Aboriginal Housing Victoria as the system partner.

The establishment of Aboriginal-specific entry points were key deliverables of the Blueprint for an Aboriginal Specific Homelessness System in Victoria (Blueprint). The Blueprint was developed as a key deliverable of Manan-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort; Every Aboriginal Person Has a Home – the Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework (VAHHF).

### Homes for Aboriginal Victorians Round (HfAVR)

DTF, with Homes Victoria, is delivering the Homes for Aboriginal Victorians Round (HfAVR) of the Social Housing Growth Fund. This initiative contributes to the Big Housing Build Target of allocating 10 per cent of social housing dwellings to Aboriginal Victorians.

Unlike other funding rounds of the Social Housing Growth Fund, the HfAVR adopts a long-term procurement approach to support the development of an Aboriginal Housing sector and enables Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations (ACCOs) to seek funding from the Social Housing Growth Fund.

The HfAVR has assessed projects under four evaluation periods to date, with each evaluation period at various stages of negotiating and contracting. A fifth evaluation period is currently under assessment, with outcomes expected to be

confirmed by the end of 2024. Future evaluation periods may be opened subject to available funding.

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 (CHAs) in partnership with an ACCO and allocated to Aboriginal Victorians on the Victorian Housing Register.

The initiative further supports ACCO ownership of social housing by:

- Providing funding for ACCOs to become CHAs using a procurement model that allows proposals to be developed within timeframes that suit the organisation.
- Dedicating personnel outside of the evaluation team to provide feedback on proposals ahead of the lodgement to help organisations put forward strong proposals.

# 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

Through the 'More Support for Mums, Dads, and Babies' initiative, the 2023-24 State Budget allocated \$71.28 million over four years to deliver more responsive community-based health care for mums, dads, babies and children. The Budget included new funding over four years to boost the capacity of Aboriginal MCH services; funding to establish Victoria's first dedicated Aboriginal-led Early Parenting Centre (EPC) in Frankston, and targeted funding to Aboriginal MCH services and Koori Maternity Services to build workforce capacity to deliver Aboriginal-led breastfeeding support. Additionally, Aboriginal organisations were eligible to apply for funding under the Dad's group grant program and Multicultural Storytime program.

The EPC will be operated by First Peoples' Health and Wellbeing (FPHW). It will enhance FPHW's holistic, wrap-around care of families, from the antenatal period to early childhood and beyond. DH is currently working with FPHW on the construction of the EPC.

An Aboriginal-led design and participation project is underway with a focus on embedding Aboriginal knowledge and expertise to shape holistic health service delivery spanning across antenatal, maternal and child health, and early parenting supports. Over 100 people attended the state-wide and regional workshops across October and November 2023. The findings from this process will inform the development of a Victorian Aboriginal Early Years Health Framework.

The 2022-23 Victorian State Budget has enabled ongoing funding to sustain the Aboriginal Maternal and Child Health program. Aboriginal services are

critical for creating cultural safety and access to services in order to strengthen service choice and flexibility.

To ensure the delivery of ongoing Cultural Safety professional development and training for all MCH providers DH engaged Centre for Cultural Competence Australia (CCCA) to deliver training to the MCH workforce in 2024.

The Victorian Government has provided funding to the DH to develop and implement a new MCH system to replace the existing Child Development Information System (CDIS) along with the system used by the MCH phone line. DH is working closely with all stakeholders throughout this multi-year project, to ensure that the new system is designed to meet the needs of all users, support the efficient and effective delivery of MCH services to families and children and how the new system can support culturally appropriate service delivery.

The Aboriginal Maternal Child Health (MCH) Workforce Support Funding provided one-off direct funding to all Victorian Aboriginal MCH sites to assist with service delivery and help to build workforce capacity in the 2023 calendar year. This funding supports costs associated with workforce support and training, and recruitment and attraction of MCH nurses and Aboriginal health workers into Aboriginal MCH services. The Aboriginal MCH workforce can access specialised training in family violence. DH has partnered with the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare to offer interactive webinar training in the family violence MARAM (the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management) framework. The training will support Aboriginal MCH workers to understand their MARAM framework responsibilities including what it means for their day-to-day practice.

### **Koori Maternity Services Program**

In partnership with VACCHO, the Koori Maternity Services (KMS) program continues to provide 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.

The number of women attending Koori Maternity Services (KMS) increased from 465 in 2021-22 to 658 in 2022-23 (an increase of 193 women), after declining between 2018-19 and 2020-21.

\$4.3m was invested in Koori Maternity Services in 2022-23, including service delivery through 10 Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and three public health services, and KMS workforce education and training through the Royal Women's Hospital's Maternity Services Education Program (MSEP).

The Aboriginal Advisory Group - Early Years Health (AAG EYH) has been established with a focus on improving health, wellbeing and developmental outcomes in the first 2000 days for Aboriginal children, mothers, fathers, parents, carers, and families. The AAG EYH brings together DH with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members representing Aboriginal communities in Victoria, ACCHOs and ACCOs, and State Government with a common purpose of strengthening health and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal people in the early years from pregnancy through to commencing school.

## **Family Violence**

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

Dhelk Dja is the key 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 Three-Year Action Plan 2019-2022 articulates the critical actions and supporting activities required to progress the Dhelk Dja Agreement's five strategic priorities. Each of these priorities recognise the need to invest in Aboriginal culture, leadership and decision making as the key

to ending family violence in Victorian Aboriginal communities.

The Dhelk Dja Second Three Year Action Plan was endorsed at the October 2022 Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum and sets an expectation that departments will enter into an Agreement Making Framework with Dhelk Dja Koori Caucus and the Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum members to commit to departmental plans to support implementation of the Dhelk Dja 10 Year Agreement to be released to the public mid-2024.

In the development of the Second Three Year Action Plan, there is strong alignment against our commitment to delivering on the Closing the Gap target 13: 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 through the second Dhelk Dja Three-Year Action Plan 2023-2025.

Dhelk Dja Koori Caucus identified the second action plan must be underpinned by:

- Leadership capability for Action Groups to be able to deliver against the 10 Year Plan.
- Data sovereignty and Aboriginal communities controlling the narrative, supporting communities to collect and interpret data.
- Funding reform - longer term, sustainable funding and job security for service system staff.
- Holding mainstream agencies accountable, funding and improving referral pathways to ACCOs to ensure they can provide prevention and early intervention.
- Building an evidence base of what works when family violence services are delivered by Aboriginal organisations and tailored to the local community.

The Victorian Government has boosted funding to family violence and sexual assault service delivery funding to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations from approximately \$5.2 million in 2017-18 to approximately \$52.5 million in 2022-23, which includes new service delivery functions arising from the family violence 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 this Budget will also be allocated to ACCOs.

Family Safety Victoria is committed to working with the Dhelk Dja Koori Caucus to establish a sustainable funding approach under the proposed 10 Year Investment Strategy to ensure ACCOs delivering family violence service responses are supported with equitable funding to continue to meet the demand for culturally safe, holistic service responses that meet the needs and aspirations of the Victorian Aboriginal community.

### **Dhelk Dja Aboriginal Family Violence Fund**

Established as a flexible pool of funding streams for eligible Aboriginal organisations and community groups to enable a range of Aboriginal-led tailored responses for victim survivors and people who use violence. Over 80 Aboriginal-led initiatives and services share in the \$18.2 million Dhelk Dja Family Violence funding pool, enabling Victorian Aboriginal organisations to deliver culturally appropriate support for Aboriginal victim survivors and people who use violence. Support includes regionally based healing and change camps and weekly yarning sessions, financial counselling support for Aboriginal women wanting to leave unsafe homes, and the delivery of 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 that are tailored to the needs of their communities.

### **Other family violence initiatives**

DFFH is providing \$2.2 million for the **Aboriginal Community Initiatives Fund (CIF)** in 2023-24 to implement community led projects that educate, prevent, reduce and respond to family violence in Aboriginal communities across Victoria.

Projects funded through CIF support and address priorities that are identified by the 11 Dhelk Dja Action Groups to address family violence at a local level. Since 2014, the CIF has supported more than 300 projects in Aboriginal communities across Victoria.

**Aboriginal Access Points (AAP)** 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 is expected to be established in the Mallee in 2024.

**Place for Change** (previously known as the Medium-term Perpetrator Accommodation Service) was established in 2021 as a pilot program. It provides an accommodation-based case management response for people using violence. The 2023-24 State Budget allocated ongoing funding of \$2.8 million to continue the program. It is available in five DFFH areas. In 2022 VACSAL and VACCA were selected to deliver Aboriginal-led sites of the initiative in North-Eastern Melbourne Area/ Hume Moreland Area and Inner Gippsland Area respectively. Ernst and Young were commissioned by DFFH to undertake two independent evaluations of the program in 2021 and 2023.

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. Yoowinna Wurnalung Healing Service (Outer Gippsland), Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (Northeast Melbourne), and VACCA (Southern Melbourne) were the successful organisations following a call for submission process and commenced in 2020. Ballarat & District Aboriginal Health Service (Central Highlands) and VACCA (Western Melbourne) joined the trials in 2021. 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.

Work has continued to build the **evidence base to support Dhelk Dja prioritisation and investment**, including:

- The Dhelk Dja Data Sub Working Group was instrumental in developing defined data, indicators and measures to track our progress against the Closing the Gap 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.
- The first comprehensive data pack was presented to the Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum at the October 2022 and an updated Dhelk Dja Data Pack was provided to Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum in July 2023.
- URBIS and Karen Milward were engaged to undertake an Aboriginal Family Violence Primary Prevention Research Project to support the refresh of the Indigenous Family Violence Primary Prevention Framework in 2023.

## Children and Family Services

### Aboriginal Child Protection Diversion Trials Project

The Aboriginal Children and Families Innovation and Learning Fund supported a consortium to deliver the Child Protection Diversion Trial Project.

Three different approaches were trialled to test the hypothesis that having an Aboriginal organisation involved in decision making will improve outcomes for children and families. The trials were:

- Aboriginal-Led Case Conferencing (ALCC) (Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency).
- Aboriginal-Led Aboriginal Family Decision-Making During Open Investigation Program (AFLDM) (Goolum Goolum Aboriginal Cooperative and the Njernda Aboriginal Corporation).
- Garinga Bupup (Bendigo and District Aboriginal Cooperative).

A 2022 evaluation found that the ALCC trial had a 78 percent diversion success rate (no return to Child Protection), and Garinga Bupup had 63 percent diversion success rate.

This evidence formed part of a business case to secure more investment aimed at preventing Aboriginal children and families from escalating further within the child protection system. The 2023-24 Budget allocated funding of \$28.8 million over four years to enable ACCOs to deliver rapid and place-based responses to families.

### Aboriginal Kinship Finding Service

Kinship care is provided by relatives of a member of a child's social network to children at risk who cannot live with their parents. The Aboriginal Kinship Finding Service aims to identify kinship networks early and support kinship connections for Aboriginal children and young people who require care or are at risk of entering care. VACCA have been contracted to operate the statewide service since September 2018. An evaluation in 2020 has informed the ongoing implementation and enhancement of the service.

### Transitioning Aboriginal Children to ACCOs

DFFH is working in partnership with ACCOs and Community Service Organisations (CSOs) to support the gradual transfer of case management and care of all Aboriginal children and young people on contractible protection orders to ACCOs. Child protection must consult with the Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice and Support Service (ACSASS) when considering contracting case management to an ACCO.

The 2023-24 Budget includes dedicated funding for Transition Readiness Officers to help implement the commitment that 100 per cent of Aboriginal children managed by an ACCO.

### **Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care (ACAC)**

ACAC is the program name that supports implementation of Section 18 of Children, Youth, Families Act 2005 which 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 conferred on the Secretary in relation to an Aboriginal child or young person subject to a protection order.

ACAC is an important and vital step for Aboriginal self-determination and self-management that will have a significant impact for Aboriginal children. 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.

In 2023-24 the Victorian Government funded the expansion of the ACAC program to total 1,152 children authorised to an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) by June 2027.

### **Community Protecting Boorais program**

The Victorian Government provided \$11.63 million of funding over four years for the Community Protecting Boorais program in the 2020-21 State Budget.

The additional funding of \$13.67 million in the 2023-24 State Budget commits to another three years and an additional two teams who will investigate reported concerns of harm made to child protection, taking the total number of teams to four by 2026-27.

This will grow the capacity from 174 children to 348 Aboriginal children managed by the Community Protecting Boorais program.

The program commenced in October 2023 with positive results. A full evaluation of the program will commence in 2024 with the final report issued in 2026-27.

### **Family Preservation and Reunification Response**

The Family Preservation and Reunification 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 model has been implemented in all 17 DFFH Areas. The Response is delivered by 34 providers including 12 Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, in partnership with Child Protection.

In 2023-24 the Victorian Government expanded the Family Preservation and Reunification Response enabling an additional 85 Aboriginal families each year by 2026-27 to receive an Aboriginal-led response.

## **Births, Deaths and Marriages**

### **Strong identity, strong spirit outreach program**

The Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages' (BDM) Strong identity, Strong Spirit outreach program was launched in 2017.

BDM's Marguk-bulok koolin-ik Team (Aboriginal Outreach) works with Aboriginal community organisations to deliver culturally-safe services directly to Aboriginal community members across Victoria.

The program also seeks to proactively engage with schools, Koori maternal services and maternal child health practitioners. BDM provides support for agencies with children in care and works closely with them to register births and provide certificates.

### **Ochre Strategy – For Our Generations (2024-2028)**

BDM is also in the final stages of drafting its Ochre Strategy – For Our Generations (2024-2028). This will replace BDM's previous Coolamon Strategy 2017-2021, and builds on the Strong Identity, Strong Spirit program achievements. It will embed principles of self-determination, ensure culturally safe service delivery and increase birth registrations and birth certificate possession for all Aboriginal community members who are born, married or pass in Victoria.

## Consumer Affairs

### Aboriginal consumer justice

Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV) is committed to better engagement to understand and provide better services and support to Aboriginal people and community.

A key focus in 2023 involved recruitment of a new, senior Aboriginal Designated Position to help lead CAV's Aboriginal community engagement and response. The inaugural position commenced in October 2023.

The role assists CAV as the consumer protection regulator in Victoria to prioritise culture, promote cultural safety, build staff capability and support strong partnerships.

A strong initial priority is to provide advice to help address systemic problems and other access barriers Aboriginal people encounter in the private rental housing market.

## Housing and Homelessness

### 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. The VAHFF is the blueprint for government and the sector to work together and 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 community's needs.

In April 2022, Homes Victoria committed \$1.16 million for three years to support the VAHFF implementation. The delivery of the VAHFF is monitored through the VAHFF Annual Report Card. The Annual Report Card provides a status update of the VAHFF yearly work plan and a report against 20 outcome measures that align with specific strategic directions outlined in the VAHFF. It is intended that the 2023 & 2024 Annual Report Cards will be combined and released together.

The VAHFF Implementation Working Group (IWG) is a key governance group of the VAHFF. The membership consists of the Koori Caucus and key government representatives and is co-chaired by CEO of Aboriginal Housing Victoria and the CEO of Homes Victoria. This group provides strategic direction and have oversight functionalities for the implementation of the VAHFF including the development of an annual work plan.

### VAHFF 5-year Implementation Plan

Aboriginal Housing Victoria, through the Victorian Aboriginal Housing and the Homelessness Forum, drafted the 20-year Vision for the Aboriginal Community Housing Sector. The purpose of the 20-year vision is to articulate the role of the sector in implementing the VAHFF and guide the Aboriginal housing sector over a transformative two decades. The Aboriginal community housing sector's vision outlines the role and aspirations of Aboriginal community housing organisations across Victoria to deliver appropriate housing outcomes and services for its communities over the next 20 years. This approach will be guided by the VAHFF 5-year implementation plan which is currently being developed by the sector. The VAHFF 5-year implementation plan will aim to include growth and capacity building of the Aboriginal community housing sector and the identification of housing specific priorities across government portfolios impacting Aboriginal communities. This approach will be directed through the recommendations of the 2022 Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Summit.

### Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Data

Homes Victoria have committed to a data sharing approach since May 2023 with the Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum. Victoria's social housing waitlist data (Victorian Housing Register) and social housing allocations data is provided to the Forum on a quarterly basis as part of this commitment. Homes Victoria has also commenced work on the development of an Aboriginal housing and homeless minimum data set in line with priorities for Aboriginal homelessness system reform.

### **Aboriginal homelessness system reform – Blueprint for an Aboriginal specific homelessness system in Victoria**

In late 2022, following endorsement from the Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum, Homes Victoria provided \$478k to Aboriginal Housing Victoria (AHV) to deliver the system stewardship of the Aboriginal-specific homelessness system. AHV continue to lead the co-design activities such as developing the role and function of the Aboriginal steward; and the establishment and co-design of the service model of two Aboriginal-specific homelessness entry points.

### **The Big Housing Build**

Under the Big Housing Build (BHB), 10 per cent of all the net new growth of homes built will be for Aboriginal Victorians. This growth in housing for Aboriginal Victorians will be delivered by a combination of Aboriginal housing organisations and mainstream housing providers.

The BHB has a delivery target of 820 net new social housing dwellings for Aboriginal Victorians. 420 net new social housing dwellings from the Social Housing Growth Fund (SHGF). The remaining 400 homes are those acquired or developed by Homes Victoria and will be placed with Aboriginal housing providers for management.

To date, 61 homes of the 420 dwelling commitment have been contracted under the Social Housing Growth Fund – Homes for Aboriginal Victorians Round (HfAVR) – with further evaluation outcomes pending announcements.

To assist Aboriginal housing providers in the development of their application for grants under the SHFG HfAVR, a targeted resource was created to lead the engagement with Aboriginal housing organizations who wish to participate. This includes project feasibility and funding submissions for new social housing projects during the pre-lodgement phase.

### **Building the Capacity of the Aboriginal Housing Sector**

The Community Housing Sector Development Fund (the Fund) was established in 2020 with \$6 million funding. The Fund is part of the total BHB funding envelope.

At least 10 per cent was committed to capacity building for the Aboriginal housing sector. To date, \$2,861,172 or 47 per cent of funding has been allocated to projects focussed on building the capacity of the Aboriginal Housing Sector.

The following projects have been funded in 2023/24:

- **Supporting Aboriginal Registration project** – \$850,000 funding to support and increase the number of Aboriginal housing providers. The project aims to support Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and Traditional Owner Corporations (TOCs) to obtain community housing registration process. This support will be complemented by a grants program to support ACCOs and TOCs.
- **Local Government Partnerships Project** - \$350,000 funding to employ staff and develop a workplan to increase the understanding of the housing needs of Aboriginal people in selected Local Government Areas. The project will look to apply strategies to promote First Peoples housing outcomes, support First Peoples projects, foster connection between councils, ACCOs and TOCs and codify commitments.
- **Breaking down barriers for ACCOs to the Big Housing Build** - \$850,617 funding for a project that aims to support ACCO's participating in the BHB and increase the number of ACCOs and TOCs seeking to deliver social housing. It aims to build internal business capacity towards developing proposals for the development of land.

Other funded projects in 2022/23 FY include:

- **Community partnerships brokerage role** – \$411,000 funding for a two-year position to broker partnerships between Aboriginal organisations and registered housing providers to directly support the design and development of proposals within the BHB Aboriginal stimulus package works.



### **Victorian Public Tenancy Association, Aboriginal Advocacy program**

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. The advocates will provide Aboriginal tenants with a voice by enabling the VPTA to provide support and feedback to VAHMF Aboriginal Governance Groups.

### **Aboriginal Private Rental Housing Access**

The Commissioner for Residential Tenancies commenced a project with Aboriginal Housing Victoria (AHV) and others to examine discrimination and other access barriers affecting Aboriginal Victorians in the private rental housing market.

The project produced two reports that were officially launched by the Minister for Consumer Affairs in October 2022 and included fourteen recommendations, developed in consultation with Aboriginal housing and homelessness organisations, for further actions to improve Aboriginal access to private rental.

Implementation of the recommendations has progressed during 2023 and will continue through 2024. The implementation is being overseen by an advisory committee comprised of community representatives.

### **Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program**

Homes Victoria is working with ACCOs to open doors to private rental housing for Aboriginal Victorians through the Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program (APRAP). APRAP is a preventative intervention that provides private rental brokerage and holistic support to households experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The program is intended to prevent or end homelessness and housing crisis by rapidly rehousing people and supporting households to sustain affordable and appropriate housing in the private rental market. Since the program commenced at the end of 2020, over 1,300 households have accessed APRAP.

The APRAP initially served five DFFH regions. APRAP is now funded in: Western Melbourne, Mallee, North-Eastern Melbourne, Loddon, Bayside Peninsula, Inner Gippsland, Brimbank Melton, Goulburn, Outer Gippsland and Barwon.

### **Aboriginal Corrections Housing Pathways Initiative**

The Aboriginal Corrections Housing Pathways Initiative (ACHPI) pilot prevents homelessness for people exiting custodial settings, through initial assessment and planning and case management support to help keep or find suitable housing. An ACHPI worker is being recruited by Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Limited. DFFH is working with the Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum to determine the second location for delivery. The program will provide an avenue for culturally safe support to Aboriginal people aged 18 years and over, in addition to the mainstream Corrections Housing Pathways Initiative.

### **Improving Aboriginal Cultural Safety**

The 2023 Homes Victoria Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Safety Framework (ATSICSF) aims to increase Homes Victoria's internal capacity and capability to address systematic barriers to secure and affordable housing for First Peoples.

The delivery includes the following activities:

- Homes Victoria Aboriginal Staff Network was established to support and retain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees.
- Inclusion of cultural safety goals in 2023-24 Professional Development Plans – supporting deliverables identified in the ATSICF implementation and delivery plan.
- Senior executive, executive and manager training sessions, targeted at understanding privilege and the importance of empowering Aboriginal communities and sectors to drive housing outcomes for Aboriginal communities.

### **Aboriginal Public Housing Management Transfer Pilot**

The Aboriginal Public Housing Tenancy Management Pilot will see the transfer the tenancy services for Aboriginal renters from the Director of Housing to a registered Aboriginal housing provider, to ensure Aboriginal self-determination and cultural safety. The pilot is in its early infancy of development in partnership with the AHHF.

### **Building Works Package; Aboriginal maintenance and refurbishment program**

The \$35 million, Building Works Package - Aboriginal maintenance and refurbishment program is an example of Aboriginal communities taking the lead role in delivering a housing stimulus program on behalf of the Victorian Government. Aboriginal Housing Victoria as the lead agency is delivering the program in partnership with 19 ACCOs. The program will look to deliver over 2000 property upgrades, which includes: 28 new Kids Under Cover modular homes, Aboriginal hostel upgrades, energy efficiency upgrades, major property refurbishments, offering quality housing for Aboriginal Victorians.

### **Key Investment**

- \$5.3 billion BHB investment with 10 per cent net of all new social housing allocated for Aboriginal Victorians, which will result in 820 new dwellings. 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.
- The Victorian Government \$496.5 million funding for the Social Housing Accelerator Program, which will provide a 10 per cent of Accelerator funded (78 dwellings) commitment prioritising dwellings to registered Aboriginal housing providers.
- The \$1 billion Regional Housing Fund will deliver more than 1300 new homes across regional Victoria. The new homes will include a mix of social and affordable housing. A proportion of the funding commitment will be targeted towards First Peoples housing.

- The Community Housing Sector Development Fund was established in 2020 with \$6 million funding. At least 10 per cent was committed to capacity building for the Aboriginal housing sector. To date, \$2,861,172 or 47 per cent of funding has been allocated to projects focussed on building the capacity of the Aboriginal Housing Sector.
- \$75.3 million to transform services for Victorians experiencing or at risk of homelessness, which includes \$7.77m to resource two Aboriginal homelessness access points, one regionally and one metropolitan and the Aboriginal homelessness system stewardship role.
- Part of the \$2.7 billion Building Works package announced in May 2020, \$528 million has been invested in 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 the 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 which include 2 x 2 bedroom townhouses in Hampton and 10 (2 x 1 bedroom and 8 x 2 bedroom) low-rise apartment in Dandenong.
- \$5.1m in 2023-24 to continue the Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program.
- \$1.16m to support the Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework (VAHMF) implementation (3 years of continuous funding).
- \$350,000 to extend the implementation of the Victorian Public Tenants Association Aboriginal Advocacy Program. Previously, \$240,000 has been expenditure to implement a pilot program.
- \$400,000 to implement the Aboriginal Public Housing Tenancy Management Transfer Pilot, to test an approach to tenancy management that promotes Aboriginal self-determination and cultural safety.

## Domain 2: Learning and Skills



*Culturally-supportive and responsive learning spaces are vital for creating an environment where Aboriginal students feel supported to achieve their learning aspirations and excel.*

### **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 improved

Enrolments of Aboriginal children in four-year-old kindergarten have returned to the pre-pandemic levels of approximately 100 per cent.

More Aboriginal children than ever before are funded to participate in Early Start Kindergarten, with significant growth in the percentage of Aboriginal children enrolled in 2022.

#### 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:** In 2022, an estimated 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 across Australia, compared to 125.8 per cent in Victoria. These figures should be treated with caution as population projections for Aboriginal children used to calculate this rate are subject to a margin of error.

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.

The gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children in Victoria assessed via the AEDC as having 'highly developed' strengths reduced by 3.3 percentage points between 2018 and 2021. This is due to a 2.2 percentage point improvement by Aboriginal children and a 1.1 percentage point decline by non-Aboriginal children over that period.

### Data Note



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

- **Measure 4.1.3:** Proportion of children vulnerable on one or more domain on the Australian Early Development Census.

Historical data for these measures is available on the First Peoples – State Relations website at [www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-affairs-report](http://www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-affairs-report).

## 4.1 Optimise early childhood development and participation in kindergarten

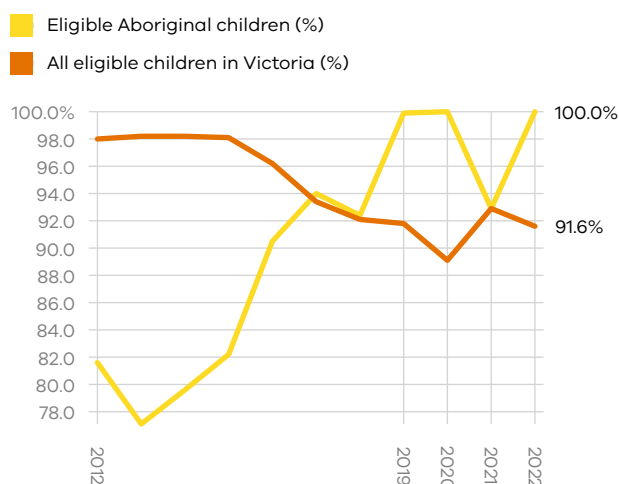
### Measure 4.1.1 Number and proportion of eligible children enrolled in a funded four-year-old kindergarten program in the year before school

The proportion of Aboriginal children enrolled in four-year-old kindergarten has remained strong. In 2022, approximately 100 per cent of eligible Aboriginal children enrolled in kindergarten. Aboriginal children enrolled in kindergarten at a greater proportion than all Victorian children (91.6 per cent). It is encouraging to see enrolments return to a pre-pandemic level. The result of 100 per cent enrolments should be treated with caution as population projections for Aboriginal children used to calculate this rate are subject to a margin of error. Increases in actual enrolments over time indicate a positive and sustained trend.

Victoria's Best Start, Best Life initiative is transitioning four-year-old kindergarten to Pre-Prep, providing 30 hours per week of play-based learning for all Victorian four-year-olds by 2036. Initiatives include funding for Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and Traditional Owners to work with early childhood services to improve cultural safety and inclusion. The Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) delivers sessions to kindergarten educators and teachers to assist in increasing Koorie children's participation in kindergarten programs across the state. This free practice development opportunity is offered to teachers and educators working directly within a funded kindergarten program and Foundation teachers. The sessions focus on how educators can learn culturally inclusive activities to incorporate into early childhood programs, creating opportunities to develop increased knowledge and understanding of local Aboriginal culture and history and an increased understanding of how services can deliver inclusive programs for Koorie children, families and local Aboriginal communities.

### Aboriginal enrolments in four-year-old kindergarten returned to approximately 100% in 2022

#### Measure 4.1.1



\* A potential under count of children in this age group may impact population estimates, allowing enrolment rates to potentially exceed one hundred per cent.

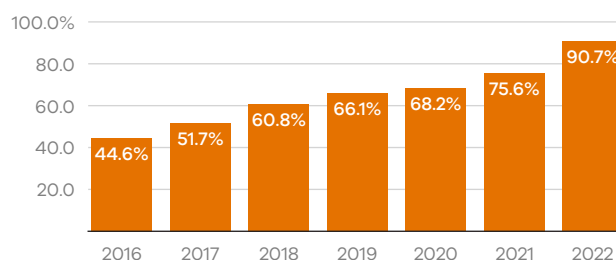
Source: Released administrative data, Department of Education, Victoria.

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

In 2022 1,371 Aboriginal children participated with funding in Early Start Kindergarten. This represents 90.7 per cent of eligible Aboriginal children up from 75.6 per cent in 2021 and 61 per cent in 2018. Early Start Kindergarten gives Aboriginal children 15 hours of free or low-cost kindergarten a week for two years before starting school. With a 90.7 per cent participation rate, more Aboriginal children than ever before are making connections in the classroom and engaging in play-based learning, setting them up to thrive in future years.

### More Aboriginal children funded for Early Start Kindergarten than ever before

#### Measure 4.1.2



Source: Released administrative data, Department of Education, Victoria.

# Goal 5: Aboriginal learners excel at school



## Overview

### Measures under Goal 5 have varied in performance

Attendance rates for Aboriginal students remained lower than for their non-Aboriginal peers across all year levels in 2022. Attendance rates dropped significantly between 2021 and 2022 across all year levels for all students, both statewide and nationally.

Cultural safety continues to be an issue in Victorian schools, with the proportion of Aboriginal students who feel connected to their school declining in all age groups.

More positive signs include that the highest ever number of Victorian schools are teaching an Aboriginal language and the number of Aboriginal school principals and Aboriginal representatives on school councils has increased.

### 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 5.2.5b:** Number and proportion of Aboriginal Victorians working in the Education and training sector.

Historical data for these measures is available on the First Peoples – State Relations website at [www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-affairs-report](http://www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-affairs-report).

### 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.

## 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

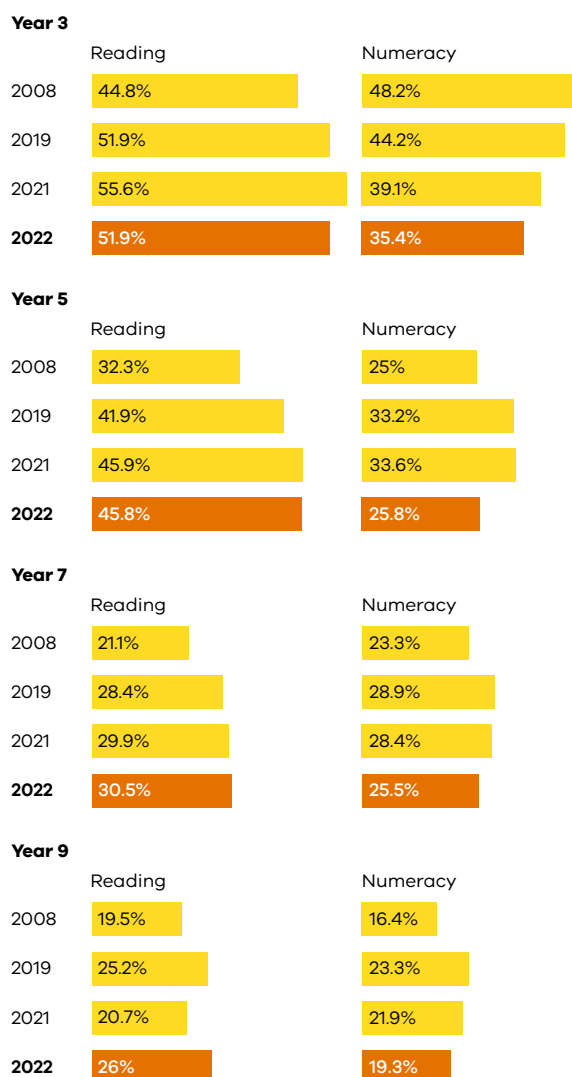
The 2022 NAPLAN results for Aboriginal students in Victoria show that while reading has improved or remained consistent over the past three years, numeracy has declined across all tested year levels. In 2022 51.9, 45.8, 30.5 and 26.0 per cent of Aboriginal students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 achieved in the top three bands for reading respectively. The percentages for numeracy remain much lower. In 2022 35.4, 25.8, 25.5 and 19.3 per cent of Aboriginal students in Years 3, 5, 7, and 9 achieved in the top three bands for numeracy respectively. In numeracy all four-year levels have declined from their 2021 results with 39.1, 33.6, 28.4, and 21.9 per cent of Aboriginal students in the top three bands in 2021.

While analysing year on year results for the same year level does not assess changes in the same cohort, it is concerning that over time Victorian schools are not meeting the learning needs of Aboriginal students in this area. Declines in numeracy results also occurred in the non-Aboriginal population. This suggests an issue with numeracy teaching in general. In reading, results from Aboriginal students in the top three bands have remained steady over the past three years.

From 2023, NAPLAN has changed from grading students across 10 achievement bands to just four proficiency levels: Exceeding, Strong, Developing and Needs Additional Support. The new proficiency bands will support parents and carers to better understand where their child is and whether they need additional reading and numeracy support.

### Long term reading is improving while numeracy is declining

#### Measure 5.1.1



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)



## 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

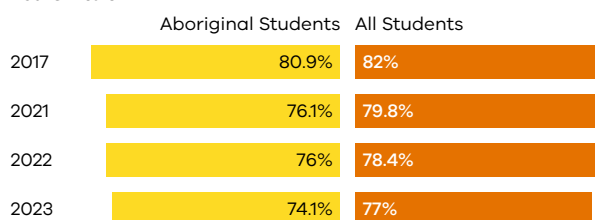
Aboriginal students are reporting feeling less connected with their schools than in previous years. In 2023 Aboriginal students in all respondent year levels reported lower sense of belonging to their school in the Attitudes to Schools Survey. The largest decline was in the years 7 to 9 with 40.8 per cent of Aboriginal students responding that they feel connected their school. Since 2017 connection to school has declined for all cohorts (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal). The largest decline being 7.9 per cent decrease in Year 7 to 9. There was a similar decrease in non-Aboriginal students in Year 7 to 9 for the period. The Attitudes to School Survey results provide important information on a student's experience of connection to and inclusion at school, as well as information on experiences of bullying and racism. Questions relating specifically to experiences of racism were added to the survey from 2023. Attitudes to School Survey results over time have consistently shown that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students feel a lower sense of connection to school and report experiencing bullying and racism at higher rates than their non-Aboriginal peers.

Building a culturally safe school system to improve connection for Aboriginal students is a key focus for the Self-determination in Education co-design process. This will include increasing the capacity of the Aboriginal community-controlled sector to support improved education outcomes for Aboriginal students.

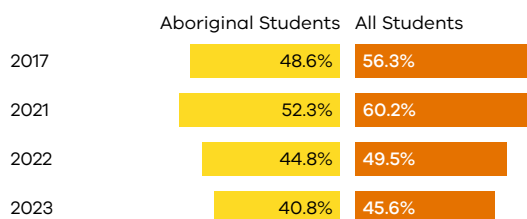
### Aboriginal students sense of belonging at schools has declined since 2017

#### Measure 5.2.1

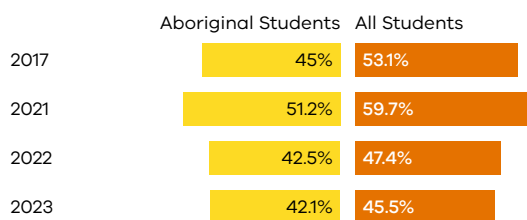
##### Years 4 to 6



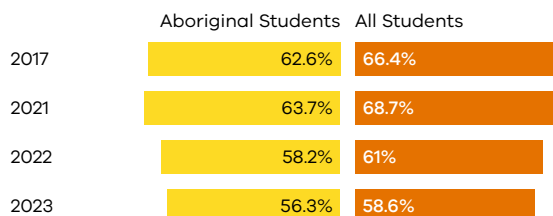
##### Years 7 to 9



##### Years 10 to 12



##### Years 4 to 12



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

**Measure 5.2.2 Student attendance rates in government schools**

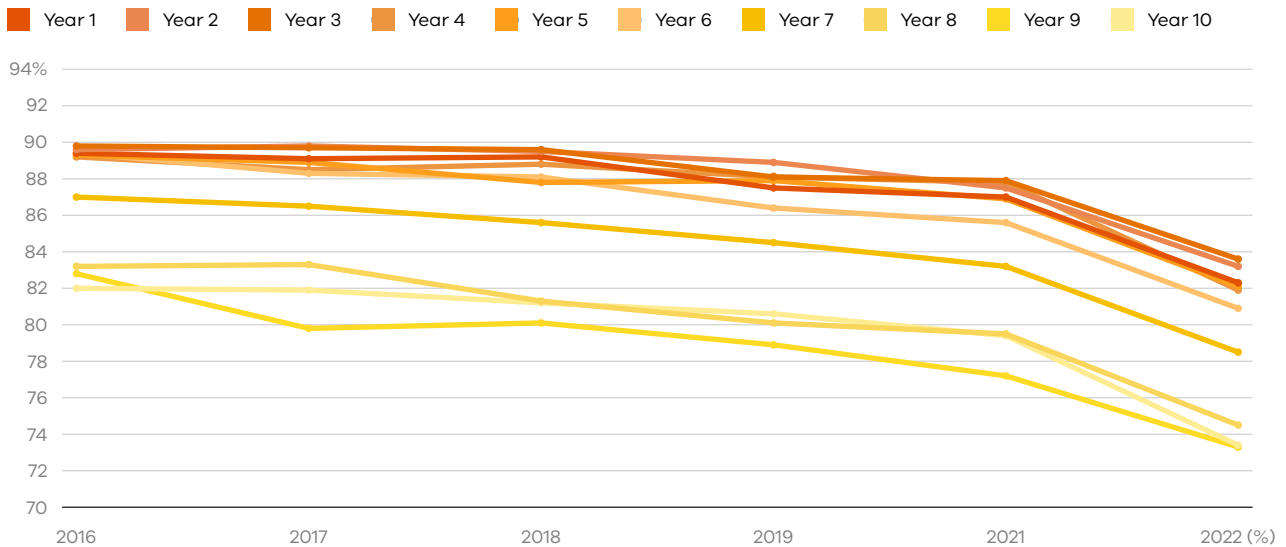
Attendance rates for Aboriginal students remained lower than for their non-Aboriginal peers across all year levels in 2022. Attendance rates dropped significantly between 2021 and 2022 across all year levels for all students, both statewide and nationally. The largest decrease for Aboriginal students was a six percentage point decrease in Year 10 attendance rate (73.4 per cent).

Historical analysis shows that if attendance rates fall below 90 per cent, students are less connected to school and at higher risk of disengaging. In 2022, attendance rates for Aboriginal students averaged

less than 90 per cent across all year levels and were particularly low in the later years of school (Years 8-10). There are many internal (inside of school) and external (outside of school) factors that influence school attendance. The COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns, and transition to and from remote learning, is likely to have played a role in increasing student disengagement. More needs to be done to reverse the trend of decreasing attendance rates. Aboriginal student attendance and engagement will continue to be a key focus as DE works with schools and Aboriginal communities to implement the reform directions emerging from the Self-determination in Education consultation and co-design process.

**Attendance rates for Aboriginal students dropped significantly in 2022, across all year levels**

**Measure 5.2.2**



For 2020, the data was not collected due to the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

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



### Koorie Young People Advisory Group

The Koorie Young People Advisory Group (KYPAG) was established in late 2022 in collaboration with VAEAI, the Koorie Youth Council and the Victorian Student Representative Council to ensure Aboriginal students' and young peoples' voices are prioritised in the Self Determination in Education Reform initiative. The group comprises 12 members between the ages of 13-25 with connections to Aboriginal communities across Australia.

Members meet regularly to discuss the reform initiative and the findings from the Campfire Conversations, including how they can support other Aboriginal young people across the state. It has become evident that young people share many of the same challenges in education despite their unique journeys. Group members

have recognised the strength of yarning together and have appreciated connecting with other young people who can relate to their experiences.

In discussing themes from the Campfire Conversations, the KYPAG produced a list of key messages about what they want schools, teachers and other students to hear and understand in order to make schools welcoming, safe and empowering. These statements based on the stories and experiences of young people have been captured through a possum skin artwork.

The KYPAG is an ever-evolving group that will continue to grow and implement change. Members are keen to continue into 2024 and beyond, especially to further focus on how they can support other young people to have their voices heard as part of the DE's ongoing work.

 Address racism and promote cultural safety

Artwork by Nakia Cadd

**Measure 5.2.3** Number of Aboriginal people on school councils

In 2023 the number of school councils reporting Aboriginal representation increased to 85, from 66 schools reporting Aboriginal representation in 2022. This represents 11 per cent of schools who responded in 2023, compared with only 11 per cent of schools who responded in 2022. The number of Aboriginal people on school councils is an important measure of school’s engagement with Aboriginal families, but caution must be applied to interpreting this data. Information for this measure is collected

via the annual Principal Survey. The Principal Survey is sent to all schools; however, participation is voluntary. Participation was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and responses continue to be lower than pre-pandemic. Only 744 schools in 2023 responded to the survey, compared to 1486 schools in 2019. Aboriginal education stakeholders have shared concerns that, whilst it is positive for schools to encourage Aboriginal parent participation on school councils, it would not be appropriate for Aboriginal families to feel any pressure to engage in this way.

**School councils with Aboriginal representation increased in 2023**

**Measure 5.2.3**

	School councils with Aboriginal representation (n)	Proportion of responding schools (%)	Number of Aboriginal persons on councils (n)
2021	63	11%	216
2022	66	10%	292
2023	85	11%	187

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



### Measure 5.2.4 Proportion of students who report bullying at school

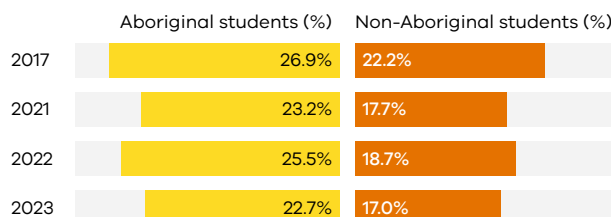
Rates of bullying towards Aboriginal students remains an issue. In 2023 22.7 per cent of Aboriginal students in years 4-6, 24.4 per cent of Aboriginal students in years 7-9, and 16.8 per cent in years 10-12 experienced bullying. All three age groups experienced reduced rates since 2022, with the largest being a 2.8 percentage point decrease for years 4-6. When analysing these results with results from non-Aboriginal students, Aboriginal students in years 4-6, 7-9 and 10-12 experience bullying at 1.3, 1.5 and 1.7 times the rate of non-Aboriginal students, respectively. In November 2023 the *Let us learn: Systemic inquiry into the educational experiences of children and young people in out-of-home care* was tabled in the Victorian parliament. This report examined the educational experiences of children and young people in out-of-home care, including the factors that affect their educational outcomes and ability to stay engaged in education. Aboriginal children commonly reported to the Commission experiences of racism, bullying and discrimination at schools from both teachers and peers.<sup>9</sup> They reported that bullying negatively affected them emotionally and threatened their engagement at school. Aboriginal children comprised 34 per cent of 101 children consulted, and 18 per cent of 88 children who completed an online survey.

Bullying is one of the key precipitants for reduced school attendance and subsequent disengagement. Bullying can also impact rates of Year 12 attainment, experiences of depression, and increased antisocial behaviour. Aboriginal children deserve to live and learn in environments that support them and set them up for success in the future. Addressing systemic racism, increasing cultural inclusion and reducing bullying will remain an important focus for Department of Education. This includes initiatives such as Self-determination in Education, Community Understanding and Safety Training, Strengthening Professional Capabilities of Principals in Koorie Education and anti-racism whole school approaches.

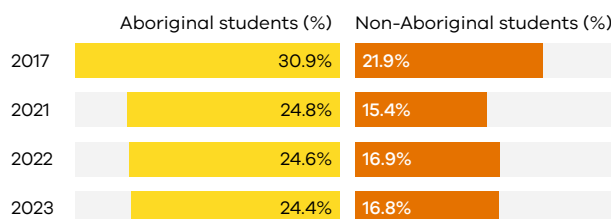
### Aboriginal students experience more bullying at school than their non-Aboriginal peers in 2023

#### Measure 5.2.4

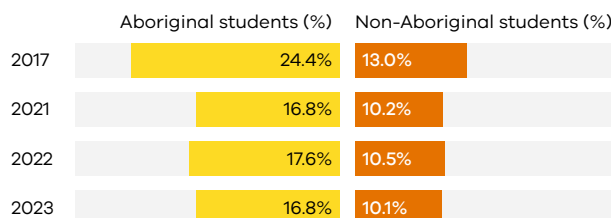
##### Year 4-6



##### Year 7-9



##### Year 10-12



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

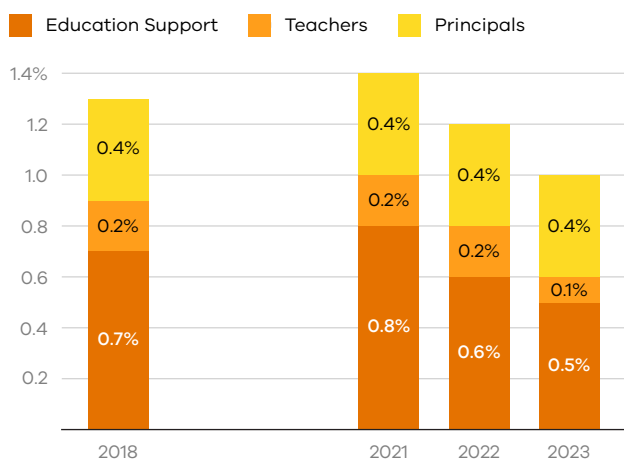
9. Commission for Children and Young People. "Let us learn: Systemic inquiry into the educational experiences of children and young people in out-of-home care", 16 November 2023, pg 194, < <https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/inquiries/systemic-inquiries/education-inquiry/> >.

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

The total number of education workers identifying as Aboriginal has slightly decreased in 2023 to 200.7 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) workers. This is the second consecutive year this number has decreased. The largest decrease across staff categories was for teachers, with 5.2 Aboriginal FTE staff leaving in 2023. This means that only 0.1 per cent of teachers identify as Aboriginal. In contrast, there was a 1.8 FTE increase in the number of Aboriginal school principals over the same period. Recruiting and supporting Aboriginal teaching staff is being addressed through the Aspiring Koorie Teachers (AKT) Now initiative.

**There are less Aboriginal education staff than in 2021**

**Measure 5.2.5**



Note: Education Support includes Koorie Engagement Support Officers which are positions based in DE Area offices and servicing multiple schools, rather than attached to one school. Counting: Full Time Equivalence (FTE) positions.

Source: Released administrative data, Department of Education, Victoria

**Measure 5.2.6** Number of schools teaching an Aboriginal language

In 2023, 36 schools in Victoria were teaching an Aboriginal language - the highest on record. This is the first reporting year since 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Aboriginal languages taught included Bangerang, Barkindji, Boon Wurrung, Dhauwurd Wurrung, Dhudhuroa, Djab Wurrung, Eastern Maar, Gunai Kurnai, Guditjamara, Kirrae Wurrong, Peek Whurrong, Taungurung, Wadawurrung, Wergaia, Woiwurrung, and Yorta Yorta. Language revitalisation is essential to grounding identity and keeping First Peoples connected to culture as identified in the Yoorrook Justice Commission's *Yoorrook with Purpose* report published in June 2022. There is a need to protect and foster Aboriginal language learning in the next generation of leaders in Victoria.

**More schools are teaching Aboriginal languages than ever before**

**Measure 5.2.6**



For 2021 and 2022, the data was not collected due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Source: Released administrative data, Department of Education, Victoria.

### Elisabeth Murdoch College – Koorie Emerging Leaders in Schools (KELiS)

Elisabeth Murdoch College established the Koorie Emerging Leaders in Schools (KELiS) program, supported by DE. Aboriginal students had expressed a desire to have their voices heard by school leadership and to have more engagement with Aboriginal organisations to enhance their cultural knowledge and empowerment.

To establish the program, EMC connected with the DE’s Koorie Education Workforce, VAEAI, and other schools in the Bayside Peninsula Area. The project was discussed at a Principal Network Meeting and a Community of Practice was initiated. Elisabeth Murdoch College hosted the first student event where Bayside Peninsula Area Koorie students discussed issues including Australia Day, flag rights, racism, reconciliation and Treaty. Students agreed that, to develop and advocate their positions on issues such as these,

they needed to build their leadership skills and deepen their cultural understanding through stronger connections with local Aboriginal community organisations.

Having commenced with eight schools, the KELiS network now includes twelve schools, including a specialist school. For some schools, it is their first consistent engagement with the Aboriginal community. Students have actioned projects at their respective schools including NAIDOC and National Reconciliation Week events, as well as presented to a variety of education and broader community forums. There has also been an increase in school attendance of KELiS students from 2022 to 2023, with preliminary data indicating that KELiS students participate almost 10 days more than Koorie students not engaged in the program. This is significant as it demonstrates that supporting Koorie students’ cultural connections strengthens their engagement with school.

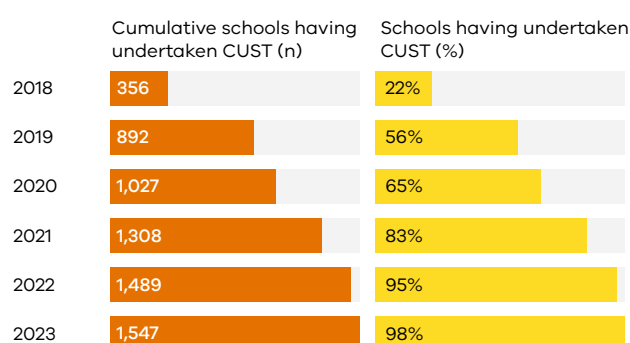
## Address racism and promote cultural safety

### Measure 5.2.7 Number and proportion of government schools having undertaken Community Understanding and Safety Training (CUST)<sup>10</sup>

98 per cent of Victorian government schools had undertaken Community Understanding and Safety Training (CUST) as of 2023. This represents 1,547 schools across Victoria. CUST is delivered to all government school staff to assist schools to better support Koorie learners, including through developing more culturally inclusive practices. CUST delivery in 2023 focused on unmet demand from schools, including new and existing staff who had not previously undertaken the training. 58 schools received training in 2023. Schools were also eligible to apply for funding for projects to further their learning from CUST. 73 schools received funding over two rounds. With CUST Phase 1 delivery almost completed, processes to work with VAEAI and Aboriginal communities to develop CUST Phase 2 will commence in the coming year.

### 98 per cent of Victorian government schools have received CUST training

#### Measure 5.2.7



Source: Released administrative data, Department of Education, Victoria.

10. Formerly 'Cultural' Understanding and Safety Training.

### **Creating connections in the Cardinia Schools Network**

The Cardinia Schools Network, comprising 25 schools in the Southern Melbourne Area, works as a collective to lead the implementation of priorities under Marrung: Aboriginal Education Plan 2016 – 2026. The network aims to create culturally safe and inclusive learning communities by building network schools' knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal history and culture, and growing teachers' confidence to embed Aboriginal perspectives into their curriculum programs.

A Marrung Steering Committee with senior representation from network schools and DE's regional office, including Koorie Engagement Support Officers, meets twice every term to ensure Marrung is kept a 'front and centre' priority for all schools. A Community of Practice

for teachers meets once each term with a focus on Koorie content in the curriculum and provides a forum for sharing ideas, practice and resources. The network's Cultural Leadership Program is for student leaders who are passionate about driving cultural change at their school and supporting staff with Harmony Day, Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week activities. Cultural Leaders meet several times each year, including a full-day program to enhance their cultural knowledge and leadership skills.

The network has established partnerships with the Cardinia Shire Council, Casey Aboriginal Gathering Place, the Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group and the Bunurong Land Council, to run events including the 2023 Deadly Day involving 160 Koorie students, 40 school student leaders and 35 staff who participated in a range of engaging cultural activities.





# Goal 6: Aboriginal learners are engaged at school



## Overview

### Measures under Goal 6 have varied in performance

While retention rates for Aboriginal students in Years 10 – 12 improved in 2023, there is evidence of a long-term decline in the rates that is greater than the decline for non-Aboriginal students.

The number of Aboriginal students completing VCE or another school-based qualification increased, however the proportion has only kept pace with population growth.

### 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).

### 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.

### Data Note



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

- **Measure 6.1.1:** Proportion of young people aged 20–24 with Year 12 or equivalent.

Historical data for these measures is available on the First Peoples – State Relations website at [www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-affairs-report](http://www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-affairs-report).

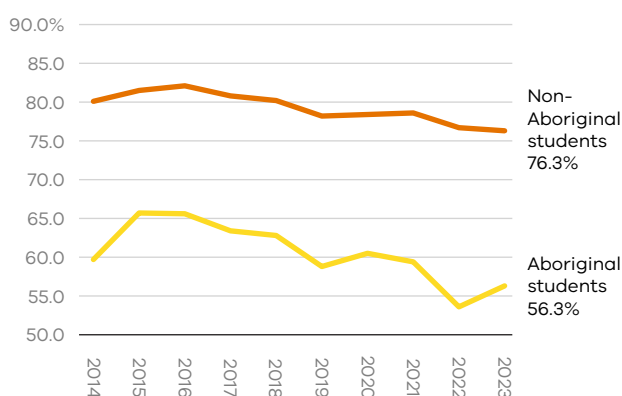
## 6.1 Increase Year 12 or equivalent attainment

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

In 2023, 56.3 per cent of Aboriginal students remained at school through years 10 to 12. This is an increase on 2022 of 2.7 per cent. Over the long-term retention rates for Aboriginal students have been slowly declining since the high point in 2015 (65.7 per cent). In comparison, non-Aboriginal students' retention rates have also been declining in the short and long-term with the high point in 2016 (82.1 per cent). While both cohorts are declining change is greater in Aboriginal students. Further action is required on the part of education settings to retain Aboriginal learners and support Year 12 or equivalent completion. The declining results for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students show that schools are struggling to sufficiently engage all their students. Improving retention rates must be tackled holistically, including through effective learning support provided in a culturally safe and inclusive environment. The Department of Education will be guided in this work by the reform directions identified by Aboriginal communities through the Self-Determination in Education initiative.

#### Retention rates for Aboriginal students in Years 10-12 have been declining since 2015

##### Measure 6.1.2



Source: Released administrative data, Department of Education, Victoria; Schools Australia, Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

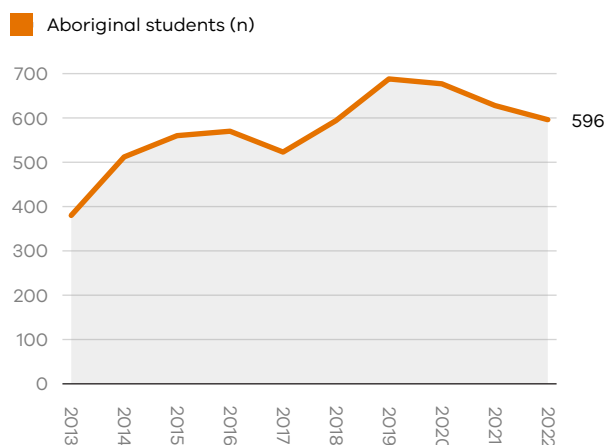
### Measure 6.1.3 Number of Aboriginal students who complete the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) or VET (Vocational Education Training) in Schools Certificate

In 2022, 596 Aboriginal students completed their VCE, VCAL, or VET schools certificate. This is a 32 person decline since 2021 and continues a recent declining trend since 2019 and the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns. When analysing the long-term trend there are 216 more graduates in 2022 than ten years ago. This shows a steady increase in the number of Aboriginal VCE, VCAL, and VET year on year.

Victoria is moving to a new integrated senior secondary certificate by 2025. In 2023, this commenced with the introduction of the VCE Vocational Major, which replaces VCAL. This includes improvements to VET Delivered to Secondary Students (VDSS) for students across Victoria. In 2025, the VCE Vocational Major program studies will open up to more students as standalone subjects. This will give them access to applied learning options which focus on their growing understanding of the future world of work. Under an integrated single VCE certificate, students will be able to build a program relevant to their specific strengths, interests, and future aspirations.

#### Completions of VCE, VCAL and VET remained steady in 2022 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 have varied in performance

After the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic years, Aboriginal young people are continuing to face barriers accessing pathways to high-skilled work after they complete Year 12. This has flow on effects for Aboriginal school leavers' opportunities in life.

The proportion of Aboriginal Year 12 completers not in the labour force, education, or training has decreased. Aboriginal enrolments in VET declined. University access for Aboriginal students remained steady.

### 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).

### 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 per cent.

#### Data Note



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

- **Measure 7.1.2:** Proportion of 17–24 year old school leavers participating in full time education and training and/or employment.
- **Measure 7.1.4a:** Proportion of 20–64 year-olds with qualifications at Certificate III level or above.
- **Measure 7.1.4b:** Proportion of 20–64 year-olds with non-school qualification at Certificate III level or above and/or currently studying at Certificate III level or above.

Historical data for these measures is available on the First Peoples – State Relations website at [www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-affairs-report](http://www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-affairs-report).

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

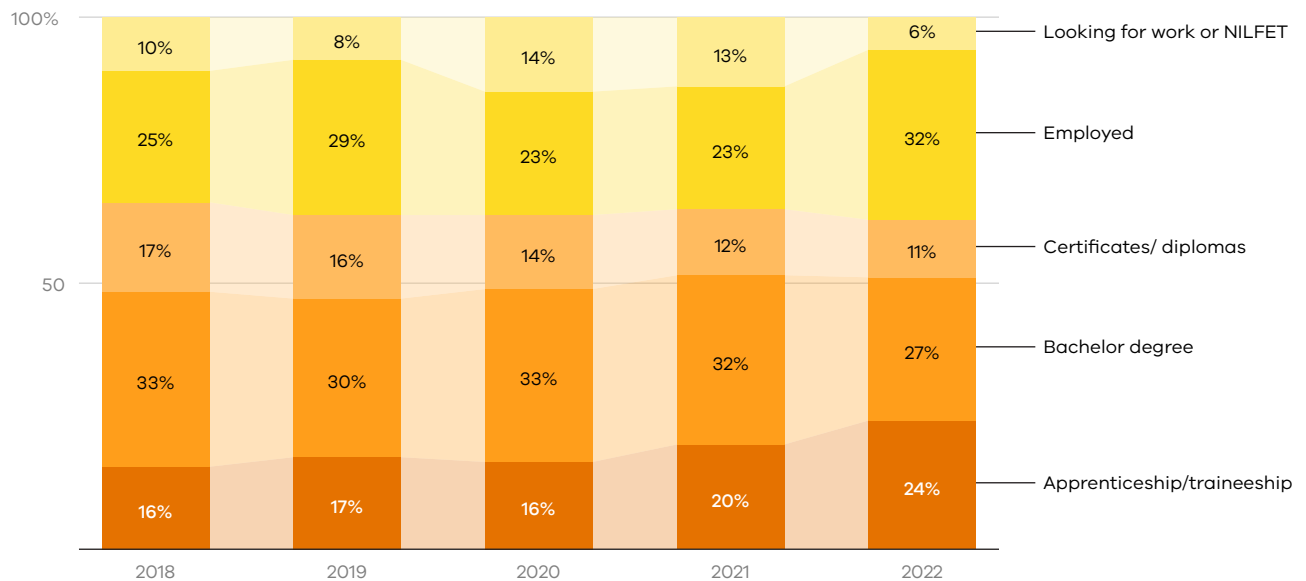
### Measure 7.1.1 Destinations of Year 12 completers

In 2022 32.0 per cent of Aboriginal Year 12 completers were employed 6 months after leaving school. This is an increase, with 23.1 per cent employed in 2021. Over the same period, the proportion of Year 12 completers undertaking apprenticeships and traineeships (24.2 per cent) increased 4.5 percentage points. The proportion of Aboriginal Year 12 completers not in the labour force, education, or training has decreased to 6 per cent. The number of

Aboriginal Year 12 completers in bachelor's degrees has continued to decline since 2020 with 32.5 per cent in 2020 compared with 26.9 per cent in 2022. This has been accompanied by a similar decline of non-Aboriginal completers in bachelor's degrees, suggesting the decline for both cohorts may be related to COVID 19 disruptions. Caution should be exercised in interpreting data for this measure as it is a once-per-cohort point-in-time survey typically returned by less than 50 per cent of Year 12 completers.

### More Aboriginal school leavers in employment or apprenticeships than previous years

#### Measure 7.1.1



NILFET: Not in Labour Force, Education or Training.

Source: OnTrack Survey, Department of Education, Victoria.

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

In 2022 4,211 Aboriginal students enrolled in VET courses. This is the lowest since 2016. This is a continuation of a declining trend since 2019 (7,529 enrolments) when enrolments were at their highest. Whilst the proportion of enrolled students completing a course is increasing, this is not due to increased completions. Rather it is a decrease in the number of enrolments. When analysing the number of enrolments as a proportion of the 18–24-year-old population, the trend shows a steep decline in enrolments since 2019, with completions remaining stable. VET studies are a significant part of the

education mix as they provide alternative pathways to higher-skilled work. Investments in VET and other alternative education pathways are crucial to meet the education needs of the widest variety of students.

University access for Aboriginal students remained steady between 2021 and 2022. The Aboriginal access rate (the number of Aboriginal students divided by total commencing Victorian domestic students) was 1.1 per cent in 2022. Aboriginal participation in university remains high. In 2022 1.0 per cent of Victorian university students identified as Aboriginal. Aboriginal students are completing awards at their highest rate.

#### Enrolments in VET are declining but the proportion of course completions remains steady

##### Measure 7.1.3a

###### Non-University

	Enrolments (n)	Completions (n)	Proportion of enrolled who completed studies (%)	Enrolments as a proportion of 18-24 year old population (%)	Completions as a proportion of 18-24 year old population (%)
2015	3,990	1,292	32.3%	50.8%	16.4%
2020	5,377	952	17.5%	62.6%	11.1%
2021	4,343	950	20.6%	49.8%	10.9%
2022	4,211	947	22.5%	47.4%	10.7%

###### University

	Enrolments (n)	Completions (n)	Proportion of enrolled who completed studies (%)	Enrolments as a proportion of 18-24 year old population (%)	Completions as a proportion of 18-24 year old population (%)
2015	198	52	28.3%	2.5%	0.7%
2020	299	45	16.2%	3.5%	0.5%
2021	304	71	25.3%	3.5%	0.8%
2022	314	52	16.6%	3.5%	0.6%

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

#### Aboriginal university student numbers declining while attainment rate steadily increases

##### Measure 7.1.3b

	Aboriginal commencing students (n)	Aboriginal students (n)	Aboriginal access rate (%) (a)	Aboriginal participation rate (%) (b)	Aboriginal attainment rate (%) (c)
2009	476	1,150	0.8%	0.6%	0.4%
2020	1,142	2,722	1.1%	1%	0.7%
2021	1,162	2,943	1.1%	1%	0.7%
2022	1,035	2,738	1.1%	1%	0.9%

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

### VACSAL's approach to supporting First Nations engagement in Vocational Education Training

The Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association (VACSAL) was awarded the Koorie Organisation Training Provider of the Year award at the 2023 Wurreeker Awards. This has strengthened its position as a leader in fostering vocational educational opportunities for First Nations learners within the community services sector. Established as a Registered Training Organization in 2013 and later accredited as a Learn Local in 2019, VACSAL has impacted the lives of over 385 Koorie and non-Koorie students across Victoria over the past decade. Through its culturally integrated pedagogy, VACSAL places students at the centre of their learning journey, ensuring that training is not only relevant

but also deeply meaningful. CEO leadership underscores the organisation's commitment to providing tailored support services that cater to the diverse needs of its learners, resulting in 227 successful employment outcomes and 17 advancements to higher education. VACSAL's success lies in its ability to deliver industry-relevant training while fostering a connection to culture. By prioritising First Nations culture and individualised support, VACSAL supports First Nations learners to navigate pathways to employment and higher education with confidence. Recognised for its excellence within the sector, VACSAL continues to set the standard for educational initiatives aimed at increasing First Nations engagement and fostering sustainable outcomes within the community services sector and beyond.

### Transfer power and resources to communities

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

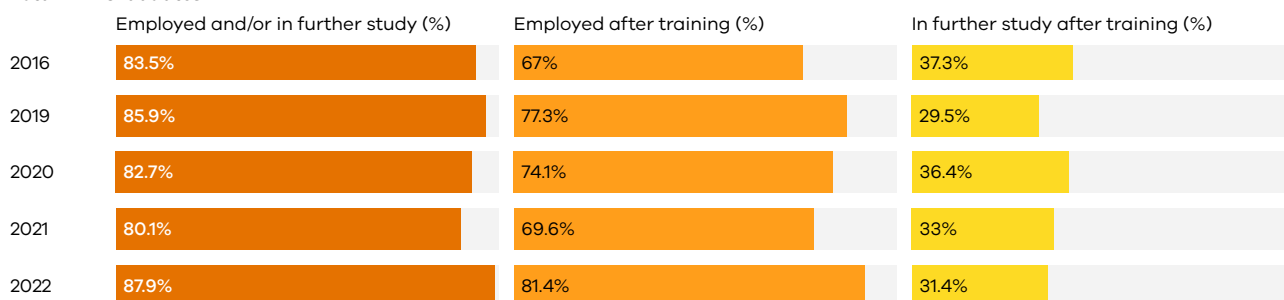
In 2022, the proportion of Aboriginal 20–64-year-old VET graduates in employment and/or further study increased to 87.9 per cent. This was an increase on 2021, with 80.1 per cent of Aboriginal graduates in employment. This proportion decreased during the COVID-19-pandemic. This may point to issues accessing employment or further studies during

these years. Regardless of the causes for this decline, the proportion Aboriginal 20–64-year-old VET graduates in employment and/or further study has now returned to a higher level than 2019 with 81.4 per cent employed. Data in 2022 for all government-funded VET graduates shows similar growth, with 87.4 per cent of government-funded VET graduates employed or in further study. VET remains an important alternative pathway to higher education and training during the later years of high school.

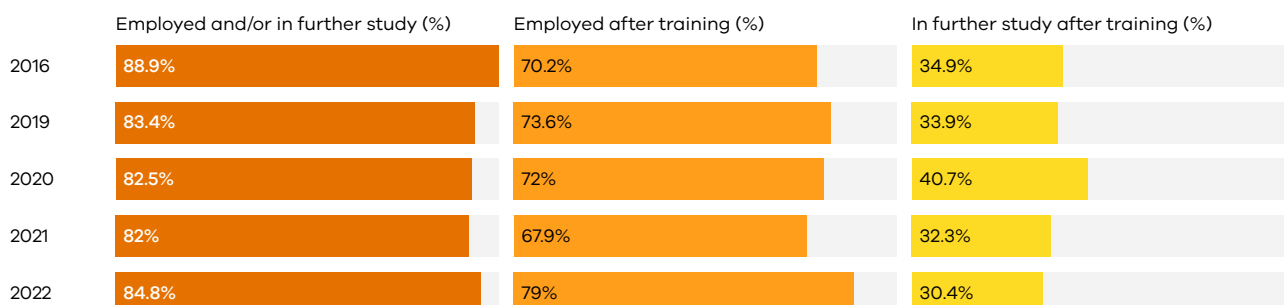
### Aboriginal VET graduate employment and training has increased again, post-COVID-19

#### Measure 7.1.5

##### Total VET Graduates



##### Government funded VET Graduates



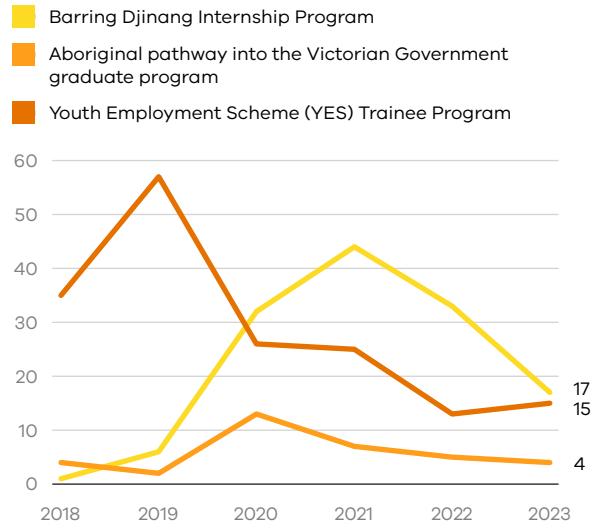
Source: ROGS 2024; Total VET graduates from Table 5A.17 [NCVER unpublished, Australian vocational education and training statistics: VET student outcomes]

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

In 2023 the Victorian Government employed 36 Aboriginal people through its graduate and trainee pathways. This is the lowest the intake has been since the VAAF has been recording this measure. Intake for the Barring Djinang Internship Program almost halved in 2022-23. An increasingly competitive Victorian labour market are influencing the choices of First Peoples. In response to this, the Victorian Public Sector Commission is looking at offering alternative pathways for First Peoples without formal qualifications. The Victorian Public Service Commission is also strengthening the promotion and engagement associated with graduate and other career pathway programs into the VPS.

**Aboriginal graduates and trainees in the VPS is at its lowest level**

**Measure 7.1.6**



Source: Internal records from the Victorian Public Service Commission; Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions

## 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.

### Marrung investment

The Victorian Government invested \$39.3 million over four years, \$11.2 million ongoing through the 2021-22 Budget, and a further \$5.8 million over two years through the 2022-23 Budget to improve education outcomes for Koorie Victorians through continued implementation of Marrung: Aboriginal Education Plan 2016-2026 (Marrung). Total investment in Marrung to 2023 is \$86.3 million and \$16.7 million ongoing.

Marrung investment includes support for:

- Koorie Literacy and Numeracy Program provides funding to support Koorie students in Victorian government primary schools who are achieving below literacy/numeracy benchmarks.
- Koorie Academy of Excellence is a program in 4 locations across Victoria, which supports Koorie students to remain engaged in education, connect to their culture, complete and excel in their secondary schooling, and pursue their desired tertiary pathway.
- Victorian Aboriginal language learning in schools pilot delivered a Dhauwurd Wurrung language program to a cluster of eight schools.
- Koorie Engagement Support Officer (KESO) Program expansion.
- Strengthening Professional Capability of Principals in Koorie Education (SPPIKE) delivered to 368 participants state-wide.
- Consultation and co-design process to progress Aboriginal Self-determination in education.

DE, through Marrung: Aboriginal Education Plan 2016-2026 (Marrung), works alongside the Koorie community, including principal partner, the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association (VAEAI), to improve the education outcomes and experiences for Koorie Victorians, so that every Koorie person achieves their potential, succeeds in life, and feels safe and strong in their cultural identity.

Increasing cultural safety for Koorie students and staff in schools is also a priority. To date, a specialist program, Strengthening Professional Capability of Principals in Koorie Education (SPPIKE) has been delivered to 368 participants state-wide.

The Victorian Government announced, through its 2023/24 budget, funding to continue attracting, retaining and developing quality teachers in Victorian schools, including \$13.6 million over 4 years to specifically target new and returning First Nations Peoples to the schools' workforce.

Throughout 2021 and 2022, DE and Aboriginal community partners undertook the largest Koorie education co-design process to date, with over 3,000 people participating in over 180 Campfire Conversations about Self-Determination in Education in locations across the state.

This process synthesised what's next for DE to strengthen learning and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal students across the priority areas of accountability, truth-telling, capacity building, strong partnerships, voice, and cultural safety.

Victoria had the strongest attendance rates in the nation in 2022, including for Koorie students. However, all Australian states and territories, including Victoria, had declines in attendance rates compared to previous years.



The COVID-19 pandemic impacted student absence rates, and we saw high rates of other illnesses and absences due to parental choice.

That is why Community Understanding and Safety Training (CUST) programs for all Victorian government schools are so important. This training builds the capacity of all government school staff to better support Koorie learners, including through developing more culturally inclusive practices. To date, all school staff at 1,531 of the 1,790 Victorian government school campuses (93 per cent) have undertaken this training.

Teaching Aboriginal perspectives throughout the curriculum, and doing it well, is also key to improving Koorie student engagement and that is why this is a mandatory requirement of the Victorian Curriculum.

Koorie student attendance and engagement will continue to be a key focus as DE works with schools and Koorie communities to implement the reform directions emerging from the Self-determination in Education consultation and co-design forums.

The 2022–2023 Victorian State Budget Paper (BP3) provided DE \$1,237,750 (ex. GST) over two years to fund an evidence-based, whole-school approach to address racism of which the Anti-racism professional learning program received \$412,750 in the 2023/24 financial year for. The Anti-racism program aims to raise awareness of racism, increase awareness of racism and its impacts. It will strengthen participants' skills and confidence with strategies to discuss racism with students and what effective bystander action can mean.

## Early Childhood Education and Care

In the early years, Koorie children's participation in four-year-old kindergarten is outstanding, with full participation in 2023 as detailed in measure 4.1.1.

Initiatives contributing to this success include Bupup balak wayipungang (Koorie Preschool Assistants) and Balert Gerrbik (Koorie Families as First Educators), which are being delivered in locations of high need, so that Koorie children and their families are supported in early childhood, and in their preparation and successful transition to school.

In 2022-23, 90 families participated in the Balert Gerrbik program.

Victoria's Best Start, Best Life initiative is transitioning four-year-old kindergarten to Pre-Prep, providing 30 hours per week of play-based learning for all Victorian four-year-olds by 2036. Initiatives include funding for Aboriginal controlled organisations and Traditional Owners to work with early childhood services to improve cultural safety and inclusion.

The Victorian Budget 2023/24 sets out additional investment of more than \$1.8 billion over 5 years in early childhood education. This builds on the existing \$4.4 billion investment in Best Start, Best Life, including Three-Year-Old Kindergarten, and takes investment to date to \$6.2 billion.

As part of the 2023-24 State Budget, a \$546.4 million package will support the continued expansion of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten and the introduction of Pre-Prep and continue Free Kinder across the state – including funding for Aboriginal community organisations and Traditional Owners to support improved cultural safety and inclusion in early childhood services.

The Bupup balak wayipungang initiative is a Victorian Government early childhood initiative (formerly the Koorie Preschool Assistants initiative KPSA). This initiative supports better outcomes for Koorie children from birth to transition to school by:

- Supporting Koorie children and families to access and be involved in their local kindergartens.
- Promoting inclusion and cultural safety in kindergartens.
- Supporting kindergarten services and programs to include Aboriginal perspectives in their practice and curriculum.

The role of a wayipungitj (formerly known as a Koori Preschool Assistant) focuses on four key areas: participation, practice, community and family.

These areas guide the work and have four aims:

- Koorie children have better access to kindergartens, and they take part more.
- Kindergarten services are more culturally inclusive and welcoming.
- Local Aboriginal communities get involved in developing and supporting culturally inclusive kindergarten programs.
- Stronger relationships with families. This supports Koorie children to take part in early childhood programs and services.

## Secondary Education

The Koorie Academy of Excellence is a program in four locations across Victoria, which supports Koorie students to remain engaged in education, connect to their culture, complete and excel in their secondary schooling, and pursue their desired tertiary pathway. The program has ongoing funding.

The Koorie Student Aspirations Day is a two-day event held on Wadawurrung country at The Gordon and Geelong Tech School, bringing together Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school students from the greater Geelong and Colac region. Students from Years 7-12 hear from inspirational young Aboriginal role models who have achieved success in their chosen fields. The program also presented a number of opportunities for students to learn about post-school careers and education pathways and opportunities.

The Engaging Students to Remain in Learning initiative supports the most vulnerable students to reengage in learning. This includes connecting Koorie early school leavers with culturally safe and inclusive pathways supports to reengage them back into education, training or employment.

The Work-based Learning for Priority Cohorts initiative provides supports to Year 9 and 10 students from priority cohorts, including Koorie students. It is linked to the My Career Insights program which provides Year 9 students with access to the Morrisby career diagnostic tool and an unpacking interview with a qualified career practitioner. This enhanced service provides career planning support to students with goal setting, action planning and organising work-based learning opportunities based on the student's strengths, aspirations, and interests.

## Workforce

The Department of Education is investing \$13.6 million in the Aspiring Koorie Teachers (AKT) Now initiative to attract and retain more Aboriginal people to the school workforce. AKT Now will provide wrap-around supports for Certificate IV vocational training students, undergraduate Initial Teacher Education (ITE) students and postgraduate students who seek to enter Education Support roles and the teaching profession, including paid placement in a Victorian government school. Additionally, the program will seek to re-engage Aboriginal teachers who are not currently teaching back into the teaching workforce, including through financial incentives and other support.

## Skills and Higher Education

Marrung includes sector specific actions for building excellence in teaching, learning and development in higher education and skills. For the Skills and TAFE portfolio, primary actions relate to revising approaches to supporting Koorie learners, expanding initiatives under the Toorong Marnong Higher Education Accord, strengthening pathways, and supporting transition from education into employment.

### Skills First funding

In November 2023, the Minister for Skills and TAFE approved a new tuition fee waiver for First Nations learners, the Skills First Aboriginal Access fee waiver. Under this initiative, tuition fees are not charged to Skills First students who self-identify as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent. From 1 January 2024 the new fee waiver replaced the Indigenous Completions Initiative concession.

The fee waiver will seek to deliver on actions committed to under Marrung to improve the inclusivity of learning environments, lift outcomes for First Nations learners in VET and enhance Aboriginal self-determination in post-secondary and vocational education.

### **First Nations Languages**

New Certificate II and III in Learning an Australian First Nations Language courses were funded under a Victorian Budget 2021-22 investment of more than \$2.7 million over four years. Additionally, \$2.8 million was allocated as part of the 2022-23 State Budget to deliver a Certificate IV in Teaching an Australian First Nations Language to help increase the number of Aboriginal language teachers in Victorian kindergartens and schools, building better connections to the country's heritage.

Currently, there are specific accredited courses that support learners to explore Koorie language, identity and strengthen community connections. There are two government funded courses on the Victorian Training Needs List – the 10891NAT - Certificate III in Learning an Australian First Nation's Language and the 10892NAT - Certificate IV in Teaching an Australian First Nation's Language. Swinburne University of Technology has been engaged by DJSIR to support the development and contextualisation of resources for delivery in Victoria. This work also includes 10890NAT - Certificate II in Learning an Australian First Nation's Language.

The intent of the project work is to develop a suite of First Nations Languages courses that will be accessible for delivery by multiple institutions. It is intended that delivery of the revised Certificate II and III courses will commence from mid-2024, following a process to seek permission from Traditional Owner groups for interested students to study their language. It is intended that this process will be developed in collaboration with the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association (VAEAI).

### **Victorian Skills Plan 2023 into 2024**

The 2023 into 2024 Victorian Skills Plan includes commentary about how education and training can play a crucial role in reconciliation and self-determination for First Peoples. Recommendations in the 2023-24 Victorian Skills Plan include using self-determination as a guiding principle, working with training providers to embed cultural safety in practice, and encouraging diversity.

The Victorian Skills Authority delivered a workshop with key First Nations stakeholders, including VAEAI, VACCHO, representatives from traditional owner groups to shape the Victorian Skills Plan.

### **Adult and Community Education sector**

The Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) Board Ministerial Statement (Statement) on the Future of Adult Community Education in Victoria 2000 -2025 recognises the important place of adult community education in Victoria as part of an integrated post-secondary system. It establishes a crucial role for the ACFE Board to lead adult community education in Victoria. The Statement ensures that adult community education provides a safe and welcoming environment for different cohorts in the community with a focus on ensuring Koorie learners see adult community education organisations as a place for the community to meet, share experiences and learn, as well as fostering harmony with the local non-Koorie population.

#### **Koorie loading for pre-accredited training**

A 50 per cent Koorie loading of the student hour rate for ACFE Board funded pre-accredited training was introduced in February 2021 and continued throughout 2023. The loading aims to increase engagement of Koorie learners in pre-accredited core skills training, and support Koorie communities. The loading is calculated for student contact hours delivered to learners who identify as Indigenous, using the base subsidy rate for the year of delivery. The total funding is \$1.7 over four years with \$440,000 ongoing.

#### **Koorie professional development literacy and numeracy module for pre-accredited teachers**

In 2021-22, the ACFE Board commissioned Adult Learning Australia to work in partnership with VAEAI to design a Koorie professional development module for Learn Local teachers which has since been implemented across 2022-23.

The Koorie module is a short, focused five-hour online interactive unit providing strategies for teachers to support Koorie learners in the development of literacy and numeracy. The Koorie module is a part of the broader Adult Literacy and Numeracy Professional Practice Program that aims to improve the capability of pre-accredited literacy and numeracy teachers.

The forum discussion spaces or 'Yarning Circles' play an important part in connecting participants and encouraging engagement and further learning and reflective practice.

This module has been developed and all resources have been incorporated into the ACFE Board's Annual Professional Development Plan.

## Reconnect

The Reconnect program assists participants, including First Nations learners, to overcome the barriers preventing them from engaging in education, training and employment and provides support into further study or employment pathways. The program is intended to improve a person's chance of breaking the cycle of disadvantage by creating equity, improving access, and increasing choice in pathways through education and employment. Reconnect providers offer a range of supports which include counselling and mentoring, housing and accommodation services referral, mental health support referral, foundation skills, employability skills, and careers information, planning and advice.

The program has been funded to support over 1,700 participants each year by providing wrap-around supports and interventions that aim to address non-vocational barriers that impact on their ability to reach their participation potential. As at November 2023, 8 per cent of participants were First Peoples.

## Indigenous Career Workforce Development pilot

The Indigenous Career Workforce Development pilot received funding from the Regional and Specialist Training Fund which commenced in February 2022 and ran through to early 2023. This pilot successfully supported the development of courses with a focus on upskilling First Nations people to deliver culturally safe career advice and support to First Peoples.

The pilot has delivered seven enrolments. One graduate completed a Cert IV in Career Development for First Nations People and six are on target to complete their qualification. Four additional learners have requested enrolment and will enter a future intake. Two participants have since been employed within the Jobs Victoria Career Counsellors Service.

## National Skills Agreement

The National Skills Agreement, signed and agreed in October 2023 aims to achieve better outcomes for First Nations people in the VET sector. The Commonwealth Government will invest up to \$214 million over five years to help meet Closing the Gap skills targets, including \$36 million to establish the VET policy partnership with First Nations organisations.

As part of the National Skills Agreement, states and territories can submit implementation plans to the Commonwealth Government on initiatives linked to key policy priorities. Approval by the Commonwealth will unlock matched funding of a maximum of \$11.85 million (over five years) for Closing the Gap initiatives, which must be prepared by Victoria and agreed by the Commonwealth by 30 June 2025.

This process presents an opportunity to seek matched funding from the Commonwealth focusing on two key objectives:

- Activities to expand investment in the capability, sustainability, and growth of the Aboriginal Community Controlled (ACC) and First Nations owned (FNO) training sector, and
- Activities to grow the First Nations VET workforce and boost cultural competency of mainstream RTOs.

## Consultation with First Nations communities, leaders, and TAFEs

Across May 2023, DJSIR and VAEAI engaged with TAFE providers to discuss the trends and qualitative factors underpinning Koorie participation in VET. Consultation sessions explored participation and enrolment rates, student outcomes, course and location preferences, gender, intersections with departmental programs and funding, and key drivers for VET pathways.

Most providers confirmed the pandemic was a major contributor to the decrease in Koorie participation, which highlighted the need for holistic supports for Koorie learners and their families. Providers also highlighted access to devices, secure internet connections, and suitable study environments were, and continue to be, crucial for successful participation in VET.

Providers noted that some Koorie students found learning from home safer, as it provided an escape from bullying and racism, while blended delivery modes contribute to cultural safety and allow remote learners to remain on Country, surrounded by their families and local community.

DJSIR heard that intensive supports, such as career mentors, pastoral care, academic assistance, and accessible Koorie Units, go a long way towards fostering cultural safety at TAFE.

Proactive top-down approaches, like implementing Reconciliation Action Plans, are vital for embedding cultural capability in organisations.

Additionally, scholarships, grants, and supplements for accommodation and travel reduce financial barriers to study. Koorie students may also experience dissatisfaction with Higher Education, stemming from issues like low self-esteem or concerns about large HECS debts. It was also noted that clear and widespread communication of eligibility changes for Free TAFE is necessary for Koorie students to take advantage of the initiative.

## Youth

### **Marram Nganyin Aboriginal Youth Mentoring Program**

The Marram Nganyin Aboriginal Youth Mentoring Program funds five Aboriginal community-led organisations to deliver local mentoring programs that are designed and delivered in collaboration with Aboriginal young people. The Koorie Youth Council oversees delivery of the program.

The program provides social and practical support for young Aboriginal people to strengthen their family and community relationships, learn about culture and engage with education, training and employment. It has supported 300 young Aboriginal people since its establishment in 2016.

The program received continued funding through the 2023-24 State Budget over four years.

### **Victorian Aboriginal youth engagement framework**

The Koorie Youth Council was funded by DFFH to develop a Victorian Aboriginal youth engagement framework. This work was ongoing throughout 2023 and will be delivered in 2024.

### **Victorian Youth Congress**

The Victorian Youth Congress provides an opportunity for a diverse group of young people to directly advise the Victorian Government on a range of policy issues which affect young people and support the delivery of key youth-facing projects. The Office for Youth is working closely with the Koorie Youth Council to maintain the representation of Aboriginal young people and ensure the Youth Congress is a safe space for Aboriginal young people.

## Transport

### **Yani Bangal First Peoples Scholarship Program**

In 2023, the Yani Bangal First Peoples Scholarships Program (Program) continued to provide financial assistance to First Peoples enrolled in secondary school, TAFE, and University in Victoria to complete their education. A key objective of the Program is to provide these students with career opportunities in the Portfolio.

The Program is funded by entities across the Portfolio, contributing \$150,000 per annum shared funding pool. The Program has been extended by three years until 2026 with a significant emphasis on facilitating the transition of recipients into various employment opportunities.

The scholarship awards are tiered from \$1,250 to \$15,000 per recipient, per annum. Increasing by 25 per cent for the forecasted additional three years, to account for the rising cost of living in Victoria.

Under the program in 2023:

- 14 Secondary school and 3 University students received scholarships.
- A total of 65 scholarships have been awarded from 2020 to 2023, comprising of 60 secondary school, one TAFE and four University scholarships.

## Domain 3: Opportunity and Prosperity



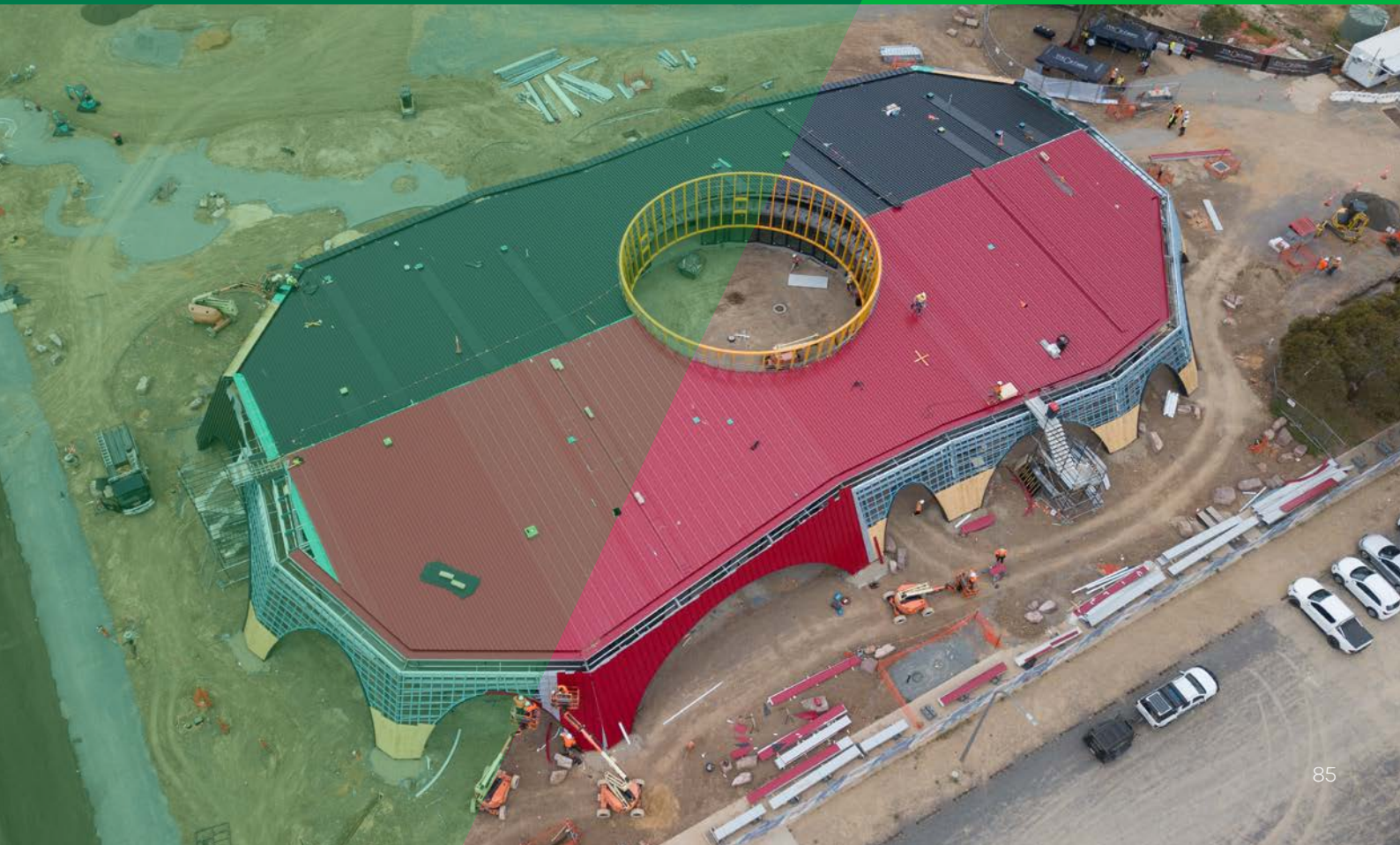
*Fully participating in the economy provides Aboriginal Victorians with the resources they need to determine the future they want. Economic participation is key to Aboriginal self-determination.*

### **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 financial 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, people living with disability and 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 do not have new data available for reporting.**

**Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally**

Not applicable.

### 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.

#### Data Note



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

- **Measure 8.1.1a:** Median household income.
- **Measure 8.1.1b:** Median equivalised household income.
- **Measure 8.1.1c:** Median personal income.
- **Measure 8.2.1:** Proportion of homeowners versus other tenure types (by age bracket).
- **Measure 8.3.1:** Number of Victorian business owner-managers who are Aboriginal.
- **Measure 8.3.2:** Aboriginal businesses that government enters into a purchase agreement with as a proportion of small to medium enterprises government enters into a purchase agreement with.

Historical data for these measures is available on the First Peoples – State Relations website at [www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-affairs-report](http://www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-affairs-report).

## Objective 8.3 Increase Aboriginal business ownership and support Aboriginal entrepreneurs

### Jaramer Legal Services

The Victorian Government's Legal Services Panel is used by almost 200 Departments and agencies to source external legal services. A refresh of this panel in 2023 provided an opportunity for Aboriginal businesses to be included in the firms that supply legal services to Government as part

of the social procurement approach. Jaramer Legal Services, a Kinway certified Victorian Aboriginal Business, was successfully appointed to the panel of 37 law firms, which means they are well positioned to provide services including property, commercial and contracts legal services, to the Victorian Government.

### Kinaway 12-Month Pilot Program

In November 2022, DTP entered a Pilot Partnership with Kinaway Aboriginal Chamber of Commerce. The one-year, \$250,000 Pilot leveraged Kinaway's expertise in strategic partnership management to create mutually beneficial procurement outcomes for Kinaway members and the Portfolio.

The Pilot, aligning with the Plan, worked towards better procurement outcomes for the Portfolio and Victorian First People owned business, including increased engagement, spend and contract awards.

DTP in partnership with Kinaway conducted Opportunity Analysis workshops with DTP staff and transport entities. Bespoke breakdowns of typical entity spend on Victorian First Peoples owned businesses were identified through category analysis, as were future procurement opportunities.

The Pilot contributed to an increase in the Portfolio's First Peoples Procurement performance in FY22/23, and there was a reported increase in the cultural competence and confidence of Portfolio buyers to engage First Peoples businesses, in addition to greater understanding of the Victorian First Peoples business sector.

DTP was also able to leverage its relationship with Kinaway to connect Victorian First Peoples owned businesses with flood recovery response teams, following the October 2022 flooding events. Work is also ongoing beyond the Pilot to address First Peoples procurement barriers and to further increase the number of First Peoples businesses prequalified for Portfolio works.



Transfer power and resources to communities



### Aboriginal Economic Hubs Initiative

In September 2023 the government allocated funding under the Regional Package for regional legacy Commonwealth Games projects to invest in regional Victoria. The Regional Package allocation provided targeted Aboriginal Economic Development funding support that aligns with the Yuma Yirramboi Strategy strategic pillars and DJSIR strategic goals. The Regional Package included \$6 million funding over two years (2023-25) for the establishment of seven TOC run regional Aboriginal Economic Hubs:

- Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation
- Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation
- Gunditji Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation
- First People of the Millewa-Mallee
- Taungurung Land & Water Corporation
- Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation
- Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation.

The new hubs will be established before June 2024 and will align with the three existing hubs currently being run by the following TOCs that have been funded by DJSIR:

- Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation – Bendigo Region
- Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation – Gippsland Region
- Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation – Ballarat Region.

The \$6 million funding is to support and resource the establishment and initial fit-out of hubs to provide a location to deliver operational programs that supports Aboriginal businesses in providing products and services. This will enable Aboriginal self-determination by supporting economic participation at a regional and local level. The funding will support and build the capacity and capability of Traditional Owners Corporations as providers of services that support increased social and emotional wellbeing of the members base, and the regional Aboriginal community.

Funding has been provided to offer regional placed-based opportunities for Aboriginal businesses and the community to grow and network in cultural tourism, capacity building programs, provide a shop-front to display and sell products, gallery space, co-working office space for Aboriginal entrepreneurs and small business owners, and rental space for outside organisations to host meetings and programs.



Transfer power and resources to communities

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



## Overview

### Measures under Goal 9 have mixed results.

The majority of measures under Goal 9 are not reported on due to sourcing data from the ABS Census of Population and Housing.

Aboriginal workforce participation in metropolitan, inner regional and outer regional and remote Victoria remained stable in 2021. Non-Aboriginal employment decreased in the same period.

More recently, in 2023 Job Victoria's service offering was returned to pre-pandemic levels, as a result the program had less job placements than in previous years and significantly less outcomes for the same year. Aboriginal leadership in the VPS (Aboriginal identifying employees at VPS6 and above) has remained stable since 2019.

### 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.



## 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).

### Data Note



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

- **Measure 9.1.1:** Employment to population ratio.
- **Measure 9.1.2a:** Proportion employed full-time.
- **Measure 9.1.2b:** Proportion employed part-time.
- **Measure 9.2.1:** Workforce participation of women (as measured at 9.1.2).
- **Measure 9.3.1a:** Workforce participation by age group.
- **Measure 9.3.1b:** Workforce participation by gender.
- **Measure 9.3.1c:** Workforce participation by disability status.
- **Measure 9.4.1a:** Employment by industry with analysis by growth industry.
- **Measure 9.4.1b:** Distribution of employment by sector and Aboriginal status.
- **Measure 9.4.1c:** Distribution of employment by industry and Aboriginal status.
- **Measure 9.4.1d:** Distribution of employment by occupation and Aboriginal status.

Historical data for these measures is available on the First Peoples – State Relations website at [www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-affairs-report](http://www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-affairs-report).

## 9.1 Increase Aboriginal workforce participation

### Measure 9.1.3 Aboriginal jobseekers supported into work.

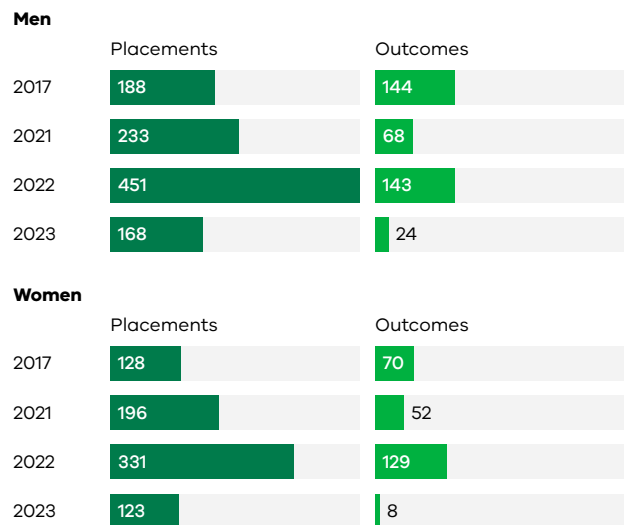
As a result of a scale down of Jobs Victoria services between 2022 and 2023 there was a significant decrease in the number of Aboriginal job seekers supported into work through Jobs Victoria. In 2023, 123 Aboriginal women and 168 Aboriginal men were supported into work placements compared to 331 and 451 in 2022.

In 2023, 6.5 per cent of Aboriginal women and 14.3 per cent of Aboriginal men placed into work were supported to achieve 26-weeks of employment. It is expected that further sustainable employment outcomes will be reflected in 2024 data as this reflects the time lag between when the work placement commenced, and the sustainable employment outcome being realised six months later.

A significant investment in Jobs Victoria was made in the 2020-21 State Budget to support jobseekers through the unprecedented crisis of COVID-19. The 2023-24 State Budget invested \$35.1 million over 2 years for Jobs Victoria to deliver targeted employment services in five priority locations. Jobs Victoria has partnered with local organisations to deliver the Mentors program in Hume, Brimbank, Greater Dandenong, Greater Shepparton, and Latrobe. The 2023 numbers reflect the Jobs Victoria service offering returning to its pre-pandemic profile, recognising that the Commonwealth Government has primary responsibility for employment services.

### Job seeker outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians at an all time low

#### Measure 9.1.3



Source: Jobs Victoria program data, Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions

### **Elevating Connections Healing Ourselves (ECHO) First Nations Women's Leadership Program**

The ECHO Leadership Program enhances the governance, decision making and leadership skills of First Nations women in a culturally appropriate manner, guided by self-determination principles. The program will provide the knowledge, framework, and tools to ensure First Nations women lead decision-making in areas that impact their lives, culture and communities.

This approach recognises that education, mentoring or coaching, networking opportunities and scholarships may create a pipeline of talented women leaders and help women on the pathway to success.

In 2022-23, the ECHO Program funded 14 First Nations women to participate in a hybrid online and in-person leadership development program led by Karen Milward Consulting and team, including Karabena Consulting and a range of expert First Nations facilitators and community members. The program concluded in 2023 with key deliverables including:

- A buddy system, allowing First Nations women to connect with one another throughout the program and afterwards
- Online and in-person workshops focusing on strategies for women's leadership, individual financial management skills, resilience and ensuring cultural safety
- Culturally informed mentoring opportunities.

## Transfer power and resources to communities

### **Algabonyah Employment Program - Goulburn Valley hospital project**

Jobs Victoria partnered with the Rumbalara Football and Netball Club in Shepparton to deliver the Algabonyah Employment Program, supporting local Indigenous jobseekers into work.

Ruby Winmar, 19 years old, had undertaken a nursing traineeship but was finding it challenging to find secure work that would support her financially. Ruby connected with Jobs Victoria and Algabonyah, who supported her to gain her white card, and then into a job with Lendlease working as a construction worker on the new Goulburn Valley Hospital project.

David Barron, Partnerships manager at Rumbalara Football and Netball Club, said Algabonyah is building careers for people in the Aboriginal community in Shepparton. "Jobs Victoria funding that goes into that is critical to the success stories that we're seeing on the Lendlease hospital site."

Rob McGregor, Site Manager, Lendlease, said Ruby walked in the door job ready. "Jobs Victoria's partnership with Rumbalara has given us job-ready people. On day one we were able to just put her through a normal construction industry induction, and within a couple of hours she was earning her keep and was part of the team straightaway." Lendlease is committed to offering employment opportunities to people from the local Indigenous community. "Particularly while we're on Yorta Yorta country, we have a responsibility to not just come in here, do our job and go away again. I think we have to go and learn from people."

Now that Ruby is thriving in her new role on the Goulburn Valley Hospital project, Algabonyah is assisting her to help her manage her income and save for her goal – to further her studies and become a nurse.

Ruby says: "I was born in this hospital. A few years back I worked as a nursing assistant, now I'm working on the construction site. Hopefully once I finish studying, I'll be able to come back and work here as a nurse."

## 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, disability status and region

#### Workforce participation by region

In 2021, Aboriginal workforce participation in metropolitan regions of Victoria was 61.9 per cent. This is the highest workforce participation out of metro, inner regional, and outer regional remote Victoria. Inner regional and outer regional and remote areas were at their highest recorded figure of 56.6 per cent and 51.1 per cent respectively in 2021. Workforce participation of non-Aboriginal Victorians continued to be higher than Aboriginal Victorians at the three regional levels. There was a difference of 5.6 per cent workforce participation on average between all regions for 2021. In 2021 5.5 per cent, 5.4 per cent, and 6.4 per cent of Aboriginal respondents were unemployed in metropolitan, inner regional, and outer regional and remote Victoria. This is an average decrease of 3.1 percentage points since the 2016 Census across the three areas. For non-Aboriginal Victorians this average decrease was only 2.0 percentage points. Employment in

regional areas is largely influenced by labour market opportunities presented. It is positive to see that despite the unusual economic circumstances during 2021 that employment participation did not decline.

Workforce participation rates for Aboriginal people in Victoria were resilient during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021. Workforce participation fell only 0.2 percentage points in outer regional and remote areas. In the same period, non-Aboriginal Victorians experienced a decline of 16 percentage points for workforce participation.

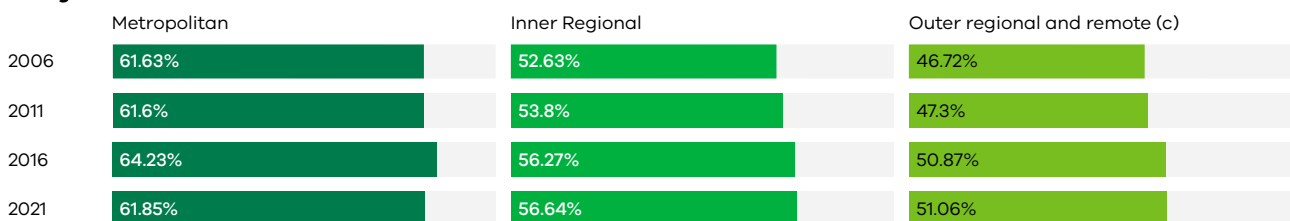
This measure relies on the 2021 Census and is self-reported employment status at a point in time. This means that it is not directly comparable to other sources of workforce participation data.

First Peoples continue to face structural barriers to workforce participation. The Victorian Skills Plan for 2023 into 2024 highlights that cost-of-living pressures are likely to have a greater impact on individuals and communities who are already facing significant challenges.

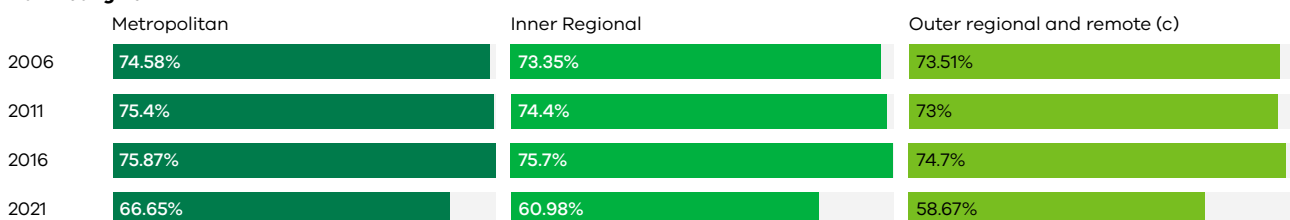
#### Aboriginal workforce participation has not been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic

##### 9.3.1.d Workforce participation by regional status

#### Aboriginal



#### Non-Aboriginal



Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing

### Munarra Centre for Regional Excellence

The Munarra Centre for Regional Excellence will deliver culturally responsive education, employment, health and wellbeing programs on Yorta Yorta Country in Shepparton from 2024.

First Peoples State Relations and the Victorian School Building Authority (VSBA) have partnered with Munarra Limited to deliver the Centre, which was designed through a self-determined Aboriginal-led decision-making process. The campus will welcome Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples of Australia and be home to the Munarra Academy and its partners University of Melbourne, Latrobe University and GOTAFE, which will offer meaningful pathways to learning and employment for students, as well as a host of other programs and research.

One of the largest Victorian Government projects ever awarded directly to an Aboriginal-owned business based in Victoria, the \$36 million centre is being constructed by TVN On-Country, a Kinaway certified 70 per cent Aboriginal-owned commercial builder.

Through an innovative partnership based social procurement model, the construction of the centre is also providing significant employment opportunities for Aboriginal people and engagement of Aboriginal businesses. The project has committed to ambitious social procurement targets and is on track to exceed them. The achievements to date include:

- 24 per cent of total labour hours by Aboriginal Victorians (representing 5,302 hours), against the target of 4 per cent;
- 31 per cent of the total labour hours by the TVN On-Country project team were performed by Aboriginal Victorians (representing 3,972 hours), against the target of 15 per cent; and
- The project is also on-track to hit the target of 10 per cent of total contract value spend with Aboriginal businesses (suppliers and subcontractors).

As a ground-breaking Aboriginal-led project, the Munarra Centre for Excellence highlights how social procurement can drive economic development and support Aboriginal-led initiatives and self-determination.



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

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

Since 2019, the number of Aboriginal employees in the VPS has grown by 98 people to 705 employees in 2023. This represents 1.2 per cent of the total VPS workforce. Growth in the number of Aboriginal staff has come during a decrease in the total number of staff. The VPSC through the Barring Djinang strategy had an employment target of 2 per cent Aboriginal representation in the Victorian Public Service. This target is far from being achieved if the current slow growth of Aboriginal identifying employees continues. Transitioning to a more culturally safe workplace for Aboriginal people is key to increasing identification and employment. Programs and pathways for new Aboriginal employees and leaders are important in fostering culturally safe workplaces.

#### The number of Aboriginal employees in the Victorian Public Service is slowly growing

##### Measure 9.4.2

Year	Number of Aboriginal employees	Proportion of Aboriginal employees in the VPS (%)
2019	607	1.2%
2020	620	1.2%
2021	682	1.2%
2022	688	1.2%
2023	705	1.2%

Source: Victorian Public Sector Commission internal records

### Transport and Planning Portfolio First Peoples Staff Conference 2023

Coordinated by DTP, the second annual Transport and Planning Portfolio First Peoples Staff Conference (Conference) was held in Warrnambool on 29 - 31 March 2023. After a successful inaugural in-person conference in 2022, the attendance increased from the 2023 conference by 75 per cent.

The Conference is a key support and retention initiative of Yani Bangal. It gives Portfolio First Peoples staff a chance to connect, network, participate in cultural and professional development workshops, and encourages relationship building to enable a peer-to-peer support network.

Highlights include:

- The attendance of 35 First Peoples employees from across DTP, Metro Trains, V/Line, Rail Projects Victoria, Major Transport Infrastructure Authority, Major Roads Projects, Yarra Trams, Suburban Rail Loop Authority and Level Crossings Removal Authority. This was a 75 per cent increase from the previous conference.
- Procuring from First Peoples Victorian-owned businesses, including Blak Wattle Coaching and Consultancy, Photography by Wayne Quilliam Photography, a Welcome to Country and Smoking Ceremony from Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation and a guided tour of Budj Bim National Park.
- The launch of the Girraway Ganyi Employee Assistance Program and Cultural Mentoring which continues to be available to all First Peoples staff, their managers and employees working in First Peoples relations across the Portfolio.



### **Nyanak Lotjpa 'We all talk'**

Established in 2023, Nyanak Lotjpa 'We all talk' is an Aboriginal staff network supporting connection and development opportunities for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees working across the Victorian public sector.

Developed by Aboriginal staff, for Aboriginal staff, members of the network can connect, share and learn from each other through digital and in-person events, as well as share career development opportunities and job vacancies, and provide input into future employment initiatives.

The network complements other Aboriginal staff networks from within the Victorian Public Service and across the public sector.

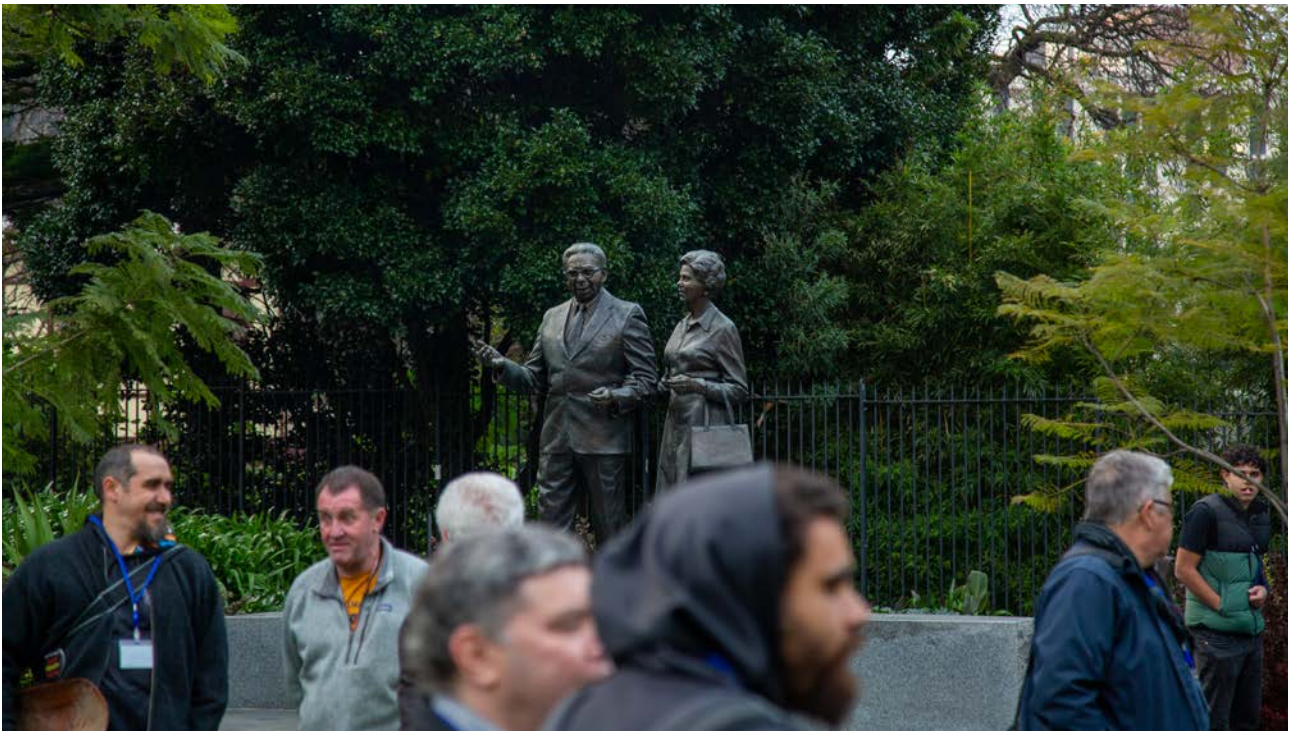
Nyanak Lotjpa was launched in April 2023 with a hybrid event at the Melbourne Museum, which was attended by over 120 staff. The Network itself has over 130 members. It is hosted on the Innovation Network digital platform.

In NAIDOC week (July 2023) the network hosted a mini film festival showing 4 short films to highlight Aboriginal Culture followed by a Q&A with one of the filmmakers – the event was opened to all VPS employees and had over 150 employees attend.

In September 2023 the network hosted a regional face to face event in Traralgon attended by 35 regional employees.

In November 2023 the network hosted an end of year celebration and had over 50 employees attend.

## **🕒 Address racism and promote cultural safety**



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

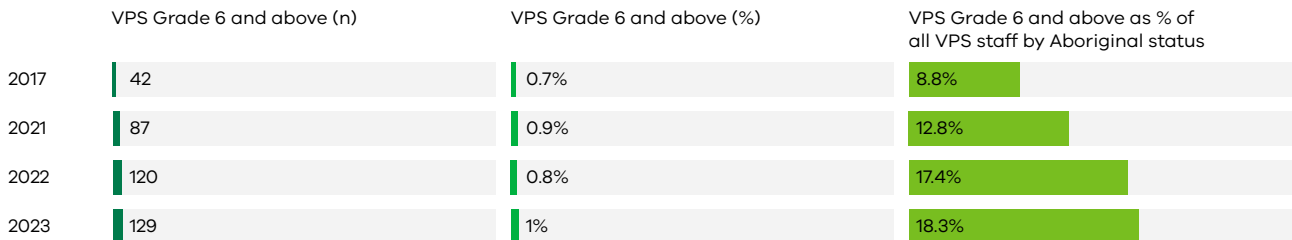
The proportion of Aboriginal employees at VPS grade 6 and above has continued to grow, rising to 1.1 per cent of all VPS 6 grade and above. In 2023, the proportion of Aboriginal employees at VPS grade

6 and above, relative to the number of Aboriginal employees in the VPS, reached an all-time high at 17.9 per cent. Increases to the proportion of Aboriginal leadership is a positive step towards embedding Aboriginal ideas, perspectives and ways of working in the VPS.

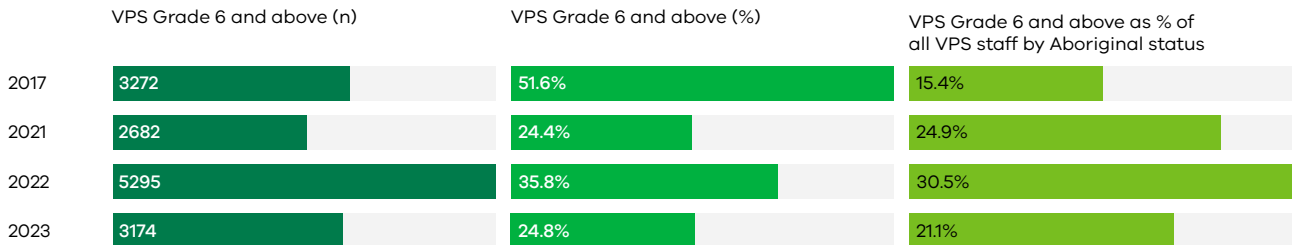
**The proportion of Aboriginal leadership in the VPS is growing**

**Measure 9.4.3**

**Aboriginal leaders**



**Non-Aboriginal leaders**



Source: Victorian Public Sector Commission internal records

**Barring Djinang Leadership program**

The Barring Djinang Leadership program provides leadership training for senior VPS and Sector employees at the manager, VPS 5 and VPS 6 level.

From 2018–2023 over 90 VPS employees have completed this program.

The hallmarks of the Barring Djinang Leadership program are culturally strong principles of Aboriginal leadership and strong networking delivered to both the VPS and the wider sector.

This is a leadership development and coaching program for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait

Islander staff that are seeking to enhance leadership capabilities.

In 2024, the Commission will deliver this program in partnership with MurriMatters an Aboriginal owned and operated company specialising in Aboriginal organisational development.

The program will focus on 'leadership in action' by connecting personal and professional development with real-life projects. This involves implementing key Engoori practices and coaching that support self-awareness and transformation of individual and organisational relationships.

### Measure 9.4.4 Number and proportion of Aboriginal people participating on Victorian Government boards

In 2023, 2.2 per cent of Victorian government boards have Aboriginal representation. The number of members across the VPS increased by 31 people since 2022 and by 88 people since 2017. The majority of the increase was in boards under the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action. Aboriginal representation increased 1.2 percentage points since 2022 and 6.8 percentage points since 2017. Two out of the ten government departments had Aboriginal representation below one percent of board members. The Department of Health's boards have just 0.6 per cent Aboriginal representation and Department of Treasury and Finance had no

Aboriginal representation in 2023. Since 2017 the Department of Treasury and Finance has had no Aboriginal identifying representatives on its boards.

The Victorian Government is committed to ensuring that government boards reflect the rich diversity of the Victorian community. The Victorian Government Appointment and Remuneration Guidelines outlines the standard processes for appointing people to government boards. This guide specifically highlights the need for Aboriginal people on a variety of government boards, not just Aboriginal specific boards. Aboriginal representation on Government boards provide their lived experience, strategic leadership and greater accountability of government actions.

### The proportion of Aboriginal people participating on government boards has increased over time

#### Measure 9.4.4

Year	2017	2023
Department of Education	1%	2%
Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action	3%	10%
Department of Families, Fairness and Housing	-	4%
Department of Government Services	-	1%
Department of Health	0%	1%
Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions	2%	6%
Department of Justice and Community Safety	1%	2%
Department of Premier and Cabinet	6%	9%
Department of Transport	0%	2%
Department of Treasury and Finance	0%	0%
Total VPS	1%	2%

Source: Victorian Public Service Commission internal records

### Advising on Victorian Government diversity at Board-level

Applying the Diversity on Victorian Government Boards Guidelines (Guidelines), DPC assists departments to increase the diversity on boards across several priority cohorts, including First Peoples.

Historically, First Peoples have been underrepresented in decision-making roles within government structures, including on boards and committees. When First Peoples are not represented on government boards, they are excluded from significant opportunities to design and shape strategic policy and program directions. This means the unique and valuable knowledge and perspectives that First Peoples bring are missed entirely. To truly support self-determination, First Peoples should be represented on both 'mainstream' boards and those with specific mandates for Aboriginal affairs, because all areas of policy impact First Peoples.

DPC provides tailored advice to departments to run inclusive board recruitment processes and better target the priority cohorts. This includes addressing First Peoples' barriers and creating opportunities to participation on government boards, such as through increasing open and competitive recruitment and embedding flexible working arrangements.

In efforts to close diversity gaps for planned recruitment, DPC consulted with portfolios on their inaugural annual ministerial diversity plans (AMDP) for the 2023-24 financial year. While the AMDP process served as an important accountability tool towards achieving set recruitment targets, it was observed that improving diversity on boards is a long-term commitment that requires concerted efforts to address barriers across all elements of the appointment cycle.

From July 2023, the proportion of First Peoples board members was 5 per cent, surpassing the 3 per cent target set in 2022.

### Address racism and promote cultural safety



# Goal 10: Aboriginal income potential is realised



## Overview

**Measures under Goal 10 do not have new data available for reporting.**

**Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally**

Not applicable.

### **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.

#### **Data Note**



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

- **Measure 10.1.1:** Victoria's Aboriginal income as sum of all income earned by Aboriginal workers.
- **Measure 10.1.2:** Opportunity cost: Aboriginal gross income at parity minus actual.

Historical data for these measures is available on the First Peoples – State Relations website at [www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-affairs-report](http://www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-affairs-report).

## 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 is currently insufficient research and data on the specifics of digital inclusion barriers faced by First Peoples in Victoria. Digital inclusion research to-date (specifically the Australian Digital Inclusion Index) has been limited in its ability to produce meaningful insights into the levels of digital inclusion (measured across three dimensions of Access, Affordability and Ability) experienced by First Nations people in non-remote locations. This data gap has been recognised by the First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group (FNDIAG).

In October 2022, the Victorian Government released its Digital Inclusion Statement (DIS) which outlines a range of digital inclusion initiatives across government aiming to address barriers around access, affordability, ability and safety. The initiatives reflected in the DIS are not specifically targeted to First Nations Victorians but are expected to benefit First Nations communities.

A major initiative reflected in the DIS in the Victorian Government's \$540 million Connecting Victoria program which will deliver more than 1,400 mobile and broadband improvements across the State.

## 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 Strategy and Implementation

On 27 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.

During 2023 the Program allocated funding to priority targeted initiatives based on expert advice provided by the Koori Caucus and aligned to the Yuma Yirramboi Strategy pillars, including:

- Grants addressing lack of capital investment available to Victorian Aboriginal business owners.
- Innovation grants to 11 Traditional Owner Corporations to realise goals for self-determination within economic development, business partnerships and corporate capability development.
- Grants to engage clients in training, pre-employment, upskilling, and mentoring supports to make them job ready, create employment pathways and help address the gap in job supports available to the Aboriginal community.
- Grants for regional 'Aboriginal Economic Hubs' for the Ballarat, Bendigo, and Gippsland regions.
- Funding to support the DJSIR Yuma Yirramboi Council and Koorie Caucus.

#### Yuma Yirramboi Council and Koori Caucus

The Yuma Yirramboi Council (the Council) has emerged as a vital driver in advancing the objectives of the Yuma Yirramboi Strategy. Through collaborative efforts, expert guidance, and strategic deliberations, the Council has made significant progress in advancing Aboriginal economic development in Victoria. The Council includes a Koorie Caucus of 9 Aboriginal Expert Members and is the DJSIR's advisory body on Aboriginal Community priorities and is a key enabler towards achieving our shared self-determination goals.

The Yuma Yirramboi Council has a diverse mix of expertise spanning various fields crucial to economic development. Koori Caucus are appointed for their proficiency in business, finance, entrepreneurship, and community engagement and play a vital role in shaping the Council's strategic direction and advising on policy matters.

During 2023, the Council and its Koori Caucus convened regularly to deliberate on strategic priorities aligned with the DJSIR portfolios and significant government initiatives. Significant among these priorities were the execution and monitoring of the initial phases of the Yuma Yirramboi Program, the design of the Regional Package's Aboriginal Economic Development Fund, and efforts to foster the growth of the Aboriginal business sector. Additionally, the Council provided valuable insights and recommendations on formulating the Aboriginal Social Procurement Policy.

### **Geelong Aboriginal Business Hub**

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 opened in December 2023 and is now providing facilities and a base of operations for a range of supports to the Victorian Aboriginal business and artist community within the Geelong region.

### **2023 Kinaway Business Awards**

DJSIR are the major sponsor of the Kinaway Business Awards Night, hosted and present 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.

## **Employment**

As part of the 2023-24 Victorian State Budget, the Jobs Victoria Mentors service received \$35 million over two years up to March 2025. The Jobs Victoria partnership with the Rumbalara Football and Netball Club in Shepparton to deliver the Algabonyah Employment Program received funding through this initiative.

In 2023, the Jobs Victoria network transitioned from a state-wide service to working in five LGAs with specific characteristics around concentrated disadvantage. This represented a return to pre-pandemic levels of funding.

### **Goulburn Murray Regional Prosperity and Productivity Plan**

Funding to support Kaiela Institute to implement the Goulburn Murray Regional Prosperity and Productivity Plan (GMRPPP) continued in 2023. Kaiela seeks to build relationships with industries and leaders in the region and supports procurement related to the build of the Munarra Centre of Excellence.

### **GLaWAC**

Funding for the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC) continued in 2023 as part of the community revitalisation work with local leaders, community members and services to apply a systems approach to improving economic inclusion outcomes for communities experiencing entrenched disadvantage. The funding provided seeks to support GLaWAC to implement the Aboriginal Economic Development Strategy for Gippsland which seeks to improve economic inclusion outcomes alongside Aboriginal communities.

### **Microenterprise Development Grant Program**

Through the Microenterprise Grant Program, Ngarrimili Ltd is funded to provide aspiring Victorian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander microentrepreneurs with culturally informed business support and mentorship and to leverage the Murran Hub in Geelong as a co-working and retail space for their microbusinesses.

## **Social procurement**

### **Social Procurement Framework**

The Victorian Government's Social Procurement Framework (SPF) sets out a scalable and consistent whole of government approach to social procurement, applied when government departments and agencies purchase goods, services and construction.

The SPF aims to ensure value-for-money considerations are not solely focused on price but also on opportunities to deliver social and sustainable outcomes that benefit the Victorian community.

Opportunities for Victorian Aboriginal people is an objective of the SPF, with two outcomes:

- Purchasing from Victorian Aboriginal businesses; and
- Employment of Victorian Aboriginal people by suppliers to the Victorian Government.

Victorian Government procurement professionals have a significant role to play in creating social value through the adoption of targeted strategies and by supporting the engagement of a diverse range of suppliers within their supply chains.



In 2023, the Department of Government Services provided support to 86 high value procurements (valued greater than \$20 million) to strengthen SPF outcomes achieved through the procurement activity.

A key partner in supporting delivery of the SPF objective Opportunities for Victorian Aboriginal people is the Kinaway Chamber of Commerce. Kinaway provides business support and advice to Victorian Aboriginal businesses to improve visibility, strengthen relationships and create opportunities. Kinaway certifies Victorian Aboriginal businesses and provides Government buyers and suppliers with support services to identify opportunities to increase engagement with Victorian Aboriginal businesses.

To support capability uplift in applying the SPF, DGS recently launched the Procurement Knowledge Hub. The Hub provides social procurement content, webinars and resources to support Government buyers to apply more specific targets and commitments in procurement processes and contracts.

## Sport and experience economy

The Aboriginal Sport Participation Grant (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 right across the state.

The ASPG program administers 2 rounds per year to the Aboriginal community to increase participation in carnivals and community sport.

Since 2020, the ASPG Program has provided more than 400 grants, totalling more than \$540,000 to Aboriginal Community Controlled Originations and sporting clubs and associations.

In 2023, 1,845 applicants in Round 6 of the Get Active Kids Voucher Program identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, accounting for a total of 5 per cent of all applications submitted. In Round 7, 1,119 applicants identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, accounting for a total of 4 per cent of all applications.

In 2023, 362 approved Sporting Club Grants (SCG), totalling \$699,526.05, where First Peoples were a nominated cohort to be benefited.

## Creative Victoria

### First Peoples Direction Circle

The Creative Victoria First Peoples Directions Circle 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. 50 per cent of the membership was refreshed in 2023, as required in the Terms of Reference. 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.

### First Peoples Creative Hub

The feasibility study into a possible First Peoples Creative Hub within the Melbourne CBD – something First People have dreamed of for decades. Creative State 2025 enables us to finally explore this idea towards fruition through a Feasibility study and business case. A Preliminary Business Case was completed in November 2021 informed by key First Peoples Creative Organisations, Traditional Owners, and other stakeholders. This proposal is under further development as part of the work on Phase 2 of the Melbourne Arts Precinct Transformation.

### Funding Key First Peoples Platforms

Creative State 2025 supports several First Peoples Creative initiatives including the Blak and Bright Literary Festival, Yirramboi, the Koorie Art Show at the Koorie Heritage Trust, the Birrarangga Film Festival and Yalingwa First Peoples Visual Arts Initiative, providing funding security to these Victoria's key First Peoples platforms.

### First Peoples Funding Streams

Creative State 2025 has committed to dedicated First Peoples funding streams across all Creative Victoria grants programs. The First Peoples Direction Circle and First Peoples Creative Peers and Reviewers input into the program design and assessment process has ensured that they are culturally safe and adhere to Aboriginal cultural ways of working. More First People creatives are applying for support, with higher success rates across all grant rounds. The range of funding streams with dedicated First Peoples streams continued to grow in 2023 as new programs have been developed.

## Local Government

### Women Leading Locally program

The program prioritises participation of Aboriginal women. The Women Leading Locally program provides participants with resources and skills to campaign in the 2024 local government elections. The program prioritises participation of Aboriginal women and women from diverse backgrounds to increase diversity on councils, including more Aboriginal women as councillors.

59 participants from the first round of the program graduated in August 2023, receiving a Certificate in Community Leadership and Governance (Local Government). One of the graduates was an Aboriginal woman. The second round of the program commenced in June 2023 with 63 current participants of which four are Aboriginal women.

Following the first program graduation, the focus is now to ensure recent graduates of the first round of the program are supported through campaign resources, ongoing mentoring, and networking opportunities.

Additionally, DGS is focusing on supporting the participants currently studying in the second round of the program, to equip participants with the skills to become and remain successful local representatives for their communities.

### Maggolee

The Maggolee website was developed by Reconciliation Victoria and launched in 2015, with funding from Local Government Victoria, as a resource for local councils to work more closely with Aboriginal communities. The site includes information on policy and programs, protocols and cultural awareness, key contacts, relevant local data, news and events.

Information about each of the 79 Victorian local government areas, and about actions councils can take across key function areas to build closer relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and to progress reconciliation is outlined. Traditional Owners are at the centre of the Maggolee website, with information being provided to councils on how to facilitate, and further develop relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

### Victorian Aboriginal and Local Government Strategy 2021-2026 (VALGS)

The VALGS serves as a practical guide for councils across Victoria to embed the voices and priorities of Aboriginal communities at a local government level. The VALGS includes strategies for councils to support Traditional Owners and Aboriginal businesses and case studies on councils that have successfully developed Aboriginal-owned business procurement policies. These strategies seek to provide economic development and greater opportunities for Aboriginal owned businesses.

A VALGS Working Group was formed in 2023 to provide strategic advice and guidance on the implementation of VALGS. The Working Group is made up of five Aboriginal community members, three representatives from local government peak bodies, and two representatives from the Victorian Government. The Working Group is responsible for determining priority actions and evaluation of the VALGS at a state-wide level. At its November 2023 meeting, the Working Group agreed to focus on cultural competency and community sentiment as priority actions.

DGS is working closely with Reconciliation Victoria, in partnership with Working Group organisations, to conduct a sector-wide survey to assess councils' awareness of VALGS and build base-line data on councils progress in their VALGS implementation. This data will form the basis for monitoring VALGS implementation and future actions. The data and results will be reported back to the Working Group. The Working Group is also considering the development of an evaluation/performance framework for VALGS.

### Local Government Act 2020 Amendments

The amended *Local Government Act 2020* (Vic) explicitly includes Traditional Owners as part of the definition of municipal community.

Local Government Victoria is progressing legislative reforms to stamp-out inappropriate councillor behaviour and improve over-all councillor conduct. These proposed reforms will support traditionally underrepresented cohorts to nominate for council elections by creating a more positive environment.

### **Promoting awareness and accessibility of Victorian Government records about Aboriginal Victorians**

The Koorie Records Unit (KRU) within the Public Record Office Victoria (PROV) promotes awareness of Victorian Government records about Aboriginal Victorians within the PROV collection and aims to improve accessibility of these records to First Peoples in appropriate and culturally respectful ways.

The KRU provides dedicated services and support for First Peoples, including Stolen Generations survivors and their families, wishing to access historic Victorian Government records relating to themselves and their families.

The Koorie Index of Names (KIN) is an ongoing project to index records in the PROV collection to help locate references to Victorian Aboriginal people in archival records relating to family and community. A project to develop a new search interface for KIN is underway.

Descriptive metadata for a number of record series relating to the period of the Aboriginal Protectorate (1838-1949) has recently been added to the PROV online catalogue, increasing accessibility of these records to researchers.

KRU provides advice and assistance to support a broad range of requests from individuals, organisations and service providers relating to family and community history research, with eligible clients receiving free copies of relevant records.

The KRU also provides significant support to government agencies responding to Yoorrook Justice Commission requests.

### **Digital Inclusion**

In October 2022, the Victorian Government released its Digital Inclusion Statement (DIS) which outlines a range of digital inclusion initiatives across government aiming to address barriers around access, affordability, ability and safety. The initiatives reflected in the DIS are not specifically targeted to First Nations Victorians but are expected to benefit First Nations communities as the initiatives reach and are accessed by First Nations people and communities.

A major initiative reflected in the DIS is the Victorian Government's \$540 million Connecting Victoria program which will deliver more than 1000 mobile and broadband improvements across the State.

Although not targeting First Nations people specifically, this investment will benefit First Peoples living in areas that will receive telecommunications infrastructure upgrades. For example, 13 mobile telecommunications infrastructure sites in Shepparton will receive connectivity improvements, while a 5G upgrade project was funded at Lake Tyers beach.

In 2023, the Department of Government Services engaged RMIT to complete a detailed assessment of the Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2023 results and provide advice to government on the nature and extent of data availability, gaps and challenges around understanding digital inclusion for First Nations people in Victoria. This report is expected to be finalised in the first quarter of 2024.

### **Aboriginal Employment in the Victorian Public Service**

In 2022-23 VPSC re-established the Barring Djinang Advisory Group to reflect on achievements and consider the future of the Barring Djinang Aboriginal employment strategy.

VPSC also established a new staff network for Aboriginal employees in the VPS, called Nyanak Loptja, a Yorta Yorta word for 'we all talk'. More than 120 people joined the first meeting.

- This year the VPSC published a report on the experiences of Aboriginal employees. The report combines quantitative data with focus groups and seeks to understand workplace issues like racism, cultural load, career development and feeling safe to speak up. Acknowledging the experience of Aboriginal employees is critical to the public sector's ongoing commitment to provide a culturally safe workplace and grow the number of Aboriginal employees in the public sector.

## Domain 4: Health and Wellbeing



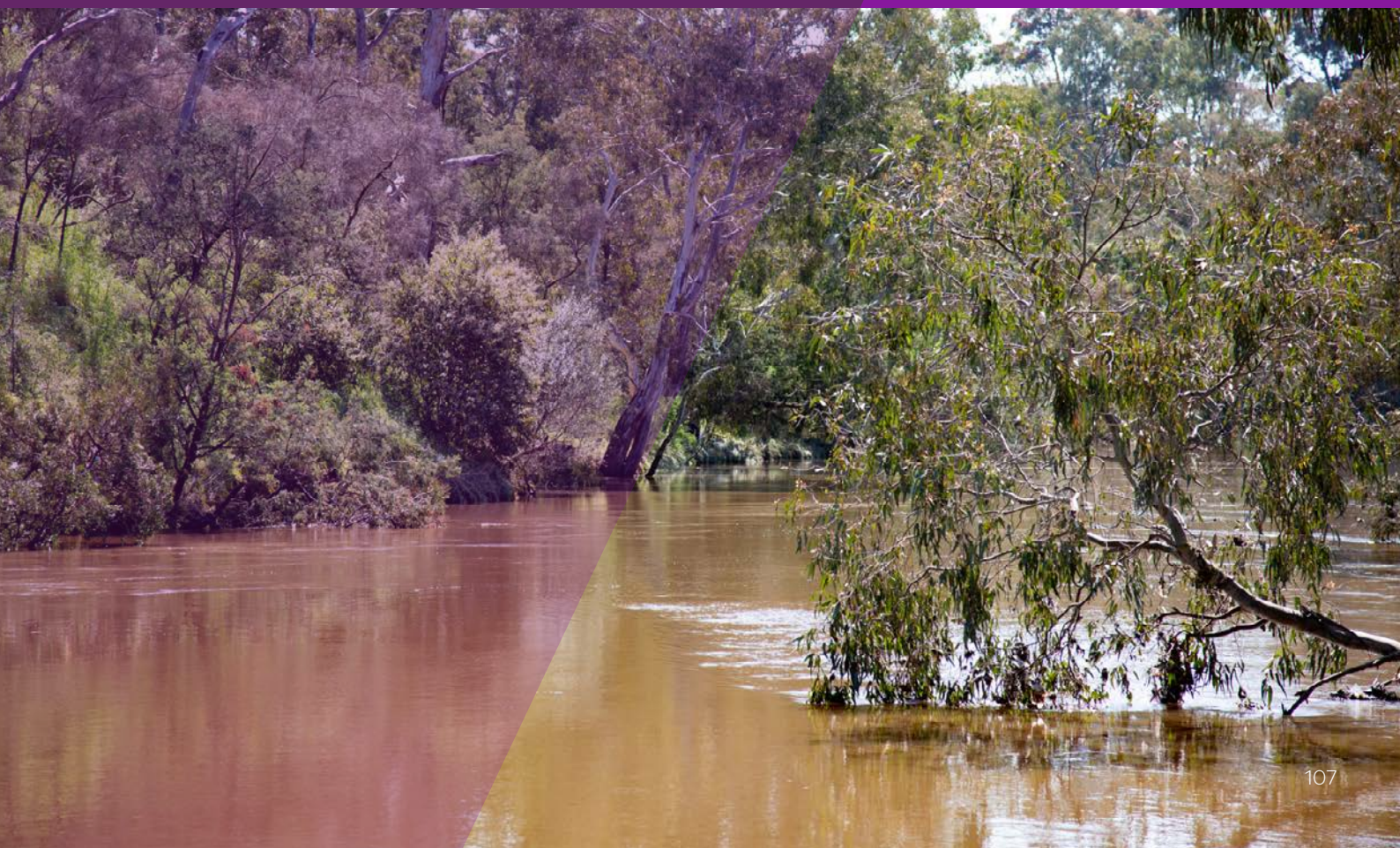
*Improving health outcomes and having a good quality of life will ensure all Victorian Aboriginal communities can thrive.*

### **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, 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 worsened

Rates of tobacco smoking, hospitalisations for preventable diseases, emergency department presentations for alcohol and other drug related harm, and service contacts for alcohol and other drug treatment services have all increased. Aboriginal Victorians are reporting worse self-reported health than in previous years.

Several systemic issues may have contributed to these outcomes:

- Health effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Funding and workforce issues characterised by limited core funding for Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) and an overstretched Aboriginal workforce.
- Limited equitable access to mainstream services due to cultural safety being an issue.
- Health data and evidence contributing to a focus on deficit narratives rather than Aboriginal holistic understandings of health.
- Current investment/funding models prioritising tertiary/acute services over early intervention and prevention models the difficulty of capturing/monitoring the longer-term outcomes of delivering prevention activities.

### Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally

**Outcome 1:** Nationally, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males born in 2020-22 are expected to live to 71.9 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 poor data collection processes and under-reporting of Aboriginal deaths.

#### 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** Expectation of life at birth, by sex.
- **Measure 11.1.5** Incidence of selected cancers.

Historical data for these measures is available on the First Peoples – State Relations website at [www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-affairs-report](http://www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-affairs-report).

### 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.

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

### Measure 11.1.1 Expectation of life at birth, by sex

Life expectancy estimates are important measures of population health. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life expectancy estimates include deaths from all states and territories. It is not currently possible to construct separate reliable life expectancy estimates for Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory. This is due to several factors including the small number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths. There is also an under-reporting of Aboriginal deaths in Victoria due to incomplete or inaccurate Aboriginal identification. The Department of Health is working with the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages and the Coroners Court to identify opportunities to improve Aboriginal identification. This will support a joint action plan to ensure the availability of robust Aboriginal life expectancy estimates for Victoria.

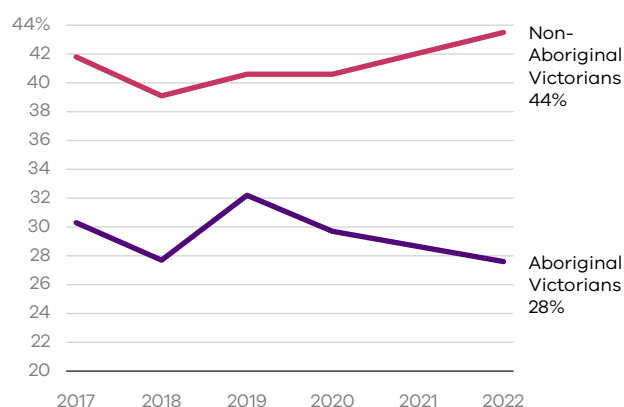
### Measure 11.1.2 Proportion reporting 'excellent or very good' health status, by sex

In 2022, Aboriginal Victorians were less likely to report excellent or very good health than in 2020 and 2019. Age standardised results for self-assessed health status from the Victorian Population Health Survey (VPHS) have declined to 27.6 per cent of respondents, down from 29.7 per cent in 2020 and 32.2 per cent in 2019. Survey results for non-Aboriginal Victorians improved over this period. 43.5 per cent of non-Aboriginal respondents said their health is either excellent or very good. A 2.9 percentage point increase from 2020 and a 1.7 percentage point increase since 2017. Historic results for Aboriginal Victorians for this question have not had a consistent trend. This means that some results 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 2021 VPHS was not conducted in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Fewer Aboriginal Victorians reported excellent or very good health than in previous years

#### Measure 11.1.2



Data were age-standardised to the 2011 Victorian population. LL/UL 95% CI = lower/upper limit of 95 per cent confidence interval. The VPHS was not run in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic

Source: Victorian Population Health Survey

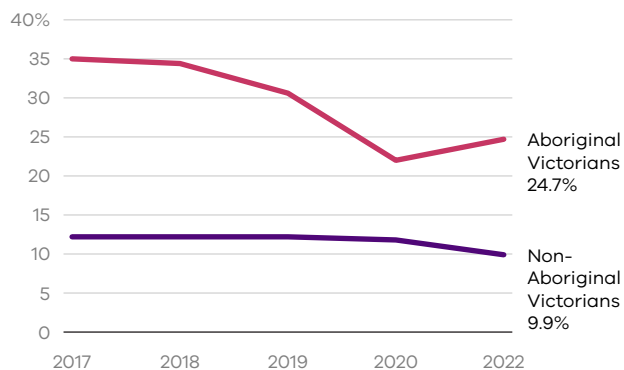
### Measure 11.1.3 Rate of daily smoking

Smoking is the leading cause of lung cancer and contributes to poor health outcomes. The proportion of daily tobacco smokers increased among Aboriginal Victorians aged 18 and above between 2020 and 2022, from 22 per cent to 24.7 per cent. This was the first and only recorded rise in daily smoking over the six-year period from 2017 to 2022 and may signal a change in the longer-term trend. As asked, the daily smoking question in the Victorian Population Health Survey does not explicitly include the use of e-cigarettes or vapes. As such current data does not include non-tobacco smoking. Continued effort is required to increase survey response rates in the future, to ascertain whether this rise in daily smoking is part of a longer-term trend.

The 2021 VPHS was not conducted in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### The proportion of daily smokers increased among Aboriginal Victorians between 2020 and 2022

##### Measure 11.1.3



Data were age-standardised to the 2011 Victorian population. LL/UL 95% CI = lower/upper limit of 95 per cent confidence interval. The VPHS was not run in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Source: Victorian Population Health Survey

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

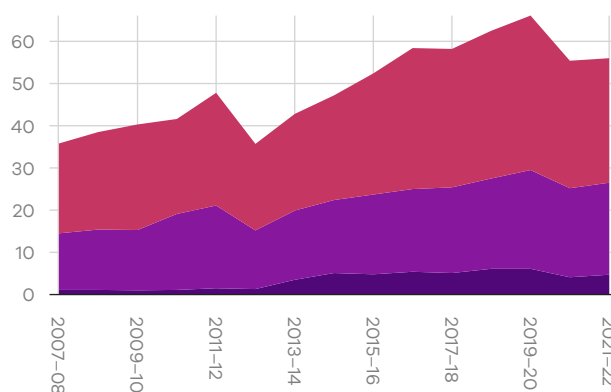
In 2021-22, the rate of hospitalisations for potentially preventable causes remained steady for Aboriginal Victorians at 55 per 1,000 people. This follows a significant decline in the year earlier. The rate in 2021-22 is much higher Aboriginal people than that for non-Aboriginal Victorians (21.7 per 1,000 people). Aboriginal Victorians are still not receiving fair access to preventative health care. For example, access to vaccinations and acute and chronic illness identification and management.

Chronic illness accounts for more than half of all potentially preventable hospital visits. The rate of potentially preventable hospitalisations for Aboriginal Victorians with chronic illness declined between 2019-20 and 2021-22. From 36.6 to 29.5 hospitalisations per 1,000 people. The rate for non-Aboriginal Victorians is 10.8 hospitalisations per 1,000 people. Earlier support, intervention, and culturally appropriate care for Aboriginal Victorians are key to making a fairer health system.

#### The rate of potentially preventable hospitalisations remains high in 2021-22

##### Measure 11.1.4 a-d

- Vaccine-related hospitalisations (rate per 1,000)
- Acute hospitalisations (rate per 1,000)
- Chronic hospitalisations (rate per 1,000)



Source: Report on Government Services 2024

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

In 2022-23 1,796 Aboriginal Victorian presented to emergency departments for alcohol or other drug related harm. This is an increase of 207 people since 2021-22. This is a rate of 26.5 people per 1,000 presenting at emergency departments.

Aboriginal Victorians aged 15-24 emergency department for the same cause reached 30.4 per 1,000 presentations in 2022-23. This represents the highest this has been since 2018-19, a year in which included drug and alcohol related self-harm in official statistics. The rate of presentations increased significantly in 2020-21 and has maintained a high rate since.

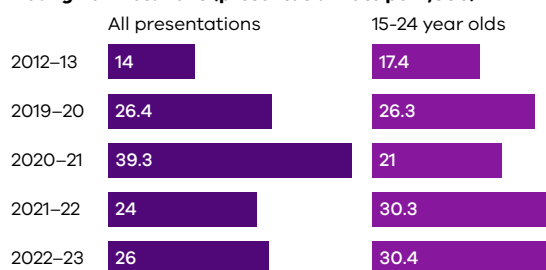
Non-Aboriginal Victorians presentations to emergency departments has remained significantly low in comparison. The rate for non-Aboriginal Victorians of all ages and aged 15-24 was 3.9 and 7.3 per 1000 presentations respectively in 2022-23. This means that Aboriginal Victorians are 6.8 times more likely to need emergency healthcare from alcohol and other drug related harm for all ages. Aboriginal Victorians aged 15-24 are 4.2 times more likely.

In Victoria, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience fatal overdoses at a rate more than three times higher than non-Aboriginal people.<sup>11</sup>

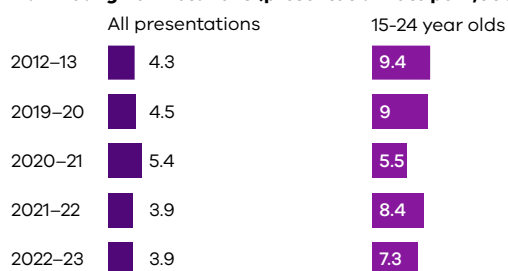
**The number of presentations to emergency departments for alcohol or drug related harm remains high**

**Measure 11.1.6**

**Aboriginal Victorians (presentation rate per 1,000)**



**Non-Aboriginal Victorians (presentation rate per 1,000)**



Source: Victorian Emergency Management Data collection

11. '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**

In 2021-22 there were 9,902 closed episodes for alcohol and other drug treatment services. This is an increase of 968 since 2020-21. In 2021-22 Aboriginal Victorians were 13.5 times more likely to need alcohol and other drug treatment services than non-Aboriginal Victorians. Ten years ago (2012-13) this was only 8.3 times. 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.

Increased alcohol sales during the COVID-19 pandemic may have contributed to an increase in risky drinking. Reducing the harm of alcohol and other drugs 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.

**More Aboriginal Victorians are accessing alcohol and other drug services in 2022**

**Measure 11.1.7**



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

**Rough sleeper packs - Ngwala Willumbong**

In response to community needs, \$50,000 from Better Connected Care was diverted to Ngwala Willumbong to support the mobile sobering up service being delivered as part of public intoxication reforms. The funding was used to provide rough sleeper packs (consisting of a sleeping bag, clothes sources through Aboriginal owned and operated Clothing the Gap, a first aid pack and essential items) for participants of the mobile service, acknowledging the link

between homelessness and substance use and creating opportunities for Ngwala Willumbong to link individuals with culturally safe services to address the underlying causes of their alcohol consumption. Since commencement of public intoxication reforms on 7 November 2023, Ngwala Willumbong has connected over 777 individuals and provided 1,000 beverages, such as tea or coffee. Expansion of the service will see an additional mobile bus, to be shared between the North West and South East Metro Regions providing place based services.

# Goal 12: Aboriginal Victorians access the services they need



## Overview

### Measures under Goal 12 have improved

In 2023 more Aboriginal people of all ages are attending MBS Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific health checks, participating in breast cancer screenings and are accessing aged care services.

In 2023 more Aboriginal people of all ages are attending health checks, participating in breast cancer screenings, and are accessing aged care services. Access to the NDIS is at near parity for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants.

### 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



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

- **Measure 12.1.3a** Proportion and number accessing disability services, by Aboriginal status.
- **Measure 12.1.5** Number and proportion of people aged 55 years or over who had an annual health assessment.

Historical data for these measures is available on the First Peoples – State Relations website at [www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-affairs-report](http://www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-affairs-report).

## 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

In 2022-23 14.1 per cent of Aboriginal Victorians aged 0-14 received a health check or assessment. In the same year 13 per cent of Aboriginal Victorians aged 15 to 54 years received a health check or assessment. This is an increase of 3.3 per cent and 3 per cent, respectively, bringing the rate of health checks for Aboriginal Victorians in these cohorts back in line with pre-pandemic levels.

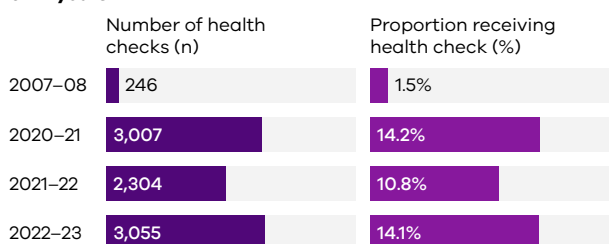
For the 55+ age bracket, 20.9 per cent received a health check or assessment in 2022-23. This means that more Aboriginal Victorians in this age bracket are accessing health checks than ever before, with at least 1 in 5 Aboriginal Victorians aged 55 and over receiving a health check or assessment in 2022-23.

Number of health checks refers to the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who had an Medicare Benefits Schedule health check that is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific.<sup>12</sup>

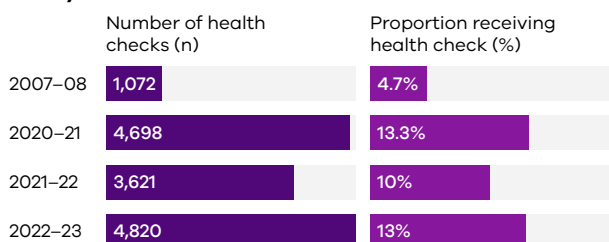
### The number of Aboriginal Victorians receiving health checks has returned to pre-pandemic levels

#### Measure 12.1.1

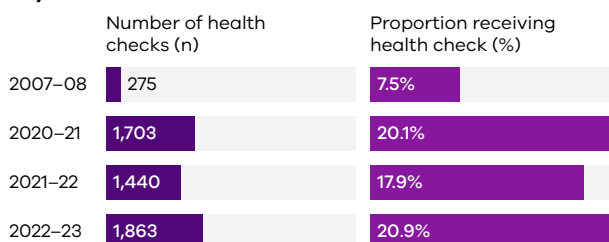
##### 0-14 years



##### 15-54 years



##### 55 years or over



Source: ROGS 2024 Table 10A.24 [Department of Health unpublished, MBS data collection]

12. For more information on this measure please see < <https://www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2024/health/primary-and-community-health> >.

**Measure 12.1.2** Participation rates for breast cancer screening

Since 2012-13 the number of Aboriginal Victorian women participating in breast screenings has risen. In 2021-22, the rate of participation in breast screenings was 23 per cent for Aboriginal women aged 40 and over. In the same year, more than one third of Aboriginal women between the ages of 50 and 74 participated in breast screenings. In comparison, more than half of all women aged 50-74 participated in breast screenings.

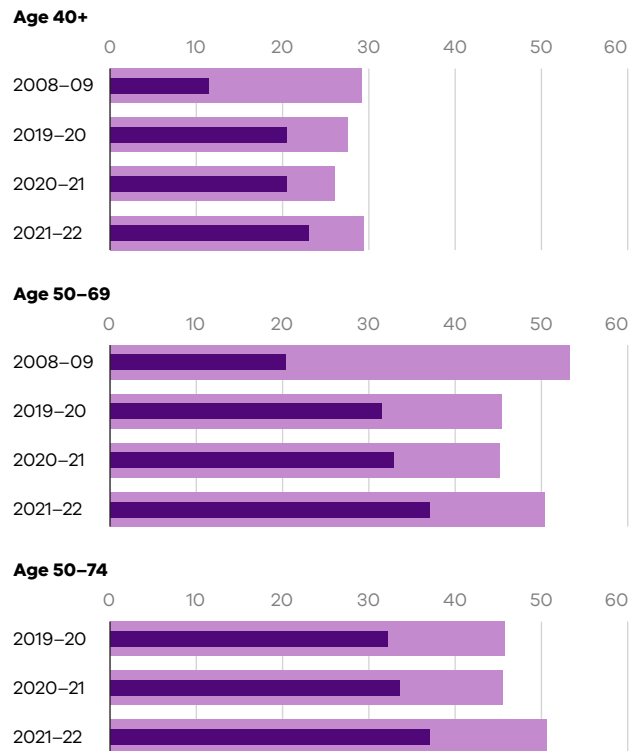
Breast cancer remains one of the highest detected cancers, with early detection key to providing adequate treatment and increase survivability. Women aged 40 and over are eligible for free breast screenings with BreastScreen Australia every 2 years. Women aged 50-74 are actively invited to participate in the program.

The Beautiful Shawl Project is a collaborative program between BreastScreen Victoria, VACCHO and ACCOs across the state to reduce barriers to breast screening. It provides customised screening shawls to Aboriginal women that are culturally appropriate, familiar and beautiful to wear during their breast screen. 291 screens were performed for Aboriginal women across Victoria in 2022-23 as part of the Beautiful Shawl Project.

**More Aboriginal women are participating in breast screenings than ever before**

**Measure 12.1.2**

■ All Victorian women (Age-Standardised Rate per 100)  
■ Aboriginal Victorian women (Age-Standardised Rate per 100)



\* 2008-09 data is not available for the 50-74 age bracket.

Source: Report on Government Services 2024



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

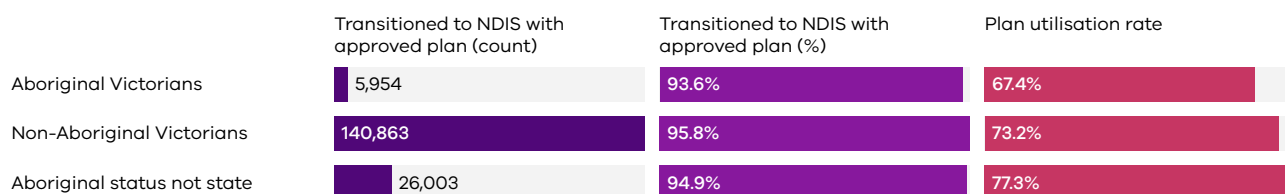
As of December 2023, 5,954 people identifying as Aboriginal in Victoria had access to the NDIS. The proportion of these with an approved plan was 93.6 per cent compared to 95.8 per cent for non-Aboriginal people. A high number of people with access to the NDIS have an undefined Aboriginal status (26,003). It is good to see that access to NDIS services is at near parity for Aboriginal Victorians. For context, in the 2021 Census 6,570 Aboriginal Victorians identified that they needed assistance with core activities. This represented 10 per cent of all Aboriginal respondents in Victoria. 6 per cent of non-Aboriginal respondents identified that they needed assistance with core activities.

Aboriginal Victorians on the NDIS use less of the funds available to them than non-Aboriginal participants. The plan utilisation rate is the total

payments made from 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023 divided by the total annualised committed supports. Aboriginal NDIS recipients use 67.4 per cent of their potential allocated funds in 2023. For non-Aboriginal Victorians this rate is 73.2 per cent. The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation of People with Disability reported that more than half of the respondents referred to ongoing challenges of access. Including a lack of culturally appropriate services, complex application process, inadequate funding for remote service delivery and an overall lack of cultural capability.<sup>13</sup> Models of care that are designed, developed and delivered by First Nations communities can contribute to improved safeguards and better outcomes for this significant segment of the Australian population with a disability. 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.

**In 2023, 5,954 Aboriginal Victorians accessed the National Disability Insurance Scheme with an approved plan**

**Measure 12.1.3**



Source: National Disability Insurance Agency - RJ-C Dataset

13. Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, The experience of First Nations people with disability in Australia. 09 June 2020

**Measure 12.1.4** Number and proportion accessing aged care services

14.1 per cent of Aboriginal Victorians (aged 50+) were accessing aged care services in 2022-23. This represents 1,726 a growth of 510 people since 2021-22. In 2014-15 only 7.2 per cent of Aboriginal Victorians aged 50+ had access to aged care services. In 2022-23 18.4 per cent of non-Aboriginal people aged 65+ have access to aged care services. Culturally safe aged care facilities are an important part of late-stage life care. It is important for Victoria to support Aboriginal community controlled aged care organisations like Aboriginal Community Elder Services (ACES) to provide culturally safe aged care services in Victoria.

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

**Measure 12.1.4**

**Aboriginal (aged 50+)**

	Count	Proportion
2014-15	629	7.53%
2020-21	963	8.52%
2021-22	1,216	10.34%
2022-23	1,726	14.12%

**Non-Aboriginal (Aged 65+)**

	Count	Proportion
2014-15	94,236	10.96%
2020-21	134,850	16.65%
2021-22	145,782	17.36%
2022-23	159,747	18.41%

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

**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+

The Victorian Government launched Victoria’s first whole-of-government LGBTIQ+ strategy, *Pride in our future: Victoria’s LGBTIQ+ strategy 2022–32* 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.

**LGBTIQ+ inclusion training**

In the 2023-24 State Budget, the Victorian Government announced an investment of \$1.85 million for Rainbow Health Australia to deliver inclusion training to service organisations to make sure they are safe for and trusted by LGBTIQ+ communities. The investment is supporting up to 400 organisations to undertake Rainbow Health Australia’s How2 training program, helping them to improve inclusion in their workplaces in sustainable ways. As part of this investment, Rainbow Health Australia has built close relationships with First Nations-led organisations and recruited a First Nations project officer to lead a dedicated self-determination component, supporting ACCOs and other Aboriginal-led organisations to undertake this inclusion work.

### Aboriginal flood relief and recovery

DFFH embedded self-determination in the state's response to the 2022/23 floods. A bilateral relationship was developed with Emergency Recovery Victoria to ensure a coordinated and collaborative response to flood affected Aboriginal communities across Victoria. Three Aboriginal community forums were held, where issues raised were rapidly responded to at a local level and also addressed through state-wide governance and policy frameworks, and strategies. As communities recover, the Aboriginal community forums have ceased to meet and the bilateral relationship between the Aboriginal Self-determination and Outcomes Division and Emergency Recovery Victoria has now concluded.

DFFH also centred Aboriginal community control and self-determination in the way it dispersed funds to aid the flood recovery effort. Regional governance groups and ACCOs decided on the disbursement of \$2 million in Aboriginal flood relief and recovery funding allocated to six Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs) in flood affected regions of Victoria; Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative, Bendigo Aboriginal Cooperative, Mallee District Aboriginal Services, Murray Valley Aboriginal Cooperative, Njernda Aboriginal Corporation and Loddon Mallee Aboriginal Reference Group. The funding will strengthen the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people through emergency relief and recovery packages and psycho social supports such as cultural connection programs and activities. The funding will also support each ACCO to research the impacts of floods on community and business continuity, and develop strategies to manage future emergencies.

 Transfer power and resources to communities



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



## Overview

### Measures under Goal 13 have worsened

Improving cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health care users can improve access to appropriate, high quality health care. This means an accessible health system that is free from racism and discrimination, and providing equitable health services that respects the cultural values, strengths and differences of Aboriginal people and their communities.

First Peoples in Victoria are experiencing racism at higher levels in health settings and are leaving/discharging themselves from hospitals at higher rates.

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

Historical data for these measures is available on the First Peoples – State Relations website at [www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-affairs-report](http://www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-affairs-report).



## 13.1 Increase the cultural safety and responsiveness of services

### Measure 13.1.1 Proportion reporting experiences of racism in the health system

In 2022, 20.6 per cent of Aboriginal people reported that they experienced racism in health settings within the previous 12 months. Non-Aboriginal people reported 7.6 per cent for the same period. Aboriginal people experience racism in health settings at 2.6 times the rate of non-Aboriginal people. These results are from the 2022 Victorian Population Health Survey. Aboriginal peoples have been experiencing increasing racism in health settings since 2018. 14.3 per cent of Aboriginal respondents reported experiencing racism in health settings in the 2018 VPHS. Racism and culturally inappropriate health care can contribute to reduced access and engagement in services and can lead to poorer health outcomes. Depression and anxiety are strongly associated with experiences of racism for Aboriginal patients. Approximately two-thirds (65.5 per cent) of Aboriginal adults who experienced racism had been diagnosed with depression and/or anxiety.

With reduced access to culturally safe health services that are free from racism, Aboriginal people are less likely to have their health and wellbeing needs met, and therefore more vulnerable to poorer health and wellbeing outcomes. We need to build more accessible and equitable health care system that is more aligned to the needs of First Peoples in Victoria to address increasing health and wellbeing gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Victoria.

### Experiences of racism in health settings have increased since 2018

#### Measure 13.1.1



Data for 2019 and 2021 is not available.

Source: Victorian Population Health Survey.

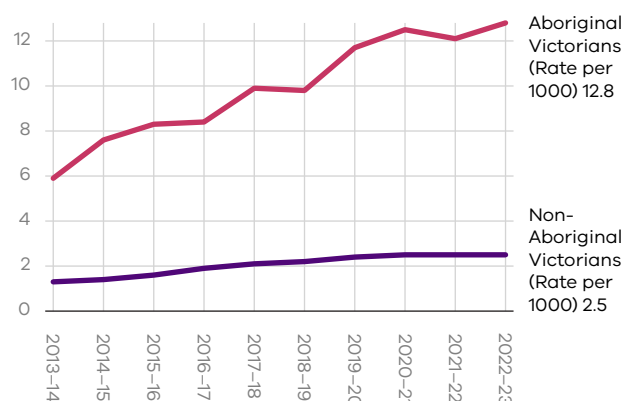
### Measure 13.1.3 Hospitalisations where patients left against medical advice/were discharged at own risk

In 2022-23, 881 Aboriginal Victorians left hospital against medical advice or were discharged at their own risk. This is a 73 person increase compared to 2021-22. The proportion of Aboriginal Victorians that left hospital against medical advice was 12.8 per 1,000 people compared to 2.5 per 1,000 people for non-Aboriginal Victorians in 2022-23. Aboriginal people left hospital against medical advice at 4.9 times the rate of non-Aboriginal people.

Understanding the cause of patients leaving hospital against medical advice is complex. As per Measure 13.1.1, Aboriginal Victorians experience racism in health settings at 2.6 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 rate of Aboriginal Victorians leaving hospital against medical advice was at an all time high in 2022-23

#### Measure 13.1.3



Source: Victorian Admitted Episodes Data collection

### Human Service and Child Safe standards in both ACCOs and mainstream services

The Human Services Regulator (HSR) is responsible for regulating Aboriginal cultural safety against the Human Service and Child Safe standards in both ACCOs and mainstream services and is particularly conscious of the sensitivity of doing so in ACCOs.

With a view to promoting and ensuring an Aboriginal led culturally safe approach to regulatory oversight:

- The HSR has adopted the approach, when concerns regarding non-compliance are identified within an ACCO, of having an initial meeting with ASDO to seek their input on any issues DFFH need to be aware of in relation to that ACCO and enable ASDO to offer support to the ACCO as relevant.
- Ensuring that where issues have been identified the newly established role of HSR Manager, Aboriginal Cultural Safety and Engagement is involved in planning HSRs initial approach to, and first meeting with, the ACCO to promote and ensure a culturally safe approach to the regulatory oversight.

Initial indications are that this approach has resulted in ACCOs being more confident that their cultural needs and rights are being acknowledged and respected with a correlating improvement in engagement between the ACCO and HSR, a more constructive approach to address any areas on non-compliance and improved service outcomes for clients.

 Address racism and promote cultural safety

### Outcomes-based funding reform

The Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Partnership Agreement and Action Plan 2023-2025, endorsed by Cabinet and the Partnership Forum in May 2023, identified sustainable outcomes-based funding (OBF) as a key priority for the ACCHO sector.

DH committed to transition all ACCOs to self-determined, longer-term outcomes-based funding for all their recurrent health and wellbeing funding. This includes:

- Multi-year funding agreements: In May 2023, DH notified 36 ACCOs of their recurrent core four-year funding, a key milestone and first phase of the transition to Aboriginal-specific funding models.
- Flexibility and self-determined outcomes: From 1 July 2024, ACCOs can use their recurrent funding to self-determine the outcomes they will progress with their local communities, which will align to the five priority domains of the 10-year Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Partnership Forum Agreement.
- Streamlined outcomes-focused reporting: From 1 July 2024, ACCOs will report their outcomes to DH through annual impact reports and audited financial statements. These community-based impact reports will help DH to monitor state-wide Aboriginal health and wellbeing outcomes while the financial statements will be used to support yearly acquittals to ensure financial accountability.
- Ongoing support: DH will collaborate with VACCHO to support all ACCOs to transition to outcomes-based funding. This includes support to develop innovative funding models geared to the unique operational needs and readiness of ACCOs to transition to outcomes-based funding.

 Transfer power and resources to communities

# Goal 14: Aboriginal Victorians enjoy social and emotional wellbeing



## Overview

### Measures under Goal 14 have worsened

Social and emotional wellbeing is a holistic individual and community experience encompassing many factors such as connection to Country, culture, family, and community.

Aboriginal people in Victoria are experiencing increasing levels of psychological distress and are presenting at higher levels of self-harm at emergency departments. People are also accessing clinical mental health services more than ever before.

### Goal 14 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.

The VAAF contains measures related to social and emotionally wellbeing but not suicide.

### Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally

**Outcome 14:** Current reporting is based on the AIHW National Mortality Database. This only covers jurisdictions which have adequate levels of Indigenous identification in mortality data. Data for those with a usual residence in Victoria, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory is excluded as it is considered unsuitable for comparisons of changes over time. Progress in Victoria cannot be assessed.

In 2021, the suicide age-standardised rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was 29.3 per 100,000 people for NSW, QLD, WA, SA and the NT combined. This rate is worse than the baseline year of 2021.

#### 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 First Peoples – State Relations website at [www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-affairs-report](http://www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-affairs-report).

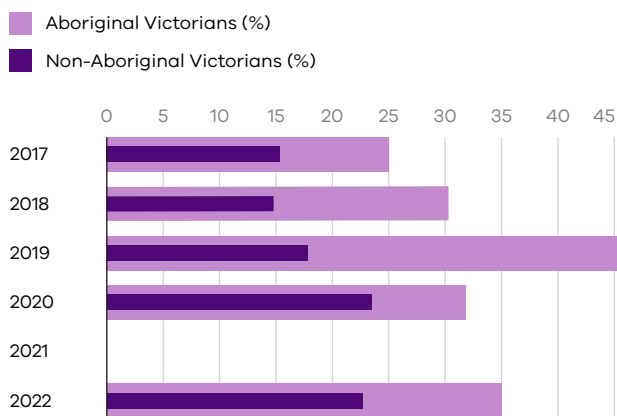
## 14.1 Improve Aboriginal mental health and social and emotional wellbeing

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

In 2022 35.0 per cent of Aboriginal people reported high or very high levels of psychological distress. Psychological distress has increased 10 percentage points since 2017. When comparing with the non-Aboriginal population there has been a similar increase in reported high or very high levels of psychological distress. In 2022 Aboriginal Victorians are 1.5 times more likely to report high or very high levels of psychological distress. In 2019 Aboriginal respondents were 2.6 times more likely to report high or very high levels of psychological distress. Experiences of racism, and financial and housing stress can lead to poor mental health outcomes.

#### More than one third of Aboriginal respondents experienced high levels of psychological distress in the past 12 months

##### Measure 14.1.1



Data not available for 2021.

Source: Victorian Population Health Survey.

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

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. 4.2 per 1000 presentations for self-harm. Presentations have increased dramatically since 2008-09. In 2008-09 6.1 Aboriginal people per 1,000 presented to emergency departments for self-harm.

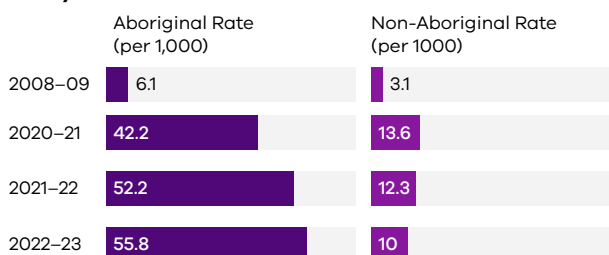
Due to changes in the methodology of identifying self-harm there has been a significant increase in 2018-19 (up by 11.6 per 1000 presentations).

In 2020-21 42.4 15-24-year-old people per 1000 presentations presented for self-harm at emergency departments. In 2019-20 this was 38.7 per 1000 presentations. In 2020-21 15-24-year-old non-Aboriginal people increased but was significantly lower than Aboriginal representations. Presentation by non-Aboriginal people were 13.6 in 2020-21.

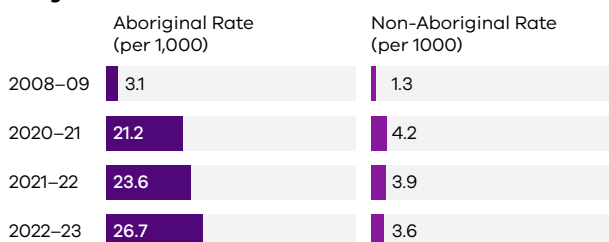
#### Rate of self-harm related emergency department presentations increasing slowly

##### Measure 14.1.2

###### 15-24 year olds



###### All Ages



Data not available for 2021.

Source: Victorian Emergency Management Data collection.

### Ngootyoong Mara Cultural Healing Centre

Under the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System, DH allocated funding to Dhauwurd Wurrung Elderly and Community Health Services (DWECH) for social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) services, resulting in greater funding for the Ngootyoong Mara Cultural Healing Centre. Funding allowed the centre to be used to its full extent.

This Centre addresses physical repair, psychological well-being, social nurturing, cultural reclamation, and spiritual maintenance. Operating a flexible model, it combines traditional and modern practices to provide a physically, socially, and culturally safe space.

The Centre’s success is evident in increased community engagement, with families actively participating and contributing to program planning. This involvement has led to significant personal growth and cultural connection within the Community and the approach has encouraged clients who had not sought help before to engage with the SEWB team, resulting in positive outcomes.

Despite being newly established, the Centre has already seen decreased substance use amongst community members and fewer interventions from external services, showcasing the effectiveness of the support provided by the SEWB team and the impact of the Centre.

 Address trauma and support healing

#### Measure 14.1.5 Number of Aboriginal Victorians receiving clinical mental health services

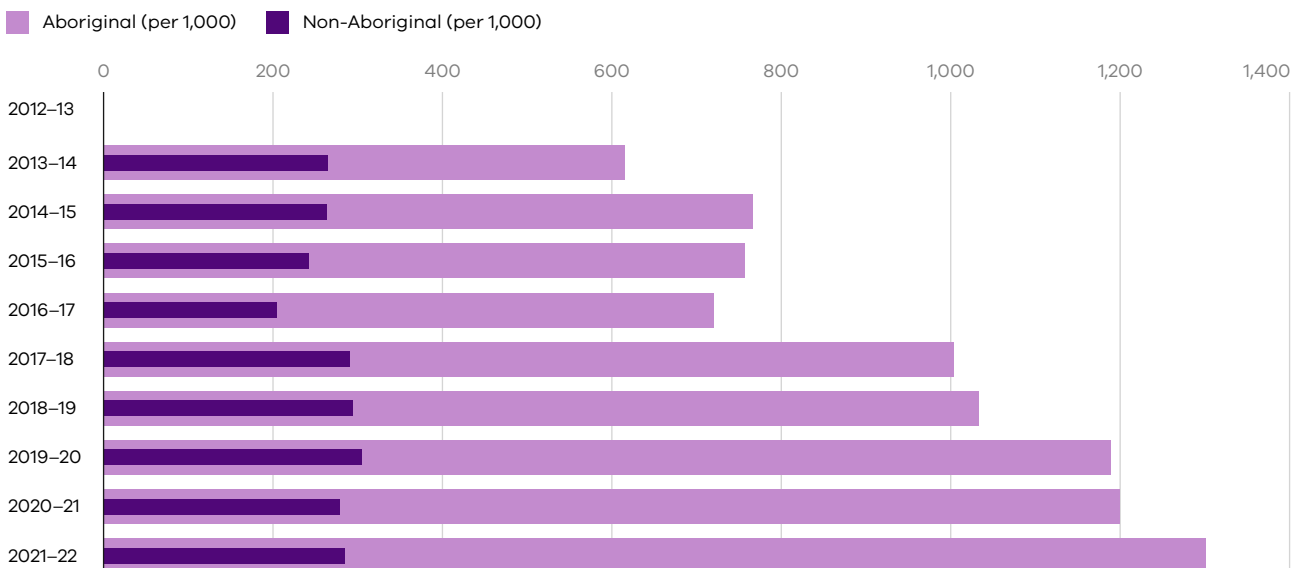
Contacts with community mental health care services increased for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Victorians between 2020-21 and 2021-22. The number of contacts was 1,301 per 1,000 people in 2021-22 for Aboriginal Victorians. It was 285 per 1,000 people in 2021-22 for non-Aboriginal Victorians. This means Aboriginal Victorians accessed community

mental health care services at more than 4.5 times the rate of non-Aboriginal Victorians.

Increased contacts with community mental health services does not necessarily represent a decrease in the wellbeing of Aboriginal Victorians. This could also represent greater access to culturally safe services. But it does show there is a growing demand for community mental health services. It will be up to government to support service providers to meet that demand.

#### Aboriginal people are more than 4.5 times more likely to use community mental health care services

##### 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.

## 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.

### Disability

#### Victoria's response to the Disability Royal Commission

The Disability Royal Commission made a range of recommendations specifically aimed at improving outcomes for First Nations people with disability. On 5 March 2024, Disability Reform Ministers committed that governments would respond to these by mid-2024. The Victorian government is committed to working with people with disability and the sector on its response to the Disability Royal Commission, including with First Nations People.

The Victorian Government's submission to the Disability Royal Commission emphasised the Government's commitment to self-determination and its support for Victoria's treaty and truth-telling process. The proposed reforms and recommendations in the submission were guided by six overarching objectives, one of which was to embed Aboriginal self-determination. Specifically, the submission recommended that:

- All jurisdictions, including the Commonwealth Government, should support the self-determination of Aboriginal people with disability and the role of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations 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.

The submission will be made publicly available on the Disability Royal Commission's website.

#### Inclusive Victoria: State disability plan 2022-26

Released in March 2022, *Inclusive Victoria: State disability plan 2022-26* (Inclusive Victoria) is Victoria's plan for making our community inclusive and accessible for everyone as required under the *Disability Act 2006*. The plan is an important way for the Victorian Government to be accountable for making all parts of the community inclusive and accessible for everyone.

The actions in Inclusive Victoria reflect the commitments all Victorian government departments are taking to build a fairer, inclusive community. Inclusive Victoria also sets out how government will do this by committing to six systemic reforms that will support a stronger focus on coordinated approaches to inclusion and accountability, including:

- Co-design with people with disability
- Aboriginal self-determination
- Intersectional approaches
- Accessible communications and universal design
- Disability confident and inclusive workforces
- Effective data and outcomes reporting.

Building genuine inclusion means changing the way we do things. It means having people with disability at the table when we design policies, programs and services. It means working with Aboriginal people with disability and listening to what works best for them and their communities. Inclusive Victoria includes the following definition of Aboriginal self-determination: "the ability for Aboriginal people to freely determine their political status and pursue their economic, social and cultural development. It also describes self-determination as a right that relates to groups of people, not only individuals."

Inclusive Victoria commits the Victorian Government to:

- Coordinating whole-of-government effort to align disability inclusion reforms with Treaty, the Victorian Government's commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, the Victorian Aboriginal affairs framework 2018–2023, the Victorian self-determination reform framework, the Korin Korin Balit Djak systems transformation strategy (the Aboriginal health, wellbeing and safety strategic plan 2017–2027) and the five objectives in Wungurilwil Gagapduir – Aboriginal children and families agreement.
- Continuing our commitment to work closely and in good faith with Aboriginal stakeholders to ensure Aboriginal people with disability have power, control and decision-making and are able to co-design policies, programs and services that affect them.
- Aboriginal representation on the Victorian Disability Advisory Council and related government working groups, as well as engagement with any self-determined representative body for Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Victorians established through Treaty – this will ensure the voices of Aboriginal people with disability and Aboriginal self-determination principles are central to the government's disability inclusion reforms.
- Further developing the capacity of the Aboriginal community-controlled sector to deliver disability support services and strengthening the Aboriginal disability workforce.

The Victorian autism plan sits under the state disability plan and takes up its structure and outcomes framework. The plan sets out specific initiatives to deliver long-term improvements to the lives of autistic people.

A key comment under the plan is to deliver additional public autism assessments. Work has been undertaken since 2023 to establish trial delivery of assessments under this commitment through select Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.

## Public health

The Victorian Aboriginal sexual and reproductive health plan 2022–30 was published in March 2023. Victoria's first Aboriginal sexual and reproductive health plan outlines priority actions to improve the sexual and reproductive health of Aboriginal Victorians using a self-determination approach.

Local Public Health Units (LPHUs) are continuing to provide locally based public health responses in disease prevention, as well as health promotion and protection. LPHUs have engaged and built partnerships with community and local stakeholders such as Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations (ACCOs) and Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (VACCHO) to implement state-wide programs and to co-design locally based public health initiatives. LPHUs have developed Public Health and Wellbeing Catchment Plans, based on the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, identifying health priorities for their catchment.

These catchment plans promote equity, address gender disparities, ensuring that health promoting policies, programs, and services are inclusive and culturally responsive to the diverse needs of their community, including First Nations people. Examples of how LPHUs have applied principles of self-determination in various ways to empower First Nations people to inform these plans include having First Nations organisations represented on established advisory committees, inviting ACCOs to determine their own health needs assessment for their community, providing culturally tailored materials and by partnering with local and statewide aboriginal led organisations.

DH is developing engagement guidelines between the networked public health system (including LPHUs), VACCHO and ACCOs to support culturally safe engagement between stakeholders. DH has facilitated mechanisms to support the partnership between LPHUs, VACCHO and ACCOs including:

- LPHU Aboriginal Health Community of Practice, Aboriginal health focused LPHU Director meetings
- Informal network of LPHU Aboriginal health leads co-facilitated by DH and VACCHO.

DH has committed more than \$7.8 million to VACCHO for the development and implementation of the Victorian Aboriginal Cancer Journey Strategy 2023-2028 over the next 5 years. This included \$1.05 million for VACCHO to lead the development

of the Strategy including commencement of pilot initiatives. The remaining \$6.75 million has been allocated to VACCHO for implementation of the Strategy across the ACCOs and the mainstream cancer control sector. This funding also includes \$600,000 per annum for VACCHO to implement the Victorian Cancer Screening Framework.

Other key actions:

- Continued partnership between Royal Children's Hospital and Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS) has supported the access to self-determined health care for Aboriginal children and families within an ACCO.
- DH will work with VACCHO to identify a new approach to the prevention of diabetes and cardiovascular disease for Aboriginal Victorians.
- Continuation of the Best Practice Aboriginal Forum on Reducing Tobacco and E-Cigarette Related Harms, where ACCHOs are provided opportunities to report on local initiatives, build capacity and share stories and progress in reducing smoking and vaping.
- Continued implementation of the Tackling Indigenous Smoking Program across Victorian Aboriginal communities up to 30 June 2026.
- VACCHO and VAHs coordinate and support strong and culturally safe smoking cessation initiatives led by local Aboriginal communities, in partnership with Quit Victoria, Koori Maternity Services and Safer Care Victoria.
- The Commonwealth Government will be investing \$15m towards ensuring that Quitline services are equitable for priority populations across Australia under the *National Tobacco Strategy* with a focus on First Nations people.
- Working Together For Health (WT4H) takes a place-based approach to improving Aboriginal health and wellbeing in central and northwest Victoria (Loddon Mallee). It is a coordinated approach to delivering culturally safe primary prevention and early detection services within Aboriginal communities, by Aboriginal communities. WTFH aims to prevent ill health before it happens and improve the health of Aboriginal communities across the Loddon and Mallee regions. Priority areas have included: reducing tobacco and e-cigarette related harms; increasing cancer screenings; immunisations; 715 health checks; improving mental health; healthy eating and active living; sexual and reproductive health; and oral health promotion.
- In early 2023, a Drugs and Poisons Regulations amendment approved Aboriginal Health Practitioners (AHPs) to apply fluoride varnish (Schedule poison) to children, to help prevent tooth decay. AHPs with appropriate training will be able to apply fluoride varnish on children aged 3-17 who are clients of an ACCHO in Victoria. DH has subsequently funded a project to train AHPs and support ACCHOs to embed fluoride varnish application in their practice.
- In mid-2023, DH Secretary approval has enabled registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Practitioners, who meet the relevant training requirements, to administer vaccinations in line with the National Immunisation Program. DH has subsequently funded VACCHO's Registered Training Organisation to train AHPs to administer vaccinations.
- In October 2023, the Surgery Recovery and Reform Program published the 'Planned Surgery Reform Blueprint' (the Blueprint). The Blueprint outlines a purposeful and systematic plan to improve access to and experiences of planned surgery and non-surgical pathways in Victoria. Underpinned by 12 months of extensive engagement and research, including with VACCHO and Aboriginal Hospital Liaison Officers (AHLOs), the Blueprint features 10 co-designed reforms that will drive system-wide efficiencies, workforce suitability and positive patient outcomes and experiences.

The State Budget 2023-24 allocated \$35.04 million over four years to seven ACCHOs to deliver 100,000 culturally informed, prevention focused episodes of care (which includes additional referrals, care plans and primary care services) by 2027. The funding will alleviate the demand on Victorian hospitals and acute services by redirecting treatment for potentially preventable hospitalisations into holistic, primary culturally safe healthcare settings provided by ACCHOs.

The State Budget 2023-24 allocated \$34.04 million for ACCHOs to deliver Strengthening Lifelong Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing (Urgent Care Pathways) from 2023-24 to 2026-27. Urgent Care Pathways will improve the health of Aboriginal Victorians by redirecting treatment for potentially preventable hospitalisations from mainstream hospitals to ACCHOs. Greater access to primary care will enable ACCHOs to better treat chronic health conditions or even identify them early they become problematic for the individual. By shifting demand from acute health services and hospitals to ACCHOs who deliver culturally responsive,



prevention-focussed health care, DH and the ACCHOs, are working towards closing the gap in Aboriginal health and wellbeing. It is expected that Urgent Care Pathways will reduce the number of Aboriginal Victorians that present to hospitals for Potentially Preventable conditions by ACCHOs providing primary care early. ACCHOs will deliver approximately 100,000 episodes of care by 2026–27 financial year due to the Urgent Care Pathways initiative.

DH is transitioning to an outcomes-based funding model for the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Sector. This reform will enable improved access to health and community services for Aboriginal Victorians. The aim is to provide the sector with flexible funding agreements that align to locally determined needs and outcomes, reduce administrative and reporting burden and increase the sustainability of ACCHOs. The first phase was delivered in mid-2023 with ACCHOs shifting to multi-year funding arrangements.

The Victorian government has committed \$58 million in 2023 over four years to establish 20 women's health clinics, with once in Victoria specified for Aboriginal women. The Aboriginal women's health clinic will be operational in 2025–26 and will be developed in partnership with Community. The election commitment also includes a further \$5.1 million over the four years to establish a mobile women's health clinic to improve access for rural and remote Victorian women.

## Cultural safety

### Cultural safety in transport services

The Transport and Planning Portfolio Cultural Safety Framework (Framework), and accompanying Action Plan, was completed in late 2023. The purpose of the Framework is to advance the cultural safety of the portfolio and provide an accessible workplace for First Peoples.

The Framework enacts the portfolio's commitment to promote cultural safety as provided in the Transport Portfolio Aboriginal Self-Determination Plan 2020–2023 and supports the Department of Transport and Planning's strategic goals of thriving places and connected communities.

The Framework's vision is for our First Peoples employees and transport users to thrive and feel culturally safe in the environments managed by DTP.

In March 2023, DTP commenced a 12-month pilot program with Girraway Ganyi Consultancy, a culturally appropriate Employee Assistance Program. Girraway Ganyi specifically cater for First Peoples employees, managers of First Peoples and employees working in First Peoples affairs within Government.

Over the pilot period a series of interactive workshops were scheduled aimed to foster deeper understanding of First Peoples cultural practices and promoting a more inclusive and culturally safe workplace.

Workshops were held specifically for First Peoples, Managers of First Peoples and in the period following the result of the Voice Referendum. These workshops were designed to provide practical insights into traditional First Peoples customs, a platform to facilitate dialogue and engage in meaningful discussions about the significance of cultural diversity and the positive impact in fostering an inclusive workplace culture.

### Cultural safety in health services

Under the new health-led response to public drunkenness, contracted service providers are required to ensure staff complete cultural safety training within the first three months of employment. This is mandated in the model of care and confirmed in the Service Framework.

All services commissioned for the Public Intoxication response are contracted to comply with the model of care and the service framework per the terms of the agreement.

Cohealth have produced a cultural safety guide, in conjunction with Professor Richard Frankland and Koorreen Enterprises, titled "Yakeen Tharn (Dreaming Path) Working with First Nations People – A Cross-Cultural Safety Guide".

Data collected as part of the 2023 Victorian Population Health Survey, to be available in 2024, will strengthen understanding of the current health and wellbeing of Aboriginal peoples in Victoria including measures of Community participation and connection to culture.

The VACCHO Culture + Kinship model has been underway with the pilot funded for diabetes and cancer screening areas. The model aims to enable communities to make decisions about their health and wellbeing priorities as well as how they are funded and measured. DH is supporting this in

alignment with the move to outcomes-based funding that will go live from 1 July 2024. To date, successful outcomes include the strengthening of prevention hubs and the Culture + Kinship program, which young people and new mothers with their elders through programs such as youth on-country camps, possum cloak skin workshops and shared yarns. Evaluation has shown increased confidence, connection, trust, control and an \$8 social return on investment.

VACCHO is implementing expansion of the DH-funded Beautiful Shawl Program to include 5 additional ACCOs and to increase access to culturally safe cervical screening services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and people with a cervix through provision of culturally appropriate education and resources. The program has supported hundreds of women to access important health services, with 377 screening performed across 15 sites in 2022-23.

Design guidelines are in development to ensure new health facilities are designed to be culturally safe and inclusive, informed by engagement with local Aboriginal communities. The guidelines will be a technical support aimed at creating environments sensitive to culture and will be applicable to all health facilities.

Mainstream health infrastructure service projects are significantly informed by Aboriginal representation and engagement through Community Consultative Committees (CCC).

Aboriginal health cultural safety capability has been enhanced through LPHU operations, connecting with ACCHOs to embed self-determining approaches that meet the public health needs of Aboriginal communities within their catchment. This is being done through LPHU participation at the Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Partnership Forum (AHWPF). The LPHU Aboriginal Health Community of Practice has been formed to enable LPHU to share knowledge and support Aboriginal public health programs.

DH has funded VACCHO in collaboration with Dental Health Services Victoria (DHSV) to develop a State-wide oral health Model of Care for Aboriginal Victorians. This project will further strengthen the delivery of public dental services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

DH funds the Koorie Heritage Trust to deliver Building Aboriginal Cultural Competency training to Transition Care Program and aged care assessment staff to support Aboriginal Elders' access to culturally safe services.

DH continues to work with ACCOs to deliver Home and Community Care Program for Younger People (HACC-PYP) services including the resourcing of four (two EFT) Aboriginal Development Officers to facilitate and strengthen participation of ACCOs in the HACC-PYP program.

Victorian public health services must report on their performance in supporting access to services and improving cultural safety for Aboriginal consumers. As part of the annual Statement of Priorities, a contract between a health service and the Minister for Health, health services make a commitment to monitor access to services and implement improvement strategies.

The Aboriginal Health Improvement Initiative, as part of the broader Health Service Partnership (HSP) program, is supporting 8 Health Services (3 Metropolitan, 5 regional) to actively partner with local ACCHOs to develop projects that address the specific needs of local Aboriginal communities. In 2023, the program focused on strengthening both Aboriginal patient identification and discharge planning with an aim to reduce preventable hospital admissions and emergency department presentations.

Aboriginal Cultural Safety Fixed Grants have been recurrently allocated to public health services since 2019-20. The 38 largest public health services in the state received an annual grant (totalling 32 million in 2023-24) to support improving Aboriginal cultural safety. The participating health services are required to submit an annual plan and a report on achievements.

As part of a long-term health services collaboration project, VACCHO, four major Victorian health services, ACCHOs, and DH are partnering with local Aboriginal communities to improve Aboriginal cultural safety in hospitals. The initial focus is on developing locally specific initiatives in emergency departments and urgent care clinics.

Quit Victoria has trained Aboriginal councillors to provide a culturally safe smoking and vaping cessation service to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

## Social and emotional wellbeing

The 2021-22 Victorian State Budget committed funding of \$87 million over four years and \$25.7 million in recurrent funding for ACCHOs to establish and/or expand their Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) teams and commission services for children and young people.

In February 2023, DH held consultations with 25 ACCHOs across Victoria to commence the co-design process for a funding allocation model and outcomes-based reporting framework for SEWB. DH is now working with ACCHOs to improve the way ACCHOs report on social and emotional wellbeing outcomes that aligns with an outcomes-based funding model.

The 2023-24 State Budget committed an investment of \$11.8 million to progress the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System (the Royal Commission) vision for an expanded and better skilled and supported mental health and wellbeing workforce. This included expanding the capacity and capability of the Aboriginal Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) workforce through an increase in Aboriginal AOD FTE and workforce development.

DH is working with the Balit Durn Durn Centre of Excellence in Social and Emotional Wellbeing (established by VACCHO in 2022) on the development of a new Victorian suicide prevention and response strategy, including an implementation plan and accountability framework.

The Balit Durn Durn Centre is planning, in partnership with DH and VACCHO, for the future establishment of two new Aboriginal Healing Centres. VACCHO are leading the co-design process which includes extensive state-wide community consultation to bring people's stories to life – and ultimately increase supports to improve the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people.

The 2022-23 State Budget allocated funding of \$3.5 million over two years to support a range of Aboriginal suicide prevention and response initiatives, including:

- In-depth analysis of Aboriginal suicides recorded in the Victorian Suicide Register and a review to improve real-time surveillance and response in partnership with the Coroners Court of Victoria.
- 12-month extension of the Yarning Safe N Strong helpline.

- Funding for an Aboriginal community-led suicide prevention and response codesign process (being led by the Balit Durn Durn Centre).
- Establishment of an Aboriginal-led suicide and self-harm prevention panel to advise on targeted efforts for Aboriginal people, as well as areas of most need (being led by the Balit Durn Durn Centre).

## Equality

### Funding to support LGBTIQ+ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

Since 2019-20, the Equality portfolio through DFFH has funded Koorie Pride Victoria over \$470,000 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 COVID-19 pandemic, funded activities were delivered from 2022 onwards.

The Equality portfolio's flagship competitive grants programs, the Pride Events and Festivals Fund and the LGBTIQ+ Organisational Development program, both include assessment measures that prioritise applications that support diverse communities including First Nations and Aboriginal communities. Successful applications through these programs would primarily support Domain 4 of the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework "Health and wellbeing" in Goals 12 and 14, "Aboriginal Victorians access the services they need" and "Aboriginal Victorians enjoy social and emotional wellbeing".

Key activities undertaken in 2023 with Victorian Government's investment include:

- Funded VACCHO to deliver a "Strong. Proud. Me" event in April 2023 through the 2022-23 Pride Events and Festivals Fund to highlight the talents of queer Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Funded Your Community Health to deliver a Rainbow Mob Day Out event through the 2023-24 Pride Events and Festivals Fund to host a festival event featuring gender diverse First Nations performers and artists. This event is scheduled to be held in July 2024.

## Domain 5: Justice and Safety



*Systemic and structural barriers that Aboriginal people experience, such as racism and social and economic disadvantage, can lead to over-representation in the justice system.*

### **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 worsened

Although there have been improvements in rates of police cautioning of young people, other measures have worsened. There is an increase of women in prison on remand, and men returning to prison within 12 months of release.

More children, men, and women were processed by police and more are under corrections supervision in 2023. The consequences of colonisation are far-reaching and intergenerational, continuing to play out in First Peoples interactions with the criminal justice system.

### Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally

**Outcome 10:** In 2022-23, the age standardised rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners was 2,151.1 per 100,000 adult population across Australia compared to 1,778.1 per 100,000 in Victoria. In Victoria, there has been some improvement since the baseline year of 2018-19.

**Outcome 11:** In 2022-23, the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 10-17 years in detention across Australia was 28.8 per 10,000 children compared to 9.1 per 10,000 in Victoria. There has been improvement nationally and in Victoria since the baseline year of 2018-19.

### 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.

### Data Note



The latest year of available data varies across the Report due to the inconsistent frequency of collection of survey data and lags in processing administrative data. Data in this Report is the most up to date available for publishing.

All measures in this goal are reported on.

## 15.1 Decrease the number and eliminate the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in the justice system

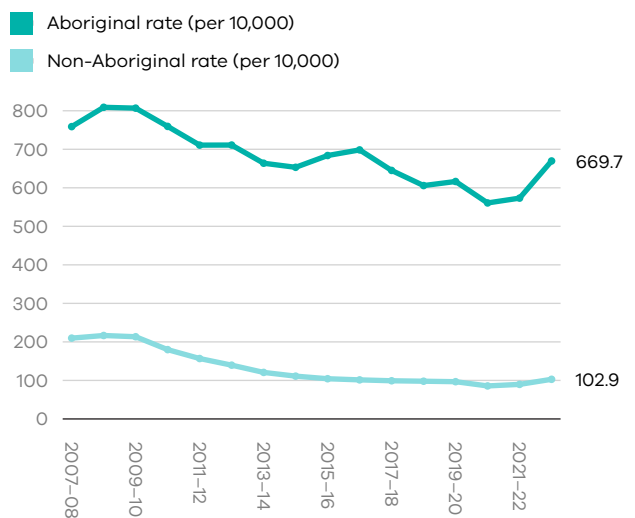
### Measure 15.1.1 Number, rate and age profile of unique youth (10-17 years) alleged offenders processed by police

The number and rate of young people processed by police has continued to increase since 2020-21. Police processing includes receiving a caution, arrest or summons. In 2022-23, Victoria Police processed 700 Aboriginal and 6,395 non-Aboriginal young people. This represents a rate of 669.7 per 10,000 Aboriginal young people and 102.9 per 10,000 non-Aboriginal young people. Since 2007-08, there has been an almost 50 per cent decline in the rate of police processing for non-Aboriginal young people. This historic decline has not taken place for Aboriginal young people.

The rate of police processing can also be broken down by age profile. In 2022-23, Victoria Police processed Aboriginal young people aged 15-17 years at almost three times the rate of Aboriginal young people aged 10-14 years. For the 15-17 age group, the rate of police processing (1,143 per 10,000) is the highest it has been since 2012-13. For the 10-14 age group, the rate has risen sharply since the previous year (from 304.7 to 395.7 per 10,000), but overall has decreased over the last ten years. This breakdown is significant in the context of raising the age of criminal responsibility to 14. Victoria will be the first state in Australia to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 10 years old to 12 in 2024, and to 14 years old by 2027 (with exceptions and subject to an alternative service model).

### The rate of youth alleged offenders receiving a caution, arrest, summons or other has increased

#### Measure 15.1.1



Source: Crime Statistics Agency (CSA)

### Aboriginal young people aged 15 to 17 are the cohort most likely to be processed by police

#### Measure 15.1.1b and 15.1.1c



Source: Crime Statistics Agency

**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**

In 2022-23 81.8 Aboriginal young people on an average day were under community-based supervision. This number has remained steady since 2021-22 with 83.7 young people on an average day. The rate of Aboriginal young people under community-based supervision has declined in 2022-23 to 32.9 per 10,000. This still represents a significant over representation. For non-Aboriginal young people only 3.2 per 10,000 were under community-based supervision in 2022-23. This means that Aboriginal young people are 10 times more likely to be under community-based supervision. Comparing long-term, Aboriginal young people are far less likely to be under community-based supervision than ten years ago. In 2013-14 the rate of Aboriginal young people under community-

based supervision was 110.5 per 10,000. The rate for non-Aboriginal young people has declined to a similar degree.

In 2022-23 9.6 Aboriginal young people on an average day were in detention. This is a slight decrease from 12.4 on an average day in 2021-22. The rate of Aboriginal young people in detention has also decreased with 9.1 per 10,000 in 2022-23. Like with community-based supervision Aboriginal young people are overrepresented in detention. Aboriginal young people are 9.3 times more likely to be in detention than their non-Aboriginal peers. Comparing long-term, Aboriginal young people are as likely to be in detention in 2022-23 as they were in 2013-14. In 2013-14 the rate was 10.8 young people per 10,000 in detention. While the rates of Aboriginal young people in detention have trended down over time, the persistent over-representation of this cohort points to the need for more effective systemic reform.

**No significant change in Aboriginal young people in community based supervision or detention**

**Measure 15.1.2**

**Aboriginal**

	Community based supervision (daily average number)	Community based supervision (per 10,000)	Detention (daily average number)	Detention (per 10,000)
2013-14	150	110.53	10.3	10.79
2020-21	99.4	58.53	9.7	9.42
2021-22	83.7	43.87	9.9	9.54
2022-23	81.8	32.85	9.6	9.08

**Non-Aboriginal**

	Community based supervision (daily average number)	Community based supervision (per 10,000)	Detention (daily average number)	Detention (per 10,000)
2013-14	913.2	9.61	47.8	0.89
2020-21	586.3	4.81	92.4	1.52
2021-22	523.8	3.92	67.9	1.11
2022-23	406.9	3.16	61.6	0.98

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Youth justice in Australia 2022-23

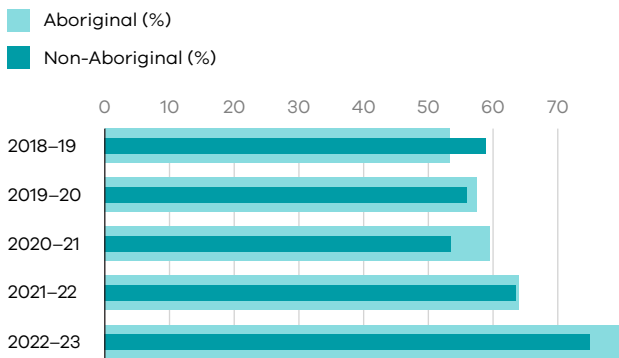
**Measure 15.1.3** Proportion of first-time youth alleged offenders (10-17 years) cautioned by police

The proportion of Aboriginal young first time alleged offenders cautioned by police has continued to increase since 2018-19. In 2022-23, 79.6 per cent of Aboriginal young people were cautioned by police. Young people who receive a caution for first-time alleged offending are less likely to reoffend than those who receive a different outcome (such as being arrested or summoned by police).<sup>14</sup>

It should be noted that there remains a large proportion of first-time youth alleged offenders whose Aboriginal status is unknown. Positive identification is required for Aboriginal young people to access Aboriginal specific alternative justice pathway programs designed for Aboriginal young people. Aboriginal people are less likely to positively identify without assurance of equitable treatment and evidence of work done to address systemic racism.

**Police are more likely to caution first-time Aboriginal youth (10-17) alleged offenders**

**Measure 15.1.3**



Source: Crime Statistics Agency



14. Victorian Crime Statistics Agency, 2017, *The Cautious Approach - Police cautions and the impact on youth reoffending*



### **Aboriginal Youth Cautioning Program (AYCP)**

The Aboriginal Youth Cautioning Program (AYCP) was developed in collaboration with Aboriginal communities and in accordance with principles of Aboriginal self-determination outlined within AJA4. 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. The program has been supported by the roll-out of the Victoria Police Aboriginal Culturally Awareness Training (ACAT) package as well as resources promoting greater awareness of the program.

Additionally, the initiative is further supported by amendments made to the Victoria Police Manual Cautions in 2021 which address barriers to cautioning, including removal of the requirement to admit responsibility for an offence in order to receive a caution and clarifying that there is no specific limit to the number of cautions that a young person can receive, in reasonable circumstances.

Aboriginal young people participating in the program have been referred to a range of services, including educational support, cultural activities, employment programs and sporting activities, with involvement of Aboriginal community services and local Elders. In many cases, panel members, including Elders and other local Aboriginal services provided follow-up support to young people to ensure that they received ongoing support beyond their initial engagement with the support panel.

Since the introduction, Victoria Police has noted promising trends in Child Cautioning, with increased cautioning rates in many areas and supportive relationships with Aboriginal organisations and service providers.

Victoria Police received four years of funding through the State Budget 2023-24 to enhance with AYCP. Enhancements will include recruitment of employees to oversee the daily operation of the program, brokerage funding to reduce barriers to engagement with the program and funding for a comprehensive evaluation.

**Measure 15.1.4** Proportion of young people (10-17 years) in detention on remand

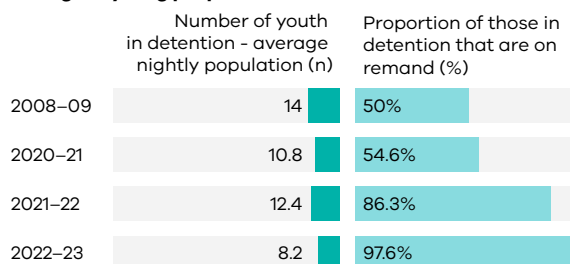
Aboriginal young people are disproportionately placed in detention before receiving a conviction or sentence. On an average night in 2022-23, 13 per cent of all young people in prison on remand identified as Aboriginal. Less Aboriginal young people were imprisoned in 2022-23 than in the previous year. However, 97.6 per cent of Aboriginal young people who are imprisoned were on remand and yet to receive a conviction or sentence. This is greater than the proportion of non-Aboriginal young people in detention on remand (92.9 per cent).

The high number of Aboriginal young people on remand needs to be addressed. The Bail Amendment Act 2023 (the Act) commenced on 25 March 2024. The Act included measures to help reduce the number of young people unnecessarily remanded. The reforms removed 'uplift' for low-level offending, which means that the most stringent bail tests are only used for serious offences. Additionally, remand will now be prohibited for some minor summary offences. The Act also strengthened the considerations that must be considered for an Aboriginal person and children, recognising the unique characteristics and vulnerabilities of children. These include consideration of the discrimination experienced by certain cohorts of children (such as Aboriginal children) that leads to their over-representation in the criminal justice system, the historical and ongoing discriminatory systemic factors that have resulted in the over-representation of Aboriginal peoples in the criminal justice system and remand population, and the risk of harm that custody poses to Aboriginal people and children. Aboriginal stakeholders, including the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, have been critical that the Victorian Government has not gone further to reduce remand rates in the youth justice system. For example, by implementing the presumption of bail for children and young people in its suite of youth justice bail reforms.

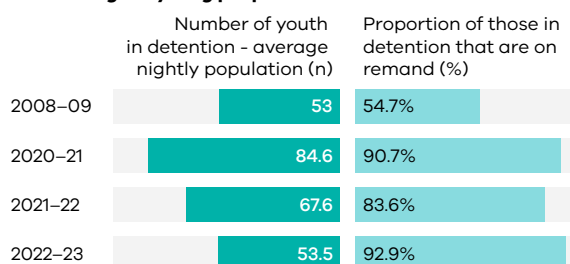
**97% of all Aboriginal young people in detention are unsentenced**

**Measure 15.1.4**

**Aboriginal young people**



**Non-Aboriginal young people**



Source: AIHW: Youth detention population in Australia. Bulletin no. 145. Cat. no. JUV 131.

## 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 number of Aboriginal women who received a caution, arrest or summons continued to rise in 2022-23, to 1,314 women. In this year, Victoria Police processed Aboriginal women at a rate of 630.7 per 10,000. This is more than 11 times the rate for non-Aboriginal women. It is also the second largest difference in rate recorded since 2007-08, meaning that outcomes for Aboriginal women have worsened over the long term. Police processing includes receiving a caution, arrest or summons.

The over policing of First Peoples in Victoria continues to be an issue. This is compounded by the disproportionate number of Aboriginal women denied bail, the impacts of structural racism in the criminal justice system, and past and current laws and policies that disproportionately impact First Nations women. In addition, while most First Nations women will never experience family violence, those who do risk being misidentified as perpetrators of violence by police, resulting in criminalisation and incarceration.<sup>15</sup> Rigorous cultural change within the justice system is needed to change these outcomes. In evidence to the Yoorrook Justice Commission (hearing 08/05/23), Victorian Police Chief Commissioner Shane Patton committed to reviewing 'policies and processes with community to address systemic racism, unconscious bias, or unequal use of discretionary power in outcomes'. Victoria Police is engaging in a program of work to reduce and rectify misidentification in family violence incidents, through changes to policy, additional training, practice guidance and a review of systems.

### The rate of Aboriginal women processed by police remains significantly high

#### Measure 15.2.1

Aboriginal		
	Number (n)	Rate (per 10,000)
2013-14	874	537.8
2020-21	1,273	647
2021-22	1,229	606.7
2022-23	1,314	630.7

Non-Aboriginal		
	Number (n)	Rate (per 10,000)
2013-14	13,289	57.6
2020-21	18,016	69
2021-22	15,381	59
2022-23	15,051	57.1

Source: Crimes Statistics Agency

**Measure 15.2.2 Average daily number and rate of Aboriginal women under corrections supervision in prison and community corrections**

On an average day in 2022-23, there were 164 Aboriginal women under community-based corrections supervision. This represents a rate of 78.7 per 10,000 Aboriginal women. This is a higher average daily number (and rate) than the previous year, when 137 Aboriginal women were placed under community-based corrections supervision (at a rate of 68.6 per 10,000 Aboriginal women).

Over the same period (2021-22 to 2022-23), the number and rate of Aboriginal women under corrections supervision in prisons decreased. On an average day in 2022-23, there were 41 Aboriginal women in prison compared to 46 women the

previous year and 53 women in 2020-21. This represents a rate of 19.7 per 10,000 Aboriginal women, compared to a rate of 23 per 10,000 and 27.3 per 10,000 the previous years.

It is promising that the number and rate of Aboriginal women under corrections supervision in prison has decreased two years in a row. However, continuing to reduce overrepresentation remains a high priority. Aboriginal women in Victoria remain far more likely to be placed under corrections supervision (either in community-based corrections or in prison) than non-Aboriginal women. In 2022-23, Aboriginal women were 17 times more likely to be under community-based supervision than non-Aboriginal women. They were also 18.3 times more likely to be under corrections supervision in prison than non-Aboriginal women.

**The rate of Aboriginal women under corrections supervision remains significantly high**

**Measure 15.2.2**

**Aboriginal**

	Number in community-based corrections (n)	Rate in community-based corrections (per 10,000)	Number in prison (n)	Rate in prison (per 10,000)
2007-08	83	60.6	15	11
2020-21	138	71.1	53	27.3
2021-22	137	68.6	46	23
2022-23	164	78.7	41	19.7

**Non-Aboriginal**

	Number in community-based corrections (n)	Rate in community-based corrections (per 10,000)	Number in prison (n)	Rate in prison (per 10,000)
2007-08	1,218	6	226	1.1
2020-21	1,061	4.1	330	1.3
2021-22	1,128	4.3	295	1.1
2022-23	1,217	4.6	284	1.1

Source: Corrections Victoria

**Measure 15.2.3** Proportion of women who return to prison under sentence within two years of release

In 2022-23, 29.7 per cent of Aboriginal women who had left prison returned within two years. This is the first increase in recidivism rates since 2018-19, demonstrating worsening outcomes for Aboriginal women leaving prison. In the same year, 28.8 per cent of non-Aboriginal women leaving prison returned within two years, less than in the previous year. Although not a large over-representation, it is concerning that increased recidivism rates for Aboriginal women have occurred at a time when recidivism rates for non-Aboriginal women have declined. In 2021-22, Aboriginal women were less likely than non-Aboriginal women to return to prisons within two years.

When looking at longer-term trends, the proportion of Aboriginal women returnees has significantly decreased since 2010-11. This was a year in which 63.2 per cent of Aboriginal women were returning to prison within two years of their release.

**Aboriginal women are returning to prison at higher rates than in 2021-22**

**Measure 15.2.3**



Source: Corrections Victoria

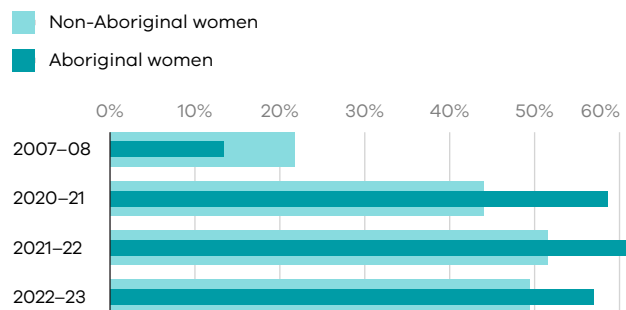
**Measure 15.2.4** Proportion of women in prison on remand

Between 2021-22 and 2022-23, the proportion of Aboriginal women on remand decreased from 60.9 to 56.9 per cent. During this time, the proportion of non-Aboriginal women on remand decreased from 51.5 to 49.3 per cent. In 2022-23, Aboriginal women represented 7.1 per cent of all women in prison. This is the lowest this rate has been since 2017-18.

In 2023, the Victorian government amended the Bail Act 1977 to remove several provisions introduced in 2013 and 2017. This critical reform followed strong advocacy from the Victorian Aboriginal justice sector. This included targeting reverse onus tests to more serious offending. It also included repealing two of three offences under the Bail Act: committing an indictable offence while on bail, and breaching bail conditions, both which had a disproportionate impact on First Peoples in Victoria. The Act has also been expanded and strengthened to include greater consideration of the impact of custody on Aboriginal women, such as the impact on caregiving responsibilities and the impact of trauma or family violence. The amendments will reduce rates of remand for people accused of low-level offending. This will help to address the disproportionate rate at which the State imprisons Aboriginal women before they have a chance to be heard before a judge.

**Aboriginal women are disproportionately remanded in prisons**

**Measure 15.2.4**



Source: Corrections Victoria

### **Dame Phyllis Frost Centre Aboriginal Healing Unit**

In an Australian first, an Aboriginal Healing Unit was opened on 6 September 2023 at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre (DPFC) providing new culturally safe, community-led and trauma-informed programs for Aboriginal women in custody.

The Victorian Government has invested \$8.8 million for the new unit and programs which are being delivered by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation Elizabeth Morgan House.

The new facilities include a sensory room, activities room with facilities for art programs, a peaceful outdoor cultural area with art-inspired screening and native plantings, and a yarnning circle featuring symbolic mosaics and a fire pit area.

Outdoor spaces feature traditional grasses for weaving, Aboriginal totems for various clan groups and a gum tree to provide leaves for cultural ceremonies.

Programs focus on the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal women within DPFC, and supporting reintegration in a respectful, therapeutic way, with mentoring from Elders and Respected Persons and support to build essential life skills in a safe space for those in both remand and sentenced custody.

Aboriginal women at DPFC and community members helped inform the design of the Aboriginal Healing Unit, ensuring the space and programs support the spiritual and cultural needs of Aboriginal women in custody.



## 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 number of Aboriginal men who received a caution, arrest or summons continued to rise in 2022-23, to 2,955 men. In this year, Victoria Police processed Aboriginal men at a rate of 1,423.9 per 10,000. In contrast, the rate for non-Aboriginal men processed by police was 206.9 per 10,000. This means that Aboriginal men were 6.9 times more likely to be processed by police than non-Aboriginal men.

The rate of police processing for Aboriginal men has not declined in recent years. In contrast, the rate of police processing for non-Aboriginal men has declined since a high point in 2020-21 (at 233 per 10,000).

### Aboriginal men are processed by police at significantly higher rates

#### Measure 15.3.1

##### Aboriginal men

	Number (n)	Rate (per 10,000)
2007-08	1,364	1,013.1
2019-20	2,760	1,471.4
2020-21	2,827	1,453.5
2021-22	2,848	1,417.6
2022-23	2,955	1,423.9

##### Non-Aboriginal men

	Number (n)	Rate (per 10,000)
2007-08	33,893	173.5
2019-20	53,849	214.5
2020-21	58,221	233
2021-22	54,353	217.7
2022-23	52,260	206.9

Source: Crime Statistics Agency

**Measure 15.3.2 Average daily number and rate of Aboriginal men under corrections supervision in prison and community corrections**

Aboriginal men remain significantly over-represented in prison and community-based corrections. On an average day in 2022-23, there were 680 Aboriginal men under community-based corrections and 759 Aboriginal men in prison.

Over this year, Aboriginal men were 10.8 times more likely to be in community-based supervision than non-Aboriginal men. They were also 17.2 times more likely to be in prison than non-Aboriginal men. The rate of Aboriginal men under community-based supervision has increased by more than 50 percent since 2007-08. The rate of Aboriginal men in prison has more than doubled over the same period.

**The rate of Aboriginal men under corrections supervision remains significantly high**

**Measure 15.3.2**

**Aboriginal men**

	Number in community-based corrections (n)	Rate in community-based corrections (per 10,000)	Number in prison (n)	Rate in prison (per 10,000)
2007-08	270	200.5	221	164.2
2021-22	618	307.6	669	333
2022-23	680	327.7	759	365.8

**Non-Aboriginal men**

	Number in community-based corrections (n)	Rate in community-based corrections (per 10,000)	Number in prison (n)	Rate in prison (per 10,000)
2007-08	5,602	28.5	3,704	18.8
2021-22	6,825	27.1	5,506	21.9
2022-23	7,640	30.2	5,365	21.2

Source: Corrections Victoria

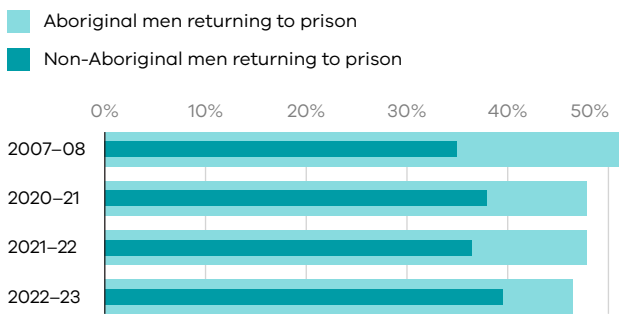


**Measure 15.3.3** Proportion of men who return to prison under sentence within two years of release

Aboriginal men who leave prison are more likely to return within two years than non-Aboriginal men. However, recidivism rates have marginally decreased in recent years. In 2022-23, 46.4 per cent of Aboriginal men returned to prison within two years, compared to 47.8 per cent the previous year. This is the lowest rate of recidivism since 2009-10. Over the same period, the proportion of non-Aboriginal men who returned to prison increased from 36.4 to 39.4 per cent.

**Aboriginal men are more likely to return to prison under sentence within two years of release**

**Measure 15.3.3**



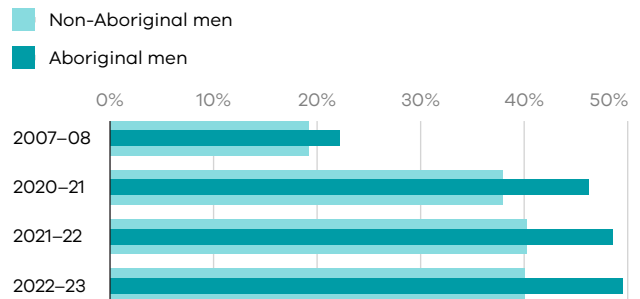
Source: Corrections Victoria

**Measure 15.3.4** Proportion of men in prison on remand

In 2022-23, almost half (49.5 per cent) of all Aboriginal men in prison were on remand and yet to have their case heard before a magistrate or judge. Between 2021-22 and 2022-23, rates of remand for Aboriginal men increased from 48.6 to 49.5 per cent. In contrast, rates of remand for non-Aboriginal men decreased from 40.3 to 40.1 per cent. For both cohorts, rates of remand have more than doubled since 2007-08. The Victorian Government is seeking to reduce unnecessary remand for people accused of low-level offending through amendments made in 2023 to the Victorian Bail Act 1977. This includes changes to the application of the reverse onus tests and strengthening and expanding Aboriginal specific considerations (as outlined above at Measure 15.2.4). These amendments came into effect in March 2024.

**Aboriginal men are disproportionately remanded in prison**

**Measure 15.3.4**



Source: Corrections Victoria



# Goal 16: Aboriginal Victorians have access to safe and effective justice services

## Overview

### Measures under Goal 16 have improved

While the number of children and young people receiving intensive bail support has decreased; more adults are receiving bail support and more young people are accessing community support programs through youth justice community services. Support through the justice system is vital for equitable access to justice.

### Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally

Not applicable.

### 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



The latest year of available data varies across the Report due to the inconsistent frequency of collection of survey data and lags in processing administrative data. Data in this Report is the most up to date available for publishing.

All measures in this goal are reported on.

## 16.1 Increase Aboriginal Victorians' participation in culturally safe and effective justice prevention, early intervention, diversion and support programs

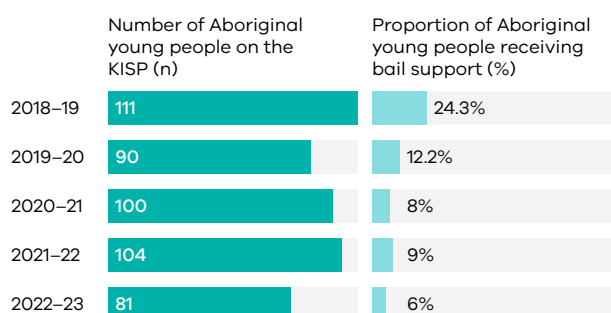
### Measure 16.1.1 Number and proportion of Aboriginal young people receiving intensive bail support through the Koorie Intensive Support Program (KISP)

In 2022-23, less Aboriginal young people accessed the Koorie Intensive Support Program (KISP) than in previous years. Only 81 young people received support through KISP. Of the 81 young people accessing the program, only five young people (6 per cent) received bail support. This was despite 97.6 per cent of all Aboriginal young people in prison being held there on remand.

The KISP aims to reduce the number of Aboriginal young people who are detained prior to sentencing. This includes providing intensive outreach support to assist young people who are complying with bail conditions or conditions placed on deferred sentences. Bail support is an important program that reduces time spent in prison as well as rates of reoffending. Access to these vital services needs to be improved.

### Support provided to Aboriginal young people through the Koorie Intensive Support Program (KISP) has decreased

#### Measure 16.1.1



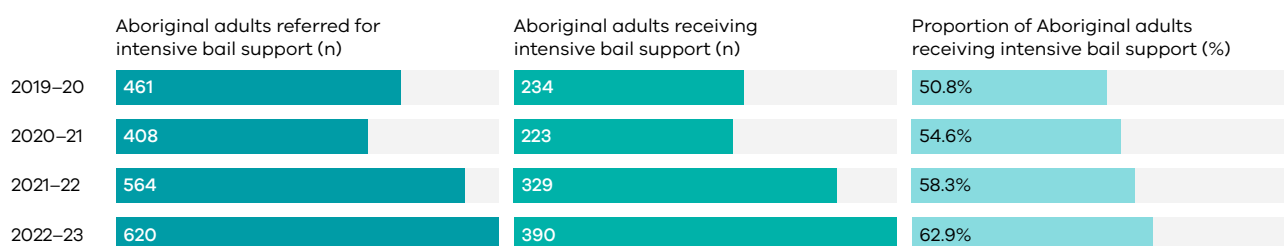
Source: Department of Justice and Community Safety

### Measure 16.1.2 Number and proportion of Aboriginal adults receiving intensive bail support

In 2022-23, 620 Aboriginal adults were referred for intensive bail support. From these referrals, 390 Aboriginal adults received intensive bail support. This represents a take-up rate of 62.9 percent, the highest rate in thirteen years (since 2010-11). Intensive bail support provides an alternative to remand for bail applicants considered high risk and who would not otherwise be granted bail. Increasing the proportion of Aboriginal adults referred for and receiving intensive bail support is key to preventing people from spending unnecessary time in prison.

#### 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 services<sup>16</sup>

In 2022-23, 580 Aboriginal children and young people participated in community support programs through the youth justice community services pathway. This is 62 more children and young people than the previous year (2021-22), and 96 more Aboriginal children and young people since the pathway began in 2019-20.

Youth Justice Community Support Services aim to reduce rates of re-offending by young people. They also aim to minimise contact with the criminal justice system and support their transition from the youth justice system to their local communities. By developing young peoples' independence, resilience and connectedness to family and community, the services help to prepare young people for adulthood and develop their capacity for meaningful educational and economic participation.

### Aboriginal access to community support programs in youth justice has increased

##### Measure 16.1.3



Source: Department of Justice and Community Safety

16. Data collection for this measure commenced from 2020.



# Goal 17: Aboriginal Victorians feel safe and connected

## Overview

### Measures under Goal 17 have improved

Improvements in the cultural awareness of Victoria Police staff and the increasing number of Aboriginal staff in the justice system is a small step towards a more culturally safe justice system.

A culturally responsive justice system is one in which non-Aboriginal people take responsibility to understand the importance of culture, country and community to Aboriginal health, wellbeing and safety, by working with Aboriginal communities to design and deliver culturally-responsive services.

### 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 relies 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 First Peoples – State Relations website at [www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-affairs-report](http://www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-affairs-report).

## 17.1 Increase community safety and trust in police and the justice system

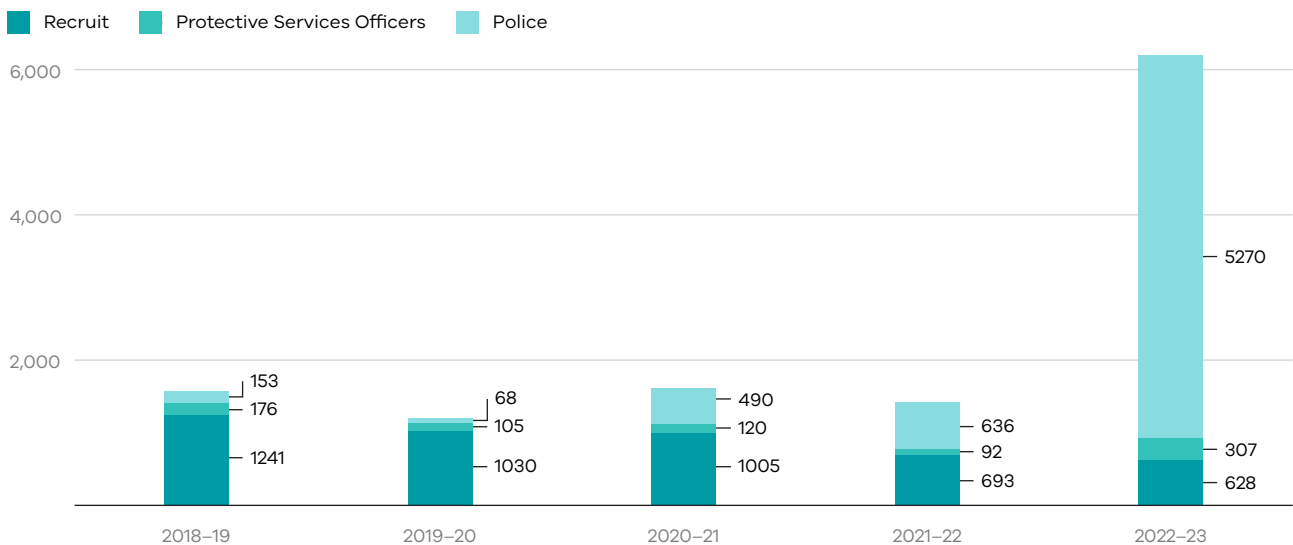
### Measure 17.1.1 Proportion of police officers who have received Aboriginal cultural awareness training

Across 2022-23, the number of Police Officers who had received Aboriginal cultural awareness training increased dramatically from 636 to 5270 officers. This represents 57.9 per cent of all current Victorian Police Officers (as at 30 June 2022-23). During the Yoorrook Justice Commission’s criminal justice system hearings, evidence from Aboriginal Victorians told of encounters with the police

involving racism, unconscious bias and unequal application of discretionary powers, including use of force. In its report, Yoorrook with Purpose, the Yoorrook Justice Commission recommends that government must significantly upscale the capability, competence and support in relation to human rights, including Aboriginal cultural rights, of all people appointed to work or working in Victoria police among other areas. This recommendation is supported in principle by Government.

### The number of Police Officers receiving Aboriginal cultural awareness training has significantly increased

#### Measure 17.1.1



Source: Internal Victoria Police records

### South Region Aboriginal Inclusion Action Plan

The South Area Aboriginal Inclusion Action Plan 2020-24 (AIAP) is the commitment to Aboriginal inclusion, demonstrating a commitment to community to ensure the South Area's structures, behaviours, culture and values reflect respect for the Aboriginal community, the Traditional Custodians of the land upon which we all live and work. The plan builds upon current achievements and places self-determination at the forefront of decision making and advice, in an effort to address the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system and strengthen the South Area in cultural diversity, cultural safety and cultural respect.

The new AIAP was developed in partnership with the South Area Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee Executive Officers and is aligned to the vision and principles of working under Burra Lotjpa Dungaludja (Aboriginal Justice Agreement Four). The South Area AIAP recognises that the Yoorrook Justice Commission is the first formal truth telling process into historical and ongoing injustices experienced by First Peoples in Victoria. It will align to any recommendations for the healing, system reform and practical changes to laws, policy and education as well as matters to be included in future treaties.

The South Area AIAP Committee has representation from all business units across South East Metropolitan and Gippsland Regions. Members are expected to commit to a minimum term of 12 months, represent assigned portfolios, attend all meetings within reason and become part of the dedicated working groups to address

area actions. Cultural advisors will also form part of the committee, with these positions open to any Aboriginal person working for DJCS in the South Area to provide overall guidance to members ensuring activities are culturally appropriate.

Achievements to date include:

- Embedding of the AIAP in the regional business plans.
- Justice Service Centres have flags, plaques acknowledging Traditional Custodian and Aboriginal artwork on display.
- Increased identified positions across CCS including the Aboriginal Professional Practice Advisor (Southern Region).
- Continual commitment for Welcome to Country for all formal events and Acknowledging Country at all meetings including formal noting for the agenda.
- Strengthened engagement with community via festivals, Aboriginal events, visits to co-ops and Gathering Place.
- Raising of internal awareness through information boards and a calendar of significant events.
- Targeted charity donation to benefit Aboriginal communities.
- Culturally appropriate community work sites and projects.
- Strengthening Aboriginal economic participation through procurement (Aboriginal venues and catering).

### Evaluation of the Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer Role and creation of new Aboriginal designated roles

In support of the recommendation from the Aboriginal Themed Community Safety Forum ABSTARR Report (July 2021), Victoria Police reviewed the Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer (ACLO) role definition and the tasks and activities generally undertaken since inception in 2005/2006 against the position description.

An independent assessment was completed and on 16 June 2023 Executive Command endorsed the reclassification of the ACLO role from VPS3 to VPS4. Executive Command also endorsed the creation of the following Aboriginal designated positions:

- VPS5 Senior Aboriginal Programs Coordinator position to provide support, consistency and information sharing across the ACLO and Police Aboriginal Liaison Officer Network (Recommendation from the 2021 Aboriginal Themed Community Safety Forum ABSTARR Report- July 2021). The position is currently underway being advertised.

- VPS4 Aboriginal Complaints Support Officer position within Professional Standards Command. The role is to provide a culturally sensitive approach to handling complaints from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The position description was endorsed by the Aboriginal Justice Caucus (Recommendation from the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Audit Report 'Victoria Police handling of complaints made by Aboriginal People' – May 2022.) Recruitment is currently being finalised.
- An additional ACLO position based in the City of Yarra (Richmond Police Station).

This brings the number of ACLO positions to 17 across the State (Action from Aboriginal Justice Forum 64- March 2023).

### Address racism and promote cultural safety





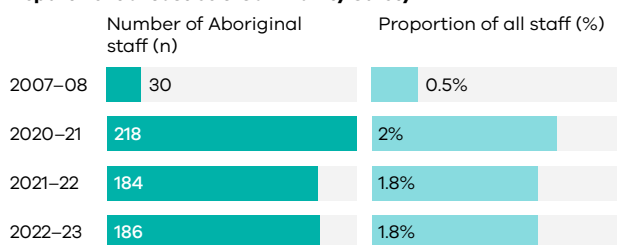
### Measure 17.1.4 Number and proportion of Aboriginal people employed across the justice system

In 2022-23, there were 400 Aboriginal staff employed in the Victorian justice system. This increased from 379 employees the previous year. Over the same period, the proportion of Aboriginal staff at the Department of Justice and Community Safety remained steady at 1.8 per cent of all staff. The proportion of Aboriginal staff at Court Services Victoria marginally increased to 2.71 per cent. The proportion of Aboriginal staff at Victoria Police also marginally increased to only 0.07 per cent. The Victoria Police Aboriginal Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan 2023-2025 supports strengthening partnerships, supporting self-determination, and continues to remove barriers to a safe and inclusive workplace for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Cultural reform of the justice system is imperative to improving outcomes for First Peoples.

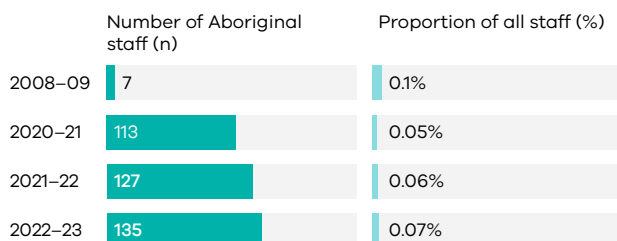
#### Aboriginal staff employed across the justice system

##### Measure 17.1.4

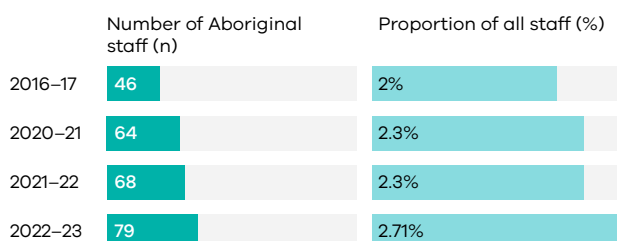
###### Department of Justice & Community Safety



###### Victoria Police



###### Court Services Victoria



Source: Department of Justice and Community Safety, Victoria Police and Courts Services Victoria.

#### Yallum Yallum Elders and Respected Persons Council – Horsham

The *Yallum Yallum Elders and Respected Persons Council* is a fully independent self-determined model of justice operating in Horsham that promotes cultural healing, social and emotional wellbeing, and a stronger role in culture and community. The *Yallum Yallum Council* program aims to divert Aboriginal people away from and reduce Aboriginal over representation from the criminal justice system.

This project is funded and supported by the Grampians RAJAC and West Area Justice Services and managed by the Goolum Goolum Aboriginal Cooperative. The *Yallum Yallum Council* is a group of Elders and Respected Persons who are brought together to provide guidance and form an agreement with participants during their engagement with the program to strengthen their cultural identity and explore, address and repair harm related to their behaviour. Referral pathways are largely through either Victoria Police, legal representatives or the Magistrates Court, and the program is generally aimed at Aboriginal people eligible for diversion in the Magistrates Court.

During 2023, the project moved from conceptualisation to project planning and into implementation, with the first participant commencing engagement with the *Yallum Yallum Council* in late 2023. An independent evaluation will be completed during 2024 by Think Impact partnering with Kowa Collaborations.

 Address trauma and support healing

## 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.

### Aboriginal Justice Agreement

The Aboriginal Justice (AJA) was established in 2000. It is the longest-running agreement of its kind in Australia and has enabled the establishment of many significant initiatives. However, addressing over-representation is complex and requires generational change.

The fourth phase of AJA Burra Lotjpa Dunguludja (AJA4), launched in August 2018, is a partnership aimed to close the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal justice outcomes by 2031. In partnership with the Aboriginal Justice Caucus, the Victorian Government is currently progressing an extensive range of actions under Burra Lotjpa Dunguludja. These actions range from programs and resources that provide support for Aboriginal people in contact with the justice system to significant legislative reform.

A large number and diverse range of initiatives are provided under the AJA4 including a community grants program of over \$35million per annum that provides for Aboriginal organisations to deliver community-based initiatives aimed at improving Aboriginal justice outcomes.

### Corrections Victoria

Victorian Government investment has supported Aboriginal people in prison to access a suite of culturally specific programs and services across prisons, as well as offending-related rehabilitation and transitional programs, that aim to respond to cultural needs.

In the 2023-24 Budget \$3.28 million was provided to support the continuation of existing programs focused on culturally safe supports for Aboriginal people in prison, including:

- \$1.258m over one year to continue Aboriginal Wellbeing Officers (AWO) roles and support for the AWO staffing model.
- \$0.753m over one year to continue the Statewide Indigenous Arts in Prison and Community Program delivered by The Torch.
- \$0.170m over one year to continue the Prison Support Program delivered by Djirra.
- \$0.993m over one year to continue the Wadamba Prison to Work Program delivered by Wanyaari.
- \$0.103m over one year to continue the Baggarrook Aboriginal Women's Transitional Housing Program delivered in partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service and Aboriginal Housing Victoria.

This builds on the \$13.7 million and \$15.8 million committed in the 2021-22 and 2022-23 Budgets respectively to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal people in prisons and Community Correctional Services and promote greater Aboriginal self-determination across the justice system.

## Wirkara Kulpa Aboriginal Youth Justice Strategy

Wirkara Kulpa, Victoria's first Aboriginal Youth Justice strategy, has continued efforts to address the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children and young people in Victoria's youth justice system.

Wirkara Kulpa is a key initiative of Burra Lotjpa Dungaludja – Aboriginal Justice Agreement 4 and the key driver of response to the Commission for Children and Young People's 2022 report 'Our youth, our way: Inquiry into the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children and young people in the Victorian youth justice system'.

The 2023-24 Budget provides \$50.92m over two years to continue critical initiatives in Youth Justice, including culturally responsive services to support Aboriginal young people in custody.

This funding builds upon the Budget allocation in 2022-23 and 2021-22, which includes:

- \$11.14m over two years from the 2022-23 Budget to support diversion initiatives including Aboriginal Youth Justice Hubs.
- \$5.95m over three years from the 2021-22 Budget to support early intervention family services to keep Aboriginal children aged 14 years and under out of the criminal justice system.

In June 2023, the Aboriginal Justice Caucus (AJC) endorsed a four-phase implementation plan for Wirkara Kulpa, whereby all 75 actions are allocated in order of timely importance according to Aboriginal stakeholders and AJC. In phase one, a suite of funded initiatives and priority projects are currently underway.

Initiatives that have been completed and progressed to business as usual in 2023 include:

- Supporting young Aboriginal people to remain connected to education and training pathways when appearing before the Children's Courts through the Education Justice Initiative.
- Conducting the Youth Justice Survey to understand the needs of Aboriginal children and young people on an annual basis.
- Improving gender responsive services through the Aboriginal Youth Justice Worker expansion.
- Expanding the Community-Based Aboriginal Justice Worker program to keep Aboriginal children and young people out of the youth justice system by working to their strengths.
- Making sure all young people in custody have access to an Aboriginal Liaison Officer to respond to their cultural needs and proactively support family visits and ongoing connection.

Work has also progressed on several phase one priority initiatives, including but not limited to:

- Integrating cultural support planning with case management and delivering a cultural plan that can be shared by all agencies working with Aboriginal children and young people.
- Establishing Aboriginal Youth Justice hubs to provide place-based Aboriginal led services to children and young people in the community.
- Supporting Koorie Youth Council to develop a mechanism which amplifies the voices of Aboriginal children and young people in the design and delivery of youth justice services.
- Developing a Wirkara Kulpa Performance Framework that sets Aboriginal-identified justice related targets and accountability measures to improve young people's outcomes.
- Implementing the Keeping Aboriginal Young People Under 14 Years Out of the Criminal Justice System Project.

## Enhanced Model of Health Care for Aboriginal People in Victorian Public Prisons

On 1 July 2023, DJCS introduced a new service model for primary health services in custodial facilities and transitioned to new providers, including public health providers in women's prisons.

The new service model includes a number of service enhancements to support Aboriginal men and women in custody to improve their health and wellbeing including the introduction of Aboriginal health checks (equivalent to MBS Item 715 health check in community), and a dedicated Aboriginal health workforce. Aboriginal health checks and related integrated care plans are required to consider traditional healing, culturally safe care, connections to family and community, and post release follow up care.

The new service model also strengthens requirements of health providers to provide culturally safe care, through incorporating cultural safety standards into the Quality Framework as well as requirements to engage with local ACCHOs to enhance service delivery and support continuity of care for Aboriginal people leaving custody.

The introduction of Aboriginal health checks is supported by an ACCHO-led learning network to support implementation and focus groups with Aboriginal people in custody.

The enhanced model of care is consistent with AJA4. The strengthened requirements to provide culturally safe and culturally appropriate care for Aboriginal men and women aims to help reduce the risk of reoffending through supporting Aboriginal men and women to improve their health in custody and transition these improvements as they move from custody into community.

## Domain 6: Culture and Country



*The richness and diversity of Aboriginal history and culture in Victoria and the resilience and strength of Aboriginal communities and peoples, is something for all Victorians to celebrate.*

### **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 and grow 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

### Measures under Goal 18 have improved

Increases in the amount of land under native title and settlement agreements, cultural burns conducted by Traditional Owner groups, and progress towards the start of formal Treaty negotiations all point towards greater Traditional Owner governance of Country.

### Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally

**Outcome 15a:** In 2023, 4,213,978 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 an increase from 14,934 square kilometres in 2020 to 16,068 square kilometres in 2023 based on data from the National Native Title Tribunal.

**Outcome 15b:** In 2023, 113,461 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, an increase from 265 square kilometres in 2020 to 293 square kilometres in 2023 based on data from the National Native Title Tribunal.

### 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.

### Data Note



The latest year of available data varies across the Report due to the inconsistent frequency of collection of survey data and lags in processing administrative data. Data in this Report is the most up to date available for publishing.

No new data was available at the time of reporting for:

- **Measure 18.1.4** Number of Whole of Country Plans published. The Federation of Victorian Traditional Owners Corporations (FVTOC) does not hold this data.
- **Measure 18.1.5** Number of Joint Management Plans and area of land covered.

Historical data for these measures is available on the First Peoples – State Relations website at [www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-affairs-report](http://www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-affairs-report).

## 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

The overall amount of Crown land with native title determinations and/or Recognition and Settlement Agreements increased in 2022-2023.

As at June 2023, the Federal Court has recognised the native title rights of Victorian Traditional Owners over 16,051 km<sup>2</sup> of Crown land. Under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* (Vic) (TOS Act), the Victorian Government recognised Traditional Owner rights and interests over 35,830 km<sup>2</sup> of Crown land in 2022. The total area of land recognised in Victoria under the TOS Act is approximately 96,210 km<sup>2</sup>.

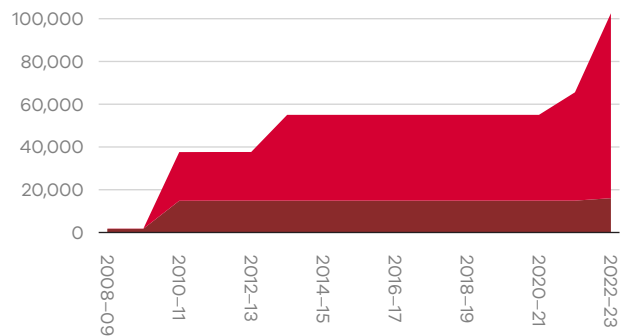
In 2022, the Victorian Government signed a Recognition and Settlement Agreement under the TOS Act with the Barengi Gadjin Land Council, representing the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagulk People. The Agreement commits the State to return certain identified sites to Barengi Gadjin Land Council in freehold title, and certain identified parks and reserves in Aboriginal title for joint management with the State.

On 28th March 2023, and on 21 March 2024, the Federal Court recognised the Eastern Maar people's native title rights over certain areas in the broader Eastern Maar claim area. This decision recognises and acknowledges the deep and ongoing connection of the Eastern Maar people to their Country.

### The area of land recognised under the Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010 agreements has increased

#### Measure 18.1.1

- Land area over which native title exists
- Land area over which Traditional Owner Settlement Act agreement has been reached - based on ILUA registration date\*



Source: National Native Title Tribunal (Geospatial Services)



**Measure 18.1.2** Work of the State in advancing the Treaty process

In 2023, the Victorian Government continued to advance the Victorian Treaty process, including finalising the elements required under the *Advancing the Treaty Process with Aboriginal Victorians Act 2018*, and establishing governance structures across the whole of the Victorian Government to support Treaty negotiations.

Throughout 2023, the Victorian Government continued to strengthen its relationship with the First Peoples' Assembly, the independent body representing First Peoples in Victoria's Treaty process. In May 2023, the First Peoples' Assembly undertook its second Statewide election, tripling its electoral role to elect a new representative chamber.

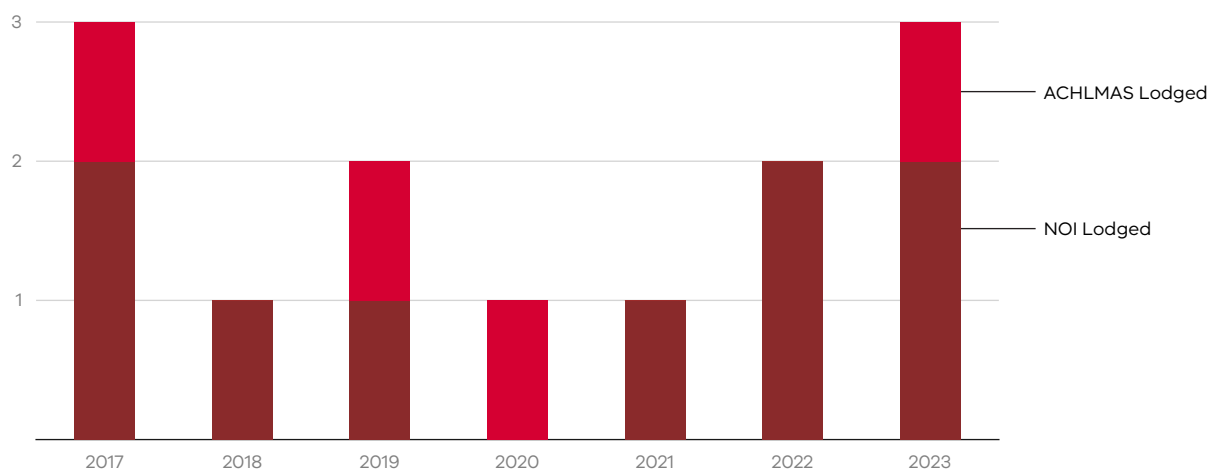
In December 2023, the Victorian Government appointed five inaugural members of the Treaty Authority. The Treaty Authority is a nation-leading institution, drawing on international best practice but adapted for Victoria to ensure Aboriginal lore, law and cultural authority are observed and upheld. With the Treaty elements in place, including the Treaty Authority, Self-Determination Fund, Treaty Negotiation Framework and a dispute resolution process, the State anticipates that formal Treaty negotiations will commence in 2024.

**Measure 18.1.3** Number of Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs) that have entered into an Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Land Management Agreement

As of 31 December 2023, 4 RAPs have entered into an ACHLMA and 9 submitted an intention to enter an ACHLMA since 2017. 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.

**The number of ACHLMA lodged has increased in 2023**

**Measure 18.1.3**



Source: First Peoples - State Relations Group (Department of Premier and Cabinet)



### Renewing Victoria's public land legislation

Hume Region staff met on country with Taungurung Land and Waters Council (TLaWC) to build greater understanding of shared aspirations for public land management.

DEECA is undertaking significant work to deliver on the Government's commitment to renew Victoria's public land legislation, which has not been comprehensively reviewed since it was created.

Work is underway to replace complex and outdated Crown land Acts (the Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978, Forests Act 1958 and Land Act 1958) with a new Public Land Act and refine the National Parks Act 1975.

Key proposed reform elements, include:

- A system of clear, legislated, public land management categories to replace current land statuses and simplify the complexity in the legal status of public land.
- Recognition of Traditional Owners and advancing their self-determination in relation to public land in a variety of ways.
- The establishment of a modern public land manager framework in the new Public Land Act to facilitate contemporary public land management.

- Simplified powers for tenures in the new Public Land Act to enable appropriate use of public land.
- A strengthened public land compliance and enforcement framework.

This will create a streamlined, contemporary and enabling legislative framework that will advance Traditional Owners' self-determination and enable public land managers to protect and enhance the values of public land for the benefit of the community, while meeting current and future challenges. The reforms will not impact on current public land uses.

The public land legislation reforms seek to address current barriers to better support Traditional Owners to realise their aspirations in relation to land in a variety of ways. In practical terms, this would mean that there would be better opportunities for Traditional Owners to be involved in public land management in a variety of ways, including through more flexible joint management arrangements or being appointed as the direct public land manager, as Traditional Owners desire and as resources permit.

Proposals are based on direct discussions with Traditional Owner groups, submissions to DEECA, a workshop outcome, recommendations of the Victorian Traditional Owner Cultural Landscapes Strategy, and ongoing engagement.

### Measure 18.1.6 Number of cultural burns conducted

In 2022-23, Traditional Owners conducted 20 cultural burns with the support of Victorian Government agencies. This is an increase of 7 since 2021-22 and 16 since 2018-19. DEECA continues to build stronger partnerships with Traditional Owners, assisting many with the planning, mapping and approvals currently required to deliver cultural burns on public land. During 2021-22, many Traditional Owner groups grew their staffing levels and capacity, and participated in a range of training. These activities have assisted Traditional Owner groups in increasing the number of cultural burns, as well as planning and delivering programs that reflect their cultural aspirations.

#### The number of cultural burns has increased in 2022-23

##### Measure 18.1.6a



(a) 2018 data reflects six month period only. All other years reflect 12 months.  
Source: Forest and Fire Operations - Department of Environment, Energy and Climate Action (DEECA) internal records.

#### The number of cultural burns by Traditional Owner Group in 2022-23

##### Measure 18.1.6b

General Locality	Traditional Owner Group	Number of burns in 2022-23
East Gippsland	Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation	0
Far South West	Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation	1
Murray Goldfields	Barapa Barapa Land and Water	0
Skipton	Wadawarrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation	1
You Yangs Regional Park		0
Wimmera	Barengi Gadjin Land Council	5
Central Victoria	Djaara (Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation)	11
Colac Shire	Eastern Marr	1
Barmah	Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>20</b>

Source: Forest and Fire Operations - Department of Environment, Energy, and Climate Action



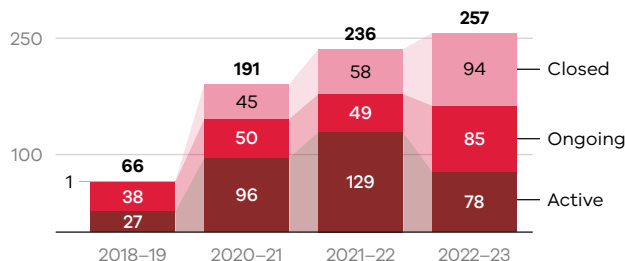
**Measure 18.1.7** Number of formal partnership agreements for planning and management between Aboriginal communities and key water and catchment agencies

There are an increasing number of formal arrangements between Aboriginal communities and key water agencies to make decisions about water landscape management. There were 257 formal partnership agreements between Aboriginal communities and key water catchment agencies in 2022-23. This was an increase from 236 in 2021-22. 63 per cent of these partnerships were either active or ongoing in 2022-23.

Partnerships are being established to strengthen the role of Traditional Owners in water management and enable them to hold water and catchment agencies accountable. The *Water is Life: Traditional Owner Access to Water Roadmap* commits to develop new provisions in statements of obligations requiring formal partnerships between water corporations and Catchment Management Authorities and Traditional Owner groups, where Traditional Owners wish to do so. Individual water corporations and catchment management authorities have also established arrangements for deepening partnerships with Traditional Owners. For example, East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority has a partnership with the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation that includes the ongoing care of the Mitchell River.

**Number of formal partnership agreements for planning and management between Aboriginal communities and keywater & catchment agencies has increased year on year since 2018-19**

**Measure 18.1.7a**

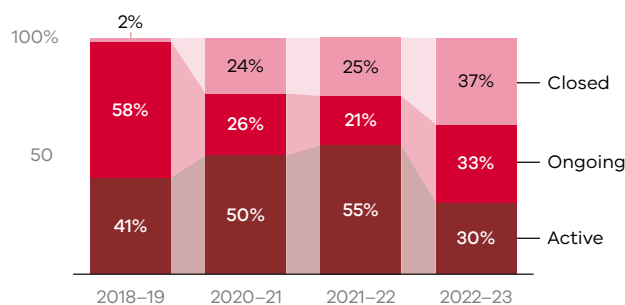


Definition: Includes MoUs, project funding and grant funding.

Source: Department of Environment, Energy and Climate Action (DEECA), water corporation and catchment management authority and Victorian Environmental Water Holder internal records.

**Proportion of formal partnership agreements for planning and management between Aboriginal communities and key water & catchment agencies**

**Measure 18.1.7b**



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.

### **Dhelkunyangu Gatjin — Djaara Gatjin Strategy**

In 2023, Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation (DJAARA) launched the Gatjin (water) Strategy, 'Dhelkunyangu Gatjin', which means working together to heal water. It sets out a pathway for Dja Dja Wurrung people to work with DEECA, water authorities and the community to manage water for a healthy and sustainable future.

DJAARA's 2013 Recognition and Settlement Agreement with the State of Victoria gives Dja Dja Wurrung People a right to be involved in the management of water that falls on and flows through Dja Dja Wurrung Country.

"The Djaara Gatjin Strategy provides a pathway for government water agencies to meet their obligations under the agreement and, more importantly, to improve water management and heal country. DJAARA embraces the spirit of ngaldurrong (working together), and we look forward to partnering with water agencies to implement Dhelkunyangu Gatjin," – Mr Rodney Carter, Dja Dja Wurrung Group CEO.

As part of the Gatjin Strategy Partners Implementation Control Group, DEECA and water sector agencies will continue supporting DJAARA to achieve their vision. This includes partnering with Dja Dja Wurrung to oversee water resources and develop initiatives that incorporate Dja Dja Wurrung's knowledge and practices into water management in their Country.

### **Walking Together: A new agreement between Taungurung and DEECA Biodiversity**

Staff from Taungurung Land and Waters Council (TLaWC) and DEECA came together to sign off on a partnership agreement in April 2023, that has been a year in the making. Yananyin gadhaba means "we walk together" in the Taungurung language and enables the two partners to deliver better outcomes for biodiversity by strengthening bioculturally informed care for Country.

Yananyin gadhaba recognises that we are all ultimately governed by Country. In order for Country to be healthy we must apply a holistic lens that recognises the interconnection between all things. The agreement identifies core principles of trust, respect, accountability and

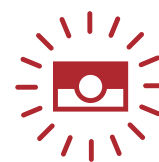
collaboration. It recognises that we must weave together our different ways of knowing if we are to meaningfully walk together to heal Country.

The agreement was developed and designed through an extensive co-design process during which TLaWC and DEECA staff met over a series of four meetings. These meetings were at times quite emotional and profound as all participants truthfully shared the thoughts and perspectives that inform their work on Country.

It is this strength in relationship and honesty that sits at the heart of Yananyin gadhaba. The next step is for the partners to gather again and co-develop a set of actions that will be delivered over the next 12 months.



**Transfer power and resources to communities**



# Goal 19: Aboriginal culture and language are supported and celebrated

## Overview

### Measures under Goal 19 have continued to improve

The Victorian Government recognises culture as a protective factor critical to countering the poorer outcomes that are statistically experienced by Aboriginal people in Victoria. Language and cultural revitalisation is essential to grounding identity and to righting current and historic wrongs.

### 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).

In Victoria in 2018-19, there were 4 languages being spoken (with 0 considered strong). This target relies on data from the National Indigenous Languages Survey which is conducted at irregular intervals. There is currently no new data since the baseline year of 2018-19.

#### Data Note



The latest year of available data varies across the Report due to the inconsistent frequency of collection of survey data and lags in processing administrative data. Data in this Report is the most up to date available for publishing.

All measures under this goal are featured although no comparative data is available from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) since 2014-15 for **Measure 19.1.1** Participation in community events which celebrate Aboriginal culture. A case study has been included instead.

## 19.1 Support the preservation, promotion and practice of culture and languages

### Measure 19.1.1 Participation in community events which celebrate Aboriginal culture

#### Major Aboriginal Cultural Events and Awards Program

The Major Aboriginal Cultural Events and Awards Program (Program) maintains the Victorian Government's connection to Victoria's Aboriginal community through:

- Elevating the achievements and honouring the sacrifices of Aboriginal Victorians;
- Promoting and celebrating examples of excellence among Aboriginal communities, culture and history;
- Providing practical and meaningful opportunities for Aboriginal communities, the broader Victorian community and government to recognise and celebrate Victoria's Aboriginal culture and history;
- Increasing engagement with regional and rural Victoria and non-Aboriginal Victorians; and
- Strengthening the Victorian Government's relationship with Aboriginal Victorians and key Aboriginal stakeholders from across the State.

#### 2023 Victorian Aboriginal Remembrance Service (Service)

The Service was held on 31 May 2023 at the Shrine of Remembrance and honours Aboriginal service men and women, past and present.

Each year, the Service acknowledges the sacrifices of an Aboriginal service person or groups within the Australian Defence Force. In 2023, the Service highlighted the dedication and bravery of Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Melbourne Johnson—a distinguished soldier of Aboriginal descent who served in the Australian Imperial Force during World War I.

#### 2023 Ricci Marks Award

The Ricci Marks Award was held on 13 June 2023 and recognises the achievements and aspirations of young Aboriginal people in training, education, arts, sports, culture and community leadership.

In 2023, the Ricci Marks Award recognised five young Aboriginal people for their achievements and excellence. Yemurraki Egan and Jayde Couzens received the 2023 Ricci Marks Award and Cobain Tipiloura, Elijah Aaron Brown and Isaac Muller received the 2023 Rising Star Award. The Award recipients received bursaries to support them in achieving their aspirations.

#### 2023 NAIDOC State Reception (Reception)

Hosted by the Victorian Government, the Reception is an annual event during NAIDOC Week. It provides an opportunity for Victorians to reflect on NAIDOC celebrations and strengthens the relationship between the Victorian Government and Aboriginal people.

On 5 July 2023, the Victorian Government hosted the Reception at Parliament House. The event provided an opportunity for attendees to connect with community members and colleagues, hear from Elders and the Victorian NAIDOC Week awardees, and celebrate Aboriginal culture.

#### 2023 NAIDOC Program of Events

For over a decade, the Victorian Government has funded the Victorian NAIDOC Committee to host an annual program of events during NAIDOC Week. NAIDOC Week celebrates Aboriginal people and their achievements, cultures and histories. The 2023 program of events included the Victorian NAIDOC Awards, Flag Raising Ceremony, Pride Gala, NAIDOC March and NAIDOC Ball.

The Victorian NAIDOC Awards recognise the achievements of Elders, young Aboriginal people, Aboriginal sportspeople and Aboriginal members of the LGBTQIA+ community.



Joshua Scott

**Measure 19.1.2 Investment in Aboriginal language and culture revitalisation programs**

Connectedness to culture and community strengthens individual and collective identities. Promotes positive self-esteem, resilience, and improved outcomes for Aboriginal people. While cultural identity is central to the lives of Aboriginal Victorians, 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 of the foundational programs and services delivered by ACCOs. Such as kinship family finding, return to Country and cultural camps.

Initiative / organisation	Description
<b>1. Koori Heritage Trust</b>	The Victorian Government funds the Koori 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 Program.
<b>2. Connecting Home Limited</b>	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.
<b>3. Koorie Youth Council</b>	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.
<b>4. Cultural Markers Project</b>	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.
<b>5. Reconciliation Victoria</b>	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.
<b>6. Lake Tyers and Framlingham Aboriginal Trusts</b>	The Victorian Government funds the Lake Tyers and Framlingham Aboriginal Trusts' operations and delivery of municipal and essential services to its residents, to manage Trust land, water and built environment, as well as the preservation of cultural heritage. Funding also supports delivery of self-determined activities to strengthen governance, social cohesion and empower future leaders.

### **Strengthening engagement with Traditional Owners in new school builds**

In 2023, the Victorian School Building Authority (VSBA) implemented significant changes to improve community-led, place-based decision-making and resourcing to enable Aboriginal communities to have a lead role in determining how Aboriginal cultures and perspectives are reflected in all new schools, major school upgrades, and new early childhood facilities.

As reported in 2022, the VSBA had introduced processes to formally consult with VAEAI and Traditional Owners on the design and naming of new schools. In 2023 this process was significantly strengthened through the creation of a dedicated Traditional Owner Engagement Team at the VSBA, to focus on improving engagement processes and outcomes.

The VSBA has introduced a comprehensive guide for all staff and contractors, “The Traditional Owner Best Practice Engagement Guide”, which outlines the ‘best practice’ process for engagement with Traditional Owners on school and early childhood building projects. The VSBA has introduced a comprehensive guide for all

staff and contractors, “The Traditional Owner Best Practice Engagement Guide”, which outlines the ‘best practice’ process for engagement with Traditional Owners on school and early childhood building projects.

Through the implementation of the guide, Local Aboriginal communities have assisted the VSBA in school building and landscape designs, incorporating their cultural perspectives and insights to shape the schools on their lands. Because of these consultation activities, many new schools that have opened since the start of 2023 have First Nations-inspired playgrounds, landscaping, murals, artwork, building names in language, etc. This allows Aboriginal people to feel connected to the schools in their community and on their land.

The Building Quality Standards Handbook (BQSH), which sets the minimum quality criteria for all DE capital projects, requires Aboriginal culture to be recognised in all new buildings and significant upgrades to Victorian Government Schools. In 2023, the BQSH was reviewed and updated to reflect the new VSBA Traditional Owner engagement processes and protocols.

## Address racism and promote cultural safety

### **The Victorian Aboriginal and Local Government Strategy (VALGS) working group**

Through the Victorian Aboriginal and Local Government Strategy 2021-2026 (VALGS), DGS supports local government to embed the voices and priorities of Aboriginal communities at a local government level. Local Government Victoria formed a VALGS Working Group in 2023, with the purpose to provide strategic advice and guidance on the implementation of VALGS. The Working Group is made up of representatives from Aboriginal communities and Traditional Owners, local government peak bodies, and the Victorian Government. The Terms of Reference for the Working group guarantees Aboriginal participation through its quorum, chairing, voting, and remuneration requirements.

The Working Group is responsible for determining priority actions and evaluation of the VALGS at a state-wide level. At its November 2023 meeting, the Working Group agreed to focus on cultural competency and community sentiment as priority actions. DGS is working closely with Reconciliation Victoria, in partnership with Working Group organisations, to conduct a sector-wide survey to assess councils’ awareness of VALGS and build base-line data on councils’ progress in their VALGS implementation. This data will form the basis for monitoring VALGS implementation and future actions. The Working Group is also considering the development of an evaluation/performance framework for VALGS.



### Melbourne Art Trams

For the third consecutive year Melbourne Art Trams made a return featuring original artwork from local First Peoples artists a collaboration between RISING, DTP, Creative Victoria, and Yarra Trams. The 2023 theme 'Blak Futurism' asked that designs about the future, climate change, care for country, expression of identity, indigenous perspectives, practices, ways of knowing and alternative worlds.

Members of DTP's First Peoples Staff Network were involved in shortlisting artists, with trams showcased on the network for 12 months. DTP has provided funding of \$100,000 for each year of the program.

Artists include Peter Waples-Crowe (Ngarigu), Charlotte Allingham (Ngiyampaa), Lyn Thorpe and Coree Thorpe (Yorta Yorta/Wamba Wemba, Woiwurrung, Gunnai, Gunditjmara and Wurundjeri), Jay Van Nus (Pibelman Noongar), Rubii Red (Lama Lama) and Amina Briggs (Boonwurrung/erub – Torres Strait).



Charlotte Anningham / Ngiyampaa & Wirakjuri



Amina Briggs / Boonwurrung-Erub



Lyn and Coree Thorpe / Yorta Yorta / Wamba Wemba & Woiwurrung



Jay Van Nus / Pibelman Noongar



Peter Waples Crowe / Ngarigu



Jay Van Nus / Pibelman Noongar



Rubii Red / Lama Lama

### Artist designs 2023 RISING Art Trams

RISING Melbourne Art Trams Designs 2023. (Department of Transport and Planning Portfolio)

# 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. There has also been an increase in the number of racism related complaints by First Nations people to the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission.

### 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.

### Closing the Gap - How Victoria is tracking nationally

Not applicable.

#### Data Note



The latest year of available data varies across the Report due to the inconsistent frequency of collection of survey data and lags in processing administrative data. Data in this Report is the most up to date available for publishing.

All measures under this goal are featured. However, the data from the Australian Reconciliation Barometer is Australia wide, rather than specific to Victoria.

## 20.1 Address and eliminate racism

### 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. This has been trending upwards since 2016. The survey does not include disaggregated results for Victoria and is biennial.

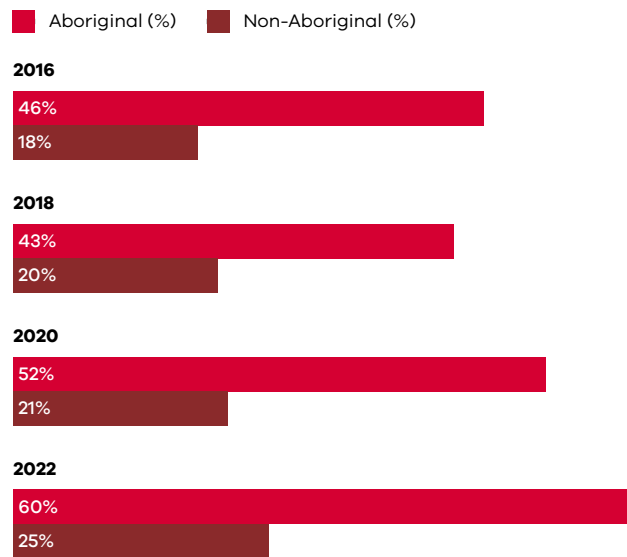
One indicator of racism experienced by Aboriginal Victorians is formal complaints made to the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC). The VEOHRC is now publishing an annual First Nations Data Report. From 2017–18 to 2022–23, 157 First Nations people made complaints about discrimination, sexual harassment, and victimisation to the VEOHRC. Since 2017–18, disability discrimination (35 per cent of issues raised in complaints) and race discrimination (21 per cent) were the most common issues that First Nations people raised in complaints.

In recent years, the VEOHRC have made changes to make their complaints service. To be more accessible and culturally safe for First Nations complainants. This has had an influence on the increase in the number of complaints received from First Nations people.

The complaints and enquiries received by the VEOHRC represent a fraction of the instances of discrimination experienced by First Nations people. It is not representative of all experiences of discrimination experienced by First Nations people.

### Aboriginal people experience racism at more than 2 times the rate of non-Aboriginal people

#### 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 and is biennial.

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**

Strongly Agree (%)   Agree (%)   Neither agree nor disagree (%)   Disagree (%)   Strongly Disagree (%)

**2014**



**2016**



**2018**



**2020**



**2022**



Source: Australian Reconciliation Barometer

## 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.

### Yoorrook Justice Commission – land injustice inquiry

The Yoorrook Justice Commission’s hearings in 2024 will address land injustice. The State will continue to provide information and evidence to the Commission to support this line of inquiry as requested by the Commission, including through Ministerial witness appearances and witness statements made to the Commission.

### Environment and Energy

#### Statewide Caring for Country Partnership Forum

The Statewide Caring for Country Partnership Forum (The Forum), which was established in 2020, serves as the formal accountability mechanism between DEECA and Traditional Owners. The forum includes the Traditional Owner Corporation Caucus (TOC Caucus) comprising of eleven ‘formally recognised’ Traditional Owner Corporations, along with key DEECA decision-makers such as the DEECA Secretary, Deputy Secretary, Parks Victoria CEO, and Director.

The Forum enables the Traditional Owner Corporation Caucus to communicate and progress their strategic goals in an effort to transfer power and resources back to Traditional Owners.

In 2022-2023 DEECA supported the delivery of two Statewide Caring for Country Partnership Forums. The inaugural on Country statewide forum was held in person in October 2022 and was co-chaired and hosted by Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation. The second on Country and in person forum was co-chaired and hosted by Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation in April 2023.

Outcomes of the forum to date include:

- The commitment to undertake funding reform, including streamlining funding with TOCs, developing and implementing Traditional owner-led budget bid mechanisms,
- The re-establishment of the Cultural Fire Leadership Group,
- Enhanced TOC Caucus and Minister engagement,
- The development of an implementation plan that seeks to address strategic priorities: Self-determining governance, Intellectual property and Indigenous data sovereignty, Energy, Water as life giving, Climate Action & Biodiversity and Cultural Fire.

In the 2022-23 financial year DEECA committed to further supporting the Traditional Owner Corporation Caucus and its strategic work by providing an expansion of funding to the role of the secretariat to include policy support.

Regional Caring for Country Partnership Forums (or equivalent engagement meetings) operate independently and are linked to the Statewide Forum through the sharing of CEO Traditional Owner Corporation members. The benefit of these meetings has been more consistent in growing relationships between DEECA and Traditional Owner Corporations, particularly at the senior level.

### **Streamlined funding**

In March 2023, then Minister for Environment made a commitment to the Traditional Owner Corporations Caucus to identify an alternate funding model to address the barriers to self-determination in the current funding model. The new model aims to streamline both funding and governance processes, as well as ease the burden Traditional Owner Corporations experience when administering, delivering, and reporting on funds and grants from DEECA. Following this, the Executive Board endorsed proposals to reform funding with Victoria's formally recognised Traditional Owner Corporations.

This funding reform represents a significant milestone in DEECAs partnership with Traditional Owners, showcasing DEECAs dedication to supporting Traditional Owners as they honour their rights and obligations to care for Country.

The role of Traditional Owner Corporations and Traditional Owner Land Management Boards will become increasingly important as the planning context evolves. Country-based plans offer a Traditional Owner led way to manage Country.

### **Cultural Fire Grants and Core funding**

As a part of the 2021-22 Budget, the Victorian Government has pledged \$22.6 million over four years, with \$6.3 million per year ongoing, to revitalise cultural land and fire management practices led by Traditional Owners. The Cultural Fire Grants program has awarded a total of \$6.3 million to ten successful Traditional Owner Corporations. The programs goal is to reinvigorate Traditional Owner-led cultural land and fire management practices.

All eleven officially recognised Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations receive core funding to support their Country plans, Cultural Fire Strategy, and Cultural Landscapes Strategy. This funding is distributed from 2021-22 through 2024-25 to aid Traditional Owners in executing their plans.

Progress thus far includes:

- State-wide, 10 projects funded, assisting Traditional Owners to conduct cultural burns across the Victorian landscape.
- Supporting Traditional Owners in their delivery of the Cultural Fire objectives described in regional Self-Determination and Caring for Country Plans.
- Cultural burns on public land increased significantly, from four in 2019 to twenty in 2022/23, a 35 per cent increase on the previous financial year. Traditional Owner Corporations have conducted forty-eight cultural burns, supported by DEECA, on public land to date.
- Five new Cultural Fire Officer roles funded and commenced in 2023.
- DEECA continues to work to build stronger partnerships with several Traditional Owner Corporations, assisting with planning, mapping and approvals currently required to deliver Cultural Burns on public land.

DEECA has recently partnered with the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations (FVTOC) to re-establish and facilitate the Cultural Landscapes Knowledge Forum to support decision making bodies.

This group will be given the necessary resources to support monitoring and evaluation of the Cultural Landscapes Strategy over a period of two years (2023-2025).

A Cultural Fire Community of Practice has been established and is operational. Throughout 2022-23, three meetings were held, including the first On Country gathering held on Barengi Gadjin Country.

### **Funding as part of new renewable energy infrastructure**

The Victorian Government has provided support to Traditional Owner Corporations to enable their informed participation in the planning and establishment of new transmission and renewable energy infrastructure, with a particular focus on protecting cultural heritage values on Country and increasing input and decision-making by Traditional Owners. VicGrid has provided funding to Barengi Gadjin Land Council and DJAARA to support their engagement in the planning and delivery of transmission infrastructure projects in western Victoria.

Additionally, the Victorian Government, through VicGrid and the Victorian Transition Investment Framework, has announced a plan to share benefits arising from the energy transition with Traditional Owners. Consultation is currently underway on that plan. In December 2023, through Offshore Wind Energy Implementation Statement 3, the Victorian Government announced its commitment to supporting Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation's (GLaWAC) aspirations for mutually beneficial agreements with feasibility licence holders, in line with international best practice. The agreements will form part of the tender assessment process with GLaWAC verifying the information provided. Targeted funding has been made available to Traditional Owner Corporations whose Country is involved in offshore wind development. This funding strengthens Traditional Owner Corporations' capacity to enable effective engagement with their Traditional Owner communities, the offshore wind industry and government; and guide knowledge and understanding of, and provide input on, offshore wind and its impact on Country and Sea Country.

### **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 provides up to \$100,000 to each Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP) who applied, addressing energy issues relevant to their 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 has worked in partnership with RAPs towards capacity-building initiatives such as the development of renewable energy roadmaps, implementation of 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.

The First Peoples Adoption of Renewable Energy (FPARE) Program was announced in March 2023 by the Minister for Energy and Resources. \$960,000 has been made available to Traditional Owner Corporations for clean energy grants, that will go towards building renewable energy capacity and capability for Traditional Owner Corporations and First Peoples communities. Projects could develop Traditional Owner Corporation specific energy initiatives, create resources to share energy knowledge, assist in accessing government programs, and build on projects funded under the previous Traditional Owner Renewable Energy Program (TOREP).

### **Water is Life**

Released in September 2022, Water is Life: Traditional Owner Access to Water Roadmap (Water is Life) sets out the Victorian government commitments and policy pathways in the short, medium, and long term to increase decision-making and resources for Traditional Owners in the management of water landscapes, as well as increasing Traditional Owner access to water.

Development of Water is Life was led by Traditional Owners over 2021 and 2022. Water is Life includes 27 Nation Statements prepared by Traditional Owner groups, expressing their cultural and water-related values, goals and aspirations in their own words.

A key commitment in Water is Life (Targeted Outcome 2) is to develop a new provision in statements of obligations for water corporations and Catchment Management Authorities to enter formal partnership agreements with Traditional Owners to make and implement decisions about water landscapes management on their Country.

Formal partnership agreements between Aboriginal communities and key water and catchment agencies have increased from 66 in 2019 to 236 in 2022 and 257 in 2023. This shows the strengthening relationships between the water sector and Traditional Owners, which will be further deepened through implementation of Water is Life commitments.

## Transport and Planning

### NAIDOC and Reconciliation Week Events

A series of events for Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC week in 2023 were held across the Transport and Planning portfolio including two signature events where all Portfolio staff were invited to attend either in person or online.

The Yani Bangal Transport and Planning Portfolio First Peoples Careers Strategy 2023–2028 was officially launched at the Reconciliation Week event in June 2023, which aligned with the national theme of 'Be a Voice for Generations'. The event concluded with a Q&A panel that included members of the Portfolio First Peoples Staff Network and senior staff from DTP.

The 2023 NAIDOC week event themed 'For our Elders' featured Aunty Eleanor Bourke as a guest speaker. Aunty Eleanor gave a very engaging overview of the origin and work of the Yoorrook Justice Commission, and then participated in a panel discussion with other First Peoples staff from the portfolio.

### Engagement with community

DTP is committed to engaging with Victorian's First Peoples Community in way that is culturally safe, and supports the free, prior, and informed consent of Traditional Owners. Traditional Owners knowledge informs reform across the Transport and Planning portfolio.

Examples of larger engagements by the portfolio which protect and realise Aboriginal land, water and cultural rights include A Plan for Victoria, Victoria's Road Maintenance Strategy, Planning Controls, Renewable Energy and the ongoing access and operations of Victoria's transport and road network and precincts.

DTP established a state-wide approach to RAP engagement on A Plan for Victoria to have greater self-determination and decision making on future planning implications for their respective Country's. This includes the development of the 'Self determination and Caring for Country' Pillar which underpins the Plan.

### Naming Assets and Celebrating Culture

DTP is naming assets, infrastructure, programs, and strategies in First Peoples of Victoria languages in keeping with the United Nations International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022 – 2032 (UNDIL). Examples are:

- Wurrek-al ('Talking with purpose' in Wergaia Language) Transport and Planning Portfolio First Peoples Engagement Framework
- Yani Bangal ('Let's go together' in Taungurung Language) Transport and Planning Portfolio First Peoples Careers Strategy
- Renaming of Level 2, 1 Spring Street meeting rooms in Wurundjeri Woiwurrung language.

## Tourism, Sports and Events

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 DJSIR has commenced work on the development of a self-determined 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.

The community engagement for the First Peoples Tourism Plan commenced in February 2024. This initiative aims to gather input to shape the Plan and provide First Peoples communities with a platform to voice their perspectives and contribute to the Strategy. The Plan holds the potential to facilitate the preservation of culture among younger generations by leveraging tourism opportunities and sharing cultural experiences with visitors.



# Glossary

<b>ABS</b>	Australian Bureau of Statistics
<b>ACARA</b>	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
<b>ACAT</b>	Aboriginal Cultural Awareness Training
<b>ACAC</b>	Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care
<b>ACCHO</b>	Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
<b>ACCO</b>	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation
<b>ACF</b>	Aboriginal Children's Forum
<b>ACHLMA</b>	Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Land Management Agreement
<b>ACIP</b>	Aboriginal Community Infrastructure Program
<b>ACLO</b>	Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer
<b>AEDC</b>	Australian Early Development Census
<b>AHV</b>	Aboriginal Housing Victoria
<b>AHWP</b>	Victorian Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Partnership
<b>AJA</b>	Aboriginal Justice Advisory
<b>AJC</b>	Aboriginal Justice Caucus
<b>AJF</b>	Aboriginal Justice Forum
<b>AJG</b>	Aboriginal Justice Group
<b>ASGF</b>	Aboriginal Strategic Governance Forum
<b>ASN</b>	Aboriginal Staff Network
<b>ASPG</b>	Aboriginal Sport Participation Grant
<b>AWF</b>	Aboriginal Workforce Fund
<b>AYCP</b>	Aboriginal Youth Cautioning Program
<b>AYJ</b>	Aboriginal Youth Justice
<b>CPP</b>	COVID Positive Pathways Program
<b>CISP</b>	Court Integrated Services Program
<b>CUST</b>	Community Understanding and Safety Training
<b>DDACL</b>	Dandenong & District Aborigines Co-Operative Limited
<b>DEECA</b>	Department of Environment Energy, and Climate Action (formally Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning)

<b>DE</b>	Department of Education (formally Department of Education and Training)
<b>DFH</b>	Department of Families Fairness and Housing
<b>DH</b>	Department of Health
<b>DJCS</b>	Department of Justice and Community Safety
<b>DJSIR</b>	Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry, and Regions (formally Department of Jobs, Precincts, and Regions)
<b>DTF</b>	Department of Treasury and Finance
<b>DTP</b>	Department of Transport and Planning (formerly Department of Transport)
<b>DPC</b>	Department of Premier and Cabinet
<b>ECCD</b>	Early Childhood Care and Development
<b>First Peoples' Assembly</b>	First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria
<b>FVTOC</b>	Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations
<b>GLaWAC</b>	Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation
<b>GNV</b>	Geographic Names Victoria
<b>HfAVR</b>	Homes for Aboriginal Victorians Round
<b>HPV</b>	Human papillomavirus
<b>IWG</b>	Implementation Working Group
<b>KFFE</b>	Koorie Families as First Educators
<b>KMS</b>	Koori Maternity Services
<b>KSN</b>	Koorie Staff Network
<b>LGBTIQ+</b>	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Intersex and Queer
<b>LPHU</b>	Local Public Health Unit
<b>MCGC</b>	Marrung Central Governance Committee
<b>MDAS</b>	Mallee District Aboriginal Services
<b>MCH</b>	Maternal and Child Health
<b>MPAS</b>	Medium-term Perpetrator Accommodation Service
<b>NAIDOC</b>	National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee

<b>NAPLAN</b>	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
<b>National Agreement</b>	National Agreement on Closing the Gap
<b>NATSIHS</b>	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey
<b>NATSISS</b>	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey
<b>NDIA</b>	National Disability Insurance Agency
<b>NDIS</b>	National Disability Insurance Scheme
<b>NIKERI</b>	National Indigenous Knowledges Education Research Institute
<b>NILFET</b>	Not in Labour Force, Education or Training
<b>NSW</b>	New South Wales
<b>NT</b>	Northern Territory
<b>PALO</b>	Police Aboriginal Liaison Officer
<b>PwC</b>	Pricewaterhouse Coopers
<b>QLD</b>	Queensland
<b>RAP</b>	Registered Aboriginal Party
<b>RCDVS</b>	Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicides
<b>REDS</b>	Regional Economic Development Strategies
<b>SCFCPF</b>	State-wide Caring for Country Partnership Forum
<b>SEWB</b>	Social and Emotional Wellbeing
<b>SDRF</b>	Self-Determination Reform Framework
<b>TAFE</b>	Technical and Further Education
<b>TMA</b>	Together More Active
<b>TO</b>	Traditional Owner

<b>TOC</b>	Traditional Owner Corporation
<b>TOS Act</b>	<i>Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010 (VIC)</i>
<b>The Report</b>	2022 Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Report
<b>TOR</b>	Terms of Reference
<b>TOREP</b>	Traditional Owner Renewable Energy Program
<b>VAAF</b>	Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework
<b>VACCA</b>	Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency
<b>VACCHO</b>	Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
<b>VAEAI</b>	Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated
<b>VAEEC</b>	Victorian Aboriginal Employment and Economic Council
<b>VAHMF</b>	Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework
<b>VCAL</b>	Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning
<b>VCE</b>	Victorian Certificate of Education
<b>VET</b>	Vocational Education Training
<b>VIC</b>	Victoria
<b>VIT</b>	Victorian Institute of Technology
<b>VPC</b>	Victorian Pathways Certificate
<b>VPHS</b>	Victorian Population Health Survey
<b>VPS</b>	Victorian Public Sector
<b>VSBA</b>	Victorian Schools Building Authority
<b>VPSC</b>	Victorian Public Sector Commission
<b>WA</b>	Western Australia
<b>YBFS</b>	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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